

Intercultural Competence in Interpersonal Relationships

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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

All relationships imply connections. When you are in an interpersonal relationship, you are connected - in a very important sense, you are bound together-with another person in some substantial way. Of course, the nature of these ties is rarely physical. Rather, in interpersonal relationships, you are connected to others by virtue of your shared experiences, interpretations, perceptions, and goals.

Cultural Variations in Interpersonal Relationships

In Chapter 2, we indicated that communication is interpersonal as long as it involves a small number of participants who can interact directly with one another and who therefore have the ability to adapt their messages specifically for one another. Of course, different patterns of interpersonal communication are likely to occur with different types of interpersonal relationships. We believe it is useful to characterize the various types of interpersonal relationships by the kinds of social connections the participants share.

Types of Interpersonal Relationships

Some interpersonal connections occur because of blood or marriage. Others exist because of overlapping or interdependent objectives and goals. Still others bind people together because of common experiences that help to create a perception of "we-ness:" However, all interpersonal relationships have as their common characteristic a strong connection among the individuals.

The number of interpersonal relationships that you have throughout your life is probably very large. Some of these relationships are complex and involved, whereas others are simple and casual; some are brief and spontaneous, while others may last a lifetime. Some of these relationships, we hope, have involved people from different cultures.

Interpersonal relationships between people from different cultures can be difficult to understand and describe because of the contrasts in culturally based expectations about the nature of interpersonal communication. However, regardless of the cultures involved or the circumstances surrounding the relationship's formation, there is always some sort of bond or social connection that links or ties the people to one another. The participants may be strangers, acquaintances, friends, romantic partners, or family or kinship members. Each relationship carries with it certain expectations for appropriate behaviors that are anchored within specific cultures. People in an intercultural relationship, then, may define their experiences very differently and may have dissimilar expectations; for example, a stranger to someone from one culture may be called a friend by someone from another culture.

Strangers You will undoubtedly talk to many thousands of people in your lifetime, and most of them will be strangers to you. But what exactly is a stranger? Certainly, a stranger is someone whom you do not know and who is therefore unfamiliar to you. But is someone always a stranger the first time you meet? How about the second time, or the third? What about the people you talked with several times, although the conversation was restricted to the task of seating you in a restaurant or pricing your groceries, so names were never actually

exchanged? Are these people strangers to you? Your answers to these questions, like so many of the ideas described in this book, depend on what you have been taught by your culture.

In the United States, for instance, the social walls that are erected between strangers may not be as thick and impenetrable as they are in some collectivistic cultures. European Americans, who are often fiercely individualistic as a cultural group, may not have developed the strong ingroup bonds that would promote separation from outsiders. Among the Greeks, however, who hold collectivistic values, the word for "non-Greek" translates as "stranger:"

Even in the United States, the distinction between stranger and nonstranger is an important one; young children are often taught to be afraid of people they do not know. Compare, however, a U.S. American's reaction toward a stranger with that of a Korean in a similar situation. In Korea, which is a family-dominated collectivist culture; a stranger is anyone to whom you have not been formally introduced. Strangers in Korea are "non-persons" to whom the rules of politeness and social etiquette simply do not apply. Thus, Koreans may jostle you on the street without apologizing or, perhaps, even noticing. However, once you have been introduced to a Korean, or the Korean anticipates in other ways that he or she may have an ongoing interpersonal relationship with you, elaborate politeness rituals are required.

Acquaintances An acquaintance is someone you know, but only casually. Therefore, interactions tend to be on a superficial level. The social bonds that link acquaintances are very slight. Acquaintances will typically engage in social politeness rituals, such as greeting one another when first meeting or exchanging small talk on topics generally viewed as more impersonal such as the weather, hobbies, fashions, and sports. But acquaintances do not

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An equally perplexing experience for me was the reaction of most U.S. Americans to my family background. I come from a fairly large extended family with some history of polygyny. Polygyny is the union between a man and two or more wives. (Polygamy, a more general term, refers to marriage among several spouses, including a man who marries more than one wife or a woman who marries more than one husband.) Polygyny is an accepted and respected marriage form in traditional Igbo society. My father, Chief Clement Muoghalu Nwosu, had two wives. My paternal grandfather, Chief Ezekwesili Nwosu, was married to four. My great grandfather, Chief Odoji, who also married four wives, was the chief priest and custodian of traditional religion in my town, Umudioka town, a small rural community in Anambra State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria....

The traditional economic structure in Igbo society dictated this familial arrangement whereby a man would have more than one spouse and produce several children, who would then assist him with farm work, which is regarded as the fiber and glue of economic life in traditional Igbo society. Each wife and her own children live in a separate home built by the husband. Each wife is responsible for the upkeep of her immediate family, with support from her husband.

typically confide in one another about personal problems or discuss private concerns. Of course, the topics appropriate for small talk, which do not include personal and private issues, will differ from one culture to another. Among European Americans, it is perfectly appropriate to ask a male acquaintance about

his wife; in the United Arab Emirates, it would be a major breach of social etiquette to do so. In New Zealand, it is appropriate to talk about national and international politics; in Pakistan, these and similar topics should be avoided. In Austria, discussions about money and religion are typically sidestepped; elsewhere, acquaintances may well be asked "personal" questions about their income and family background.

Friends As with many of the other terms that describe interpersonal relationships, *friend* is a common expression that refers to many different types of relationships. "Good friends," "close friends," and "just friends" are all commonly used expressions among U.S. Americans. Generally speaking, a friend : is someone you know well, someone you like, and someone with whom you feel a close personal bond. A friendship usually includes higher levels of intimacy, self-disclosure, involvement, and intensity than does acquaintanceship. In many ways, friends can be thought of as close acquaintances.

Unlike kinships, friendships are voluntary, even though many friendships start because the participants have been thrust together in some way. Because they are voluntary, friendships usually occur between people who see themselves as similar in some important ways and who belong to the same social class.

European American friendships tend to be very compartmentalized because they are based on a shared activity, event, or experience. The European American can study with one friend, play racquetball with another, and go to the movies with a third. As suggested in Chapter 4, this pattern occurs because European Americans typically classify people according to what they do or have achieved rather than who they are. Relations among European Americans are therefore fragmented, and they view themselves and others as a composite of distinct interests.

The Thai are likely to react more to the other person as a whole and will avoid forming friendships with those whose values and behaviors are in some way deemed undesirable.¹ Unlike friendships in the United States, in Thailand a friend is accepted completely or not at all; a person cannot disapprove of some aspect of another's political beliefs or personal life and still consider her or him to be a friend. Similarly, the Chinese typically have fewer friends than European Americans do, but Chinese friends expect one another to be involved in all aspects of their lives and to spend much of their free time together. Friends are expected to anticipate others' needs and to provide unsolicited advice about what to do. These differing expectations can cause serious problems as a Chinese and a European American embark on the development of what each sees as a "friendship."²

John Condon has noted that the language people use to describe their interpersonal relationships often reflects the underlying cultural values about their meaning and importance. Thus, Condon says, friendships among European Americans are expressed by terms such as *friends*, *allies*, and *neighbors*, all of which reflect an individualistic cultural value. However, among African Americans and some Southern whites, closeness between friends is expressed by such terms as *brother*, *sister*, or *cousin*, suggesting a collectivist cultural value. Mexican terms for relationships, like the cultural values they represent, are similar to those of African Americans. Thus, when European Americans and Mexicans speak of close friendships, the former will probably use a word such as *partner*, which suggests a voluntary association, whereas Mexicans may use a word such as *brother* or *sister*, which suggests a lasting bond that is beyond the control of any one person.³

As interpersonal relationships move from initial acquaintance to close friendship, five types of changes in perceptions and behaviors will probably occur. First, friends interact more frequently; they talk to each other more often, for longer periods of time, and in more varied settings than acquaintances do. Second, the increased frequency of interactions means that friends will have more knowledge about and shared experiences with each other than will acquaintances, and this unique common ground will probably develop into a private communication code to refer to ideas, objects, and experiences that are exclusive to the relationship. Third, the increased knowledge of the other person's motives and typical behaviors means that there is an increased ability to predict a friend's reactions to common situations. The powerful need to reduce uncertainty in the initial stages of relationships, which we discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, suggests that acquaintanceships are unlikely to progress to friendships without the ability to predict the others' intentions and expectations. Fourth, the sense of "we-ness" increases among friends. Friends often feel that their increased investment of time and emotional commitment to the relationship creates a

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She saw Mma Seeonyana standing outside her front door, a brown paper bag in her hand. As she parked the tiny white van at the edge of the road, she noticed the older woman watching her. This was another good sign. It was a traditional Botswana pursuit to watch other people and wonder what they were up to; this modern habit of indifference to others was very hard to understand. If you watched people, then it was a sign that you cared about them, that you were not treating them as complete strangers. Again, it was all a question of manners.

Alexander McCall Smith

sense of interdependence, so that individual goals and interests are affected by and linked to each person's satisfaction with the relationship. Finally, close friendships are characterized by a heightened sense of caring, commitment, trust, and emotional attachment to the other person, so that the people in a friendship view it as something special and unique.⁴

Intercultural friendships can vary in a variety of ways: whom a person selects as a friend, how long a friendship lasts, the prerogatives and responsibilities of being a friend, the number of friends that a person prefers to have, and even how long a relationship must develop before it becomes a friendship. African American friends, for instance, expect to be able to confront and criticize one another, sometimes in a loud and argumentative manner.⁵ Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans feel that it takes them, on the average, about a year for an acquaintanceship to develop into a close friendship, whereas European Americans feel that it takes only a few months.⁶ For intercultural friendships to be successful, therefore, they may require an informal agreement between the friends about each of these aspects for the people involved to have shared expectations about appropriate behaviors.

Romantic Partners The diversity of cultural norms that govern romantic relationships is an excellent example of the wide range of cultural expectations. Consider, for instance, the enormous differences in cultural beliefs, values, norms, and social practices about love, romance, dating, and marriage.

Among European Americans, dating usually occurs for romance and companionship. A dating relationship is not viewed as a serious commitment that will necessarily, or even probably, lead to an engagement. If they choose to do so,

couples will marry because of love and affection for each other. Although family members may be consulted before a final decision is made, the choice to marry is made almost exclusively by the couples themselves.

In Argentina and Spain, dating is taken more seriously. Indeed, dating the same person more than twice may mean that the relationship will lead to an engagement and, ultimately, marriage. Yet engagements in these Spanish-speaking cultures typically last a long time and may extend over a period of years, as couples work, save money, and prepare themselves financially for marriage.

In contrast, casual dating relationships and similar opportunities for romantic expression among unmarried individuals are still quite rare in India; marriages there are usually arranged by parents, typically with the consent of the couple. So when a European American couple-friends of the bride's family-was invited to a wedding in India, they brought their 14-year-old daughter. The day before the wedding, at the bride's home, a group of girls was seated tightly on a large bed in the parents' bedroom. Except for the European American, all the girls were Indian. Their conversation was raucous and rambling. As it turned to the topic of marriage-as such conversations often do at a wedding-the Indian girls chattered away about whom they hoped their parents might pick to be their husbands. Taken aback by the notion of an arranged marriage, the European American girl asserted her individualism, declared that *she* would find her own husband, and announced that she would make these choices without any intervention from her parents. The Indian girls initially reacted quizzically to this strange pronouncement; then, as its implications slowly sank in, they displayed looks of puzzlement, astonishment, concern, and finally fear. One of the girls asked, "Aren't your parents even going to help you?" To the Indian girls, it was unfathomable that they would have to select their life-partners without the help of parents and other elders.

Similar patterns of familial involvement can also be found in Muslim cultures, where marriage imposes great obligations and responsibilities on the families of the couple. In Algeria, for instance, a marriage is seen as an important link between families, not individuals; consequently, the selection of a spouse may require the approval of the entire extended family. In Indonesia, the opportunities for men and women to be together, particularly in unchaperoned settings, are much more restricted.

In both India and Algeria, romantic love is believed to be something that develops after marriage, not before. Even in Colombia, where, because of changes in customs and cultural practices, arranged marriages are no longer fashionable, the decision to get married requires family approval. Yet research by Stanley Gaines on the nature of intercultural romantic relationships found a great deal of similarity in the communication across cultures.⁷

Family Family or kinship relationships are also characterized by large cultural variations. Particularly important to the development of intercultural relationships are these factors: how the family is defined, or who is considered to be a member of the family; the formality of roles and behavioral expectations for particular family members; and the importance of the family in social relationships and personal decisions.

Among European Americans, and even among members of most European cultures, family life is primarily confined to interactions among the mother, father, and children. Households usually include just the family members, though the extended family unit also includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Though the amount and quality of interaction among extended family members will vary greatly from family to family, members of the extended family rarely live together in the same household or take an active part in the day-to-day lives of the nuclear family members.

Family relationships in other cultures can be quite different. Among Latinos, for instance, the extended family is very important.⁸ Similarly, in India the extended family dominates; grandparents, aunts, uncles, and many other relatives may live together in one household. Families in India include people who would be called second or third cousins in the European American family, and the unmarried siblings of those who have become family members through marriage may also be included in the household. These "family members" would rarely be defined as such in the typical European American family. Among Native Americans, family refers to all members of the clan.⁹ No particular pattern of family relationships can be said to typify the world's cultures. Many Arab families, for instance, include multiple generations of the male line. Often three generations—grandparents, married sons and their wives, and unmarried children—will live together under one roof. Among certain cultural groups in Ghana, however, just the opposite pattern can be found; families have a matrilineal organization, and the family inheritance is passed down through the wife's family rather than the husband's.

Expected role behaviors and responsibilities also vary among cultures. In Argentina, family roles are very clearly defined by social custom; the wife is expected to raise the children, manage the household, and show deference to the husband. In India, the oldest male son has specific family and religious obligations that are not requirements for other sons in the same family. Languages sometimes reflect these specialized roles. In China, for example,

[a] sister-in-law is called by various names, depending on whether she is the older brother's wife, the younger brother's wife, or the wife's sister. Aunts, uncles, and cousins are named in the same way. Thus, a father's sister is "ku," a mother's sister is "yi," an uncle's wife is "shen," and so on.¹⁰

Families also differ in their influence over a person's social networks and decision making. In some cultures, the family is the primary means through which a person's social life is maintained. In others, such as among European Americans, families are almost peripheral to the social networks that are established. In the more collectivist cultures such as Japan, Korea, and China, families play a pivotal role in making decisions for children, including the choice of university, profession, and even marital partner. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, where children are taught from their earliest years to make their own decisions, a characteristic of "good parenting" is to allow children to "learn for themselves" the consequences of their own actions.

The increasing number of people creating intercultural families, in which husband and wife represent different cultural backgrounds, poses new challenges for family communication. Often, the children in these families are raised in an intercultural household that is characterized by some blending of the original cultures. Differences in the expectations of appropriate social roles-of wife and husband, son and daughter, older and younger child, or husband's parents and wife's parents-require a knowledge of and sensitivity to the varying influences of culture on family communication.

Dimensions of Interpersonal Relationships

People throughout the world use at least three primary dimensions to interpret interpersonal communication messages: control, affiliation, and activation.¹¹

Control Control involves status or social dominance. We have control to the extent that we have the power and prestige to influence the events around us. Depending on the culture, control can be communicated by a variety of behaviors, including touching, looking, talking, and the use of space. Supervisors, for instance, are more likely to touch their subordinates than vice versa. In many cultures, excessive looking behaviors are viewed as attempts to "stare down" the other person and are usually seen as an effort to exert interactional control. Similarly, high-power individuals seek and are usually given

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I remember asking a twenty-year-old student in economics at Delhi University... if she loved the childhood friend her parents had decided she should marry."That's a very difficult question," she answered. "I don't know. This whole concept of love is very alien to us. We're more practical. I don't see stars, I don't hear little bells. But he's a very nice guy, and think I'm going to enjoy spending my life with him. Is that love?" She shrugged.

-Elisabeth Bumiller

more personal space and a larger territory to control than their low-power counterparts. Of course, many of these same behaviors, when used in a different context, could also indicate other aspects of the interpersonal relationship. Excessive eye contact, for example, might not be an indication of power; it may merely mean that the two individuals are deeply in love. Usually, however, there are other situational cues that can be used to help interpret the behaviors correctly.

Control is often conveyed by the specific names or titles used to address another person. Do you address physicians, teachers, and friends by their first names, or do you say *Doctor*, *Professor*, or *Mr.* or *Ms.*? In Malaysia and many

other places, personal names are rarely used among adults because such use might imply that the other person has little social status. Instead,

a shortened form or a pet name is often used if a kin term is not appropriate. This is to avoid showing disrespect, since it is understood that the more familiar the form of address to a person, the more socially junior or unimportant he must be regarded.¹²

In cultures that are very attuned to status differences among people, such as Japan, Korea, and Indonesia, the language system requires distinctions based on people's degree of social dominance. In Indonesia, for instance,

the Balinese speak a language which reflects their caste, a tiered system where (like the Javanese) at each level their choice of words is governed by the social relationship between the two people having a conversation.¹³

Intercultural communication is often characterized by an increased tendency to misinterpret nonverbal control and status cues. In both the United States and Germany, for instance, private offices on the top floors and at the corners of most major businesses are reserved for the highest-ranking officials and executives; in France, executives typically prefer an office that is centrally located, in the middle of their subordinates if possible, in order to stay informed and to control the flow of activities. Thus, the French may infer that the Germans are too isolated and the Germans that the French are too easily interrupted to manage their respective organizations well.

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To exit a marriage in Bali leaves a person alone and unprotected in ways that are almost impossible for a Westerner to imagine. The Balinese family unit, enclosed within the walls of a family compound, is merely everything-four generations of siblings, cousins, parents, grandparents and children all living together in a series of small bungalows surrounding the family temple, taking care of each other from birth to death. The family compound is the source of strength, financial security, health care, day care, education and-most important to the Balinese-spiritual connection.

The family compound is so vital that the Balinese think of it as a single, living person. The population of a Balinese village is traditionally counted not by the number of individuals, but by the number of compounds. The compound is a self-sustaining universe. So you don't leave it.

--Elizabeth Gilbert

Affiliation Members of a culture use affiliation to interpret the degree of friendliness, liking, social warmth, or immediacy that is being communicated. Affiliation is an evaluative component that indicates a person's willingness to approach or avoid others. Albert Mehrabian suggests that we approach those people and things we like and we avoid or move away from those we do not like.¹⁴ Consequently, affiliative behaviors are those that convey a sense of closeness, communicate interpersonal warmth and accessibility, and encourage others to approach.

Affiliation can be expressed through eye contact, open body stances, leaning forward, close physical proximity, touching, smiling, a friendly tone of voice, and other communication behaviors. Edward Hall has called those cultures that display a high degree of affiliation "high-contact" cultures; those that display a low level are called "low-contact" cultures.¹⁵

Compared with low-contact cultures, members of high-contact cultures tend to stand closer, touch more, and have fewer barriers, such as desks and doors, to separate themselves from others. High-contact cultures, which are generally located in warmer climates, include many of the cultures in South America, Latin America, southern Europe, and the Mediterranean region; most Arab cultures; and Indonesia. Low-contact cultures, which tend to be located in colder climates, include the Japanese, Chinese, U.S. Americans, Canadians, and northern Europeans. One explanation for these climate-related differences is that the harshness of cold-weather climates forces people to live and work closely with one another in order to survive, and some cultures have compensated for this forced togetherness by developing norms that encourage greater distance and privacy.¹⁶

Activation Activation refers to the ways people react to the world around them. Some people seem very quick, excitable, energetic, and lively; others value calmness, peacefulness, and a sense of inner control. Your perception of the degree of activity that another person exhibits is used to evaluate that person as fast or slow, active or inactive, swift or sluggish, relaxed or tense, and spirited or deliberate.

Cultures differ in what they consider acceptable and appropriate levels of activation in a conversation. For instance, among many of the black tribes of southern Africa, loud talking is considered inappropriate. Similarly, among Malaysians,

too much talk and forcefulness on the part of an adult speaker is disapproved A terse, harmonious delivery is admired The same values-of evenness and restraint-hold for Malay interpersonal relations generally. Thus Malay village conversation makes little use of paralinguistic devices such as facial expression, body movement, and speech tone Malays are not highly emotive people.¹⁷

Thais, like Malays, often dampen or moderate their level of responsiveness. As John Feig suggests,

Thais have a tendency to neutralize all emotions; even in a very happy moment, there is always the underlying feeling: I don't want to be too happy now or I might be correspondingly sad later; too much laughter today may lead to too many tears tomorrow.¹⁸

Iranians tend to have the opposite reaction, as they are often very emotionally expressive in their conversations. Particularly when angry, a man's conversation may consist of behaviors such as "turning red, invoking religious oaths, proclaiming his injustices for all to hear, and allowing himself to be held back."¹⁹

European Americans are probably near the midpoint of this dimension.

Compared to the Japanese, for instance, European Americans tend to be fairly active and expressive in their conversations. As Harvey Taylor suggested:

An American's forehead and eyebrows are constantly in motion as he speaks, and these motions express the inner feelings behind the words. The "blank," nearly motionless Japanese forehead reveals very little of the Japanese person's inner feelings to the American (but not necessarily to the Japanese). Therefore the American feels that the Japanese is not really interested in the conversation or (worse yet) that the Japanese is hiding the truth.²⁰

Compared to Jordanians, Iranians, African Americans, and Latinos, however, European Americans are passive and reserved in conversational expressiveness.

It is useful once again to remind you that all beliefs, values, norms, and social practices lie on a continuum. How a particular characteristic is displayed or perceived in a specific culture is interpreted against the culture with which it is being compared. Thus it is possible for an African American to seem very active and emotionally expressive to the Japanese but quite calm and emotionally inexpressive to the Kuwaitis.

Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are dynamic. That is, they are continually changing, as they are pushed and pulled by the ongoing tugs of past experiences, present circumstances, and future expectations.

One useful way to think about relational dynamics is to view people in interpersonal relationships as continually attempting to maintain their balance amidst changing circumstances. To illustrate, imagine that you and your partner are attempting to do a common dance routine such as a country line dance, a tango, or a waltz. Now imagine that you are dancing aboard a ship at sea: the floor rises and falls to the pulsing of the waves; uneven electrical power makes the music speed up and slow down; and your partner wants to add graceful variations to the typical sequence of steps. Your efforts to stay "in rhythm" and coordinate your movements with the music and with your partner are analogous to the adaptations that people must continually make to the ongoing dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

Leslie Baxter suggests that the changing dynamics in interpersonal relationships are due to people's attempts to maintain a sense of "balance" among opposing and seemingly contradictory needs. These basic contradictions in relationships, called "dialectics," create ongoing tensions that affect the way people connect to one another.²¹ Three dialectics have been identified as important in interpersonal relationships: autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness. Each of the dialectics has corresponding cultural-level components.

The *autonomy-connection* dialectic is perhaps the most central source of tensions in interpersonal relationships. Individuals inevitably vary, at different moments of their interpersonal relationships, in the extent to which they want a sense of separation from others (autonomy) and a feeling of attachment to others (connection). Note the word *and* in the previous sentence; both types of interpersonal needs, though they may seem contradictory, occur simultaneously. As we implied in our discussions of individualism-collectivism in Chapter 5, a culture teaches its members both the "correct" range of autonomy and connection

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I was in Mexico a couple of years ago and worked quite closely with a Mexican colleague who was very helpful. Now he is working here in New York on a six-month placement, but we are not working on the same project. He seems to be having some problems getting authorization for some of our systems, but I have a target to meet and if I spend time helping him I'm going to end up behind schedule myself. He also expects us to lunch together most days, but I usually just have a sandwich at my desk, and he wants to make arrangements for after work when I have other things to do. He needs to learn to stand on his own two feet.

and how these should be expressed when communicating with others. Thus, while the general level of autonomy desired by someone from an individualistic culture may be relatively high, one's specific needs for autonomy and connection will vary across time and relationships.

The *novelty-predictability* dialectic relates to people's desire for change and stability in their interpersonal relationships. All relationships require moments of novelty and excitement, or they will be emotionally dead. They also require a sense of predictability, or they will be chaotic. The *novelty-predictability* dialectic refers to the dynamic tensions between these opposing needs. The cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance provides a way of understanding the general range of novelty and predictability that people desire. At specific moments within each relationship, however, individuals can vary in their preferences for novelty and predictability.

The *openness-closedness* dialectic relates to people's desire to share or withhold personal information. To some extent, openness and self-disclosure are necessary to establish and maintain relational closeness and intimacy. However, privacy is an equally important need; the desire to establish and maintain boundaries is basic to the human condition. For instance, a person may be open to interpersonal contact at certain moments, or with specific individuals, or about certain topics. There will also be times when that person may want to shut the office door or find another way to lessen the degree of interpersonal contact. The *openness-closedness* dialectic operates not only within a relationship but also in decisions about the public presentation of the relationship to others. Individuals in interpersonal relationships must continually negotiate what kinds of information about their relationship they want to reveal or withhold from others. Several cultural dimensions may affect *openness-closedness*. Collectivist cultures, for instance, with their tightly knit ingroups and relatively large social distances from outgroups, typically encourage openness within the ingroup and closedness to outgroup members. Alternatively, cultures that value large power distances may expect openness within interpersonal relationships to be asymmetric, such that those relatively lower in social status are expected to share personal information with their superiors.

Each of these relational dialectics, and others as well, contributes to a dynamically changing set of circumstances that affect what people expect, want, and communicate in interpersonal relationships. As the following section explains, how people in interpersonal relationships maintain an appropriate balance among these dialectics relates to their maintenance of face.

The Maintenance of Face in Interpersonal Relationships

A very important concept for understanding interpersonal communication among people from different cultures is that of *face*, or the public expression of the inner self. Erving Goffman defined *face* as the favorable social impression that a person wants others to have of him or her.²² *Face* therefore involves a claim for respect and dignity from others.

The definition of *face* suggests that it has three important characteristics. First, *face* is *social*. This means that *face* is not what an individual thinks of himself or herself but rather how that person wants others to regard his or her worth. *Face* therefore refers to the public or social image of an individual that is held by others. *Face*, then, always occurs in a relational setting. Because it is social, one can only gain or lose *face* through actions that are known to others.

The most heroic deeds, or the most bestial ones, do not affect a person's face if they are done in complete anonymity. Nor can face be claimed independent of the social perceptions of others. For instance, the statement "No matter what my teachers think of me, I know I am a good student" is not a statement about face. Because face has a social component, a claim for face would occur only when the student conveys to others the idea that teachers should acknowledge her or his status as a good student. In this sense, the concept of *face* is only meaningful when considered in relation to others in the social network.²³ Consequently, it differs from such psychological concepts as self-esteem or pride, which can be claimed for oneself independently of others and can be increased or decreased either individually or socially.

Second, face is an *impression*, which may or may not be shared by all, that may differ from a person's self-image. People's claims for face, therefore, are not requests to know what others actually think about them; instead, they are solicitations from others of favorable expressions about them. To maintain face, people want others to act toward them with respect, regardless of their "real" thoughts and impressions. Thus, face maintenance involves an expectation that people will act as though the others are appreciated and admired.

Third, face refers only to the *favorable* social attributes that people want others to acknowledge. Unfavorable attributes, of course, are not what others are expected to admire. However, cultures may differ in the behaviors that are highly valued, and they may have very different expectations, or norms, for what are considered to be desirable face behaviors.

Types of Face Needs

Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson extended Goffman's ideas by proposing a universal model of social politeness.²⁴ They pointed out that, regardless of their culture, all people have face and a desire to maintain and even gain more of it. Face is maintained through the use of various politeness rituals in social interactions, as people try to balance the competing goals of task efficiency and relationship harmony.²⁵ Tae-Seop Lim suggests that

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It turned out that Baba had had no cash on him for the oranges. He'd written Mr. Nguyen a check and Mr. Nguyen had asked for an ID. "He wants to see my license;" Baba bellowed in Farsi. "Almost two years we've bought his damn fruits and put money in his pocket and the son of a dog wants to see my license!"

"Baba, it's not personal;" I said, smiling at the Nguyens. "They're supposed to ask for an Of

"I don't want you here;" Mr. Nguyen said, stepping in front of his wife. He was pointing at Baba with his cane. He turned to me. "You're nice young man but your father, he's crazy. Not welcome anymore." "Does he think I'm a thief?" Baba said, his voice rising. People had gathered outside: They were staring. "What kind of a country is this? No one trusts anybody!"

"I call police;" Mrs. Nguyen said, poking out her face. "You get out or I call police:"

"Please, Mrs. Nguyen, don't call the police. I'll take him home. Just don't call the police, okay? Please?"

"Yes, you take him home. Good idea;" Mr. Nguyen said. His eyes, behind his wire-rimmed bifocals, never left Baba. I led Baba through the doors. He kicked a magazine on his way out. After I'd made him promise he wouldn't go back in, I

returned to the store and apologized to the Nguyens. Told them my father was going through a difficult time. I gave Mrs. Nguyen our telephone number and address, and told her to get an estimate for the damages. "Please call me as soon as you know. I'll pay for everything, Mrs. Nguyen. I'm so sorry:" Mrs. Nguyen took the sheet of paper from me and nodded. I saw her hands were shaking more than usual, and that made me angry at Baba, his causing an old woman to shake like that.

"My father is still adjusting to life in America;" I said, by way of explanation.

I wanted to tell them that, in Kabul, we snapped a tree branch and used it as a credit card. Hassan and I would take the wooden stick to the bread maker. He'd carve notches on our stick with his knife, one notch for each loaf of naan he'd pull for us from the tandoor's roaring flames. At the end of the month, my father paid him for the number of notches on the stick. That was it. No questions. No ID.

-Khaled Hosseini

there are three kinds of face needs: the need for control, the need for approval, and the need for admiration.²⁶ We now describe these three universal face needs.

The Need for Control Control face is concerned with individual requirements for freedom and personal authority. It is related to people's need for others to acknowledge their individual autonomy and self-sufficiency. As Lim suggests, it involves people's

image that they are in control of their own fate, that is, they have the virtues of a full-fledged, mature, and responsible adult: This type of face includes such values as "independent;" "in control of self;" "initiative;" "mature;" "composed;" "reliable;" and "self-sufficient:" When persons claim these values for themselves, they want to be self-governed and free from others' interference, control, or imposition.²⁷

The claim for control face, in other words, is embodied in the desire to have freedom of action.

The Need for Approval Approval face is concerned with individual requirements for affiliation and social contact. It is related to people's need for others to acknowledge their friendliness and honesty. This type of face is similar to what the Chinese call *lien*,²⁸ or the integrity of moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for a person to function appropriately within a social group. As Hsien Chin Hu relates,

A simple case of *lien-losing* is afforded by the experience of an American traveler in the interior of China. In a little village she had made a deal with a peasant to use his donkey for transportation. On the day agreed upon the owner appeared only to declare that his donkey was not available, the lady would have to wait one day. Yet he would not allow her to hire another animal, because she had consented to use his ass. They argued back and forth first in the inn, then in the courtyard; a crowd gathered around them, as each stated his point of view over and over again. No comment was made, but some of the older people shook their heads and muttered something, the peasant getting more and more excited all the time trying to prove his right. Finally he turned and left the place without any more arguments, and the American was free to hire another beast. The man had felt the disapproval of the group. The condemnation of his community of his attempt to take advantage of the plight of the traveler made him feel he had "lost *lien*."²⁹

Lien is maintained by acting with good *jen*, the Chinese term for "man:" As Francis Hsu explains:

When the Chinese say of so-and-so "ta pu *shih jen*" (he is not *jen*), they do not mean that this person is not a human animal; instead they mean that his behavior in relation to other human beings is not acceptable."³⁰

Hsu regards the term *jen* as similar in meaning to the Yiddish term *mensh*, which refers to a good human being who is kind, generous, decent, and upright. Such an individual should therefore be admired for his or her noble character. As Leo Rosten says of this term,

It is hard to convey the special sense of respect, dignity, approbation, that can be conveyed by calling someone "a real *mensh*." . . . The most withering comment one might make on someone's character or conduct is: "He is not (did not act like) a *mensh*." . . . The key to being "a real *mensh*" is nothing less than character: rectitude, dignity, a sense of what is right, responsible, decorous. Many a poor man, many an ignorant man, is a *mensh*.³¹

Thus, approval face reflects the desire to be treated with respect and dignity.

The Need for Admiration Admiration face is concerned with individual needs for displays of respect from others. It is related to people's need for others to acknowledge their talents and accomplishments. This type of face is similar to what the Chinese call *mien-tzu*, or prestige acquired through success and social standing. One's *mien-tzu*

is built up through high position, wealth, power, ability, through cleverly establishing social ties to a number of prominent people, as well as through avoidance of acts that would cause unfavorable comment.... All persons growing up in any community have the same claim to *lien*, an honest, decent "face"; but their *mien-tzu* will differ with the status of the family, personal ties, ego's ability to impress people, etc.³²

Thus, admiration face involves the need for others to acknowledge a person's success, capabilities, reputation, and accomplishments.

Facework and Interpersonal Communication

The term facework refers to the actions people take to deal with their own and others' face needs. Everyday actions that impose on another, such as requests, warnings, compliments, criticisms, apologies, and even praise, may jeopardize the face of one or more participants in a communicative act. Ordinarily, say Brown and Levinson,

people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. That is, normally everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces, it is in general in every participant's best interest to maintain each others' face.³³

The degree to which a given set of actions may pose a potential threat to one or more aspects of people's face depends on three characteristics of the relationship.³⁴ First, the potential for face threats is associated with the control dimension of interpersonal communication. Relationships in which there are large power or status differences among the participants have a great potential for people's actions to be interpreted as face-threatening. Within a large organization, for instance, a verbal disagreement between a manager and her employees will

have a greater potential to be perceived as face-threatening than will an identical disagreement among employees who are equal in seniority and status.

Second, face-threat potential is associated with the affiliation dimension of interpersonal communication. That is, relationships in which participants have a large social distance, and therefore less social familiarity, have a great potential for actions to be perceived as face-threatening. Thus, very close family members may say things to one another that they would not tolerate from more distant acquaintances. Relationships where strangers have no formal connection to one another but are, for example, simply waiting in line at the train station, the taxi stand, or the bank, may sometimes be seen as an exception to this general principle.³⁵ As Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong-Scollon suggest, "Westerners often are struck with the contrast they see between the highly polite and deferential Asians they meet in their business, educational, and governmental contacts and the rude, pushy, and aggressive Asians they meet on the subways of Asia's major cities."³⁶ At many train stations in the People's Republic of China, for example,

people are not in the midst of members of their own community, so the drive to preserve face and act with proper behavior is much lower. Passengers usually wait in waiting rooms until the attendant moves a barrier and they can cross the area between them and the train. The competition is quite fierce as passengers rush toward the train with their luggage, and they have little regard for the safety of other passengers. Often, fellow travelers are injured by luggage, knocked to the ground, or even pushed between the platform and the train, where they fall to the tracks.³⁷

Third, face-threat potential is related to culture-specific evaluations that people make. That is, cultures may make unique assessments about the degree to which particular actions are inherently threatening to a person's face. Thus, certain actions within one culture may be regarded as face-threatening, whereas those same actions in another culture may be regarded as perfectly acceptable. In certain cultures, for instance, passing someone a bowl of soup with only one hand, or with one particular hand, may be regarded as an insult and therefore a threat to face; in other cultures, however, those same actions are perfectly acceptable.

Cultural connections

She was jolted by the ringing of her phone. It was Chen. There was traffic noise in the background.

"Where are you, Chief Inspector Chen?"

"On my way home. I had a call from Party Secretary Li. He invites you to a Beijing Opera performance this evening:"

"Does Mr. Li want to discuss the Wen case with me?"

"I'm not sure about that. The invitation is to demonstrate our bureau's attention to the case, and to you, our distinguished American guest:"

"Isn't it enough to assign you to me?" she said. "Well, in China, Li's invitation gives more face:" "Giving face-I've heard only about losing face:" "If you are a somebody, you give face by making a friendly gesture:" "I see, like your visit to Gu. So I have no choice?"

"Well, if you say no, Party Secretary Li will lose face. The bureau will, too-including me:"

"Oh no! Yours is one face I have to save:" She laughed. "What shall I wear to the Beijing Opera?" "Beijing Opera is not like Western opera. You don't have to dress formally, but if you do-" "Then I'm giving face, too:"

"Exactly. Shall I pick you up at the hotel?"

Qiu Xiaolong

Stella Ting-Toomey³⁸ and Min-Sun Kim³⁹ both suggest that cultural differences in individualism-collectivism affect the facework behaviors that people are likely to use. In individualist cultures, concerns about message clarity and preserving one's own face are more important than maintaining the face of others, because tasks are more important than relationships, and individual autonomy must be preserved. Consequently, direct, dominating, and controlling face-negotiation strategies are common, and there is a low degree of sensitivity to the face-threatening capabilities of particular messages. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, the mutual preservation of face is extremely important, because it is vital that people be approved and admired by others. Therefore, indirect, obliging, and smoothing face-negotiation strategies are common, direct confrontations between people are avoided, concern for the feelings of others is heightened, and ordinary communication messages are seen as having a great face-threatening potential.

Facework and Intercultural Communication

Competent facework, which lessens the potential for specific actions to be regarded as face-threatening, encompasses a wide variety of communication

behaviors. These behaviors may include apologies, excessive politeness, the narration of justifications or excuses, displays of deference and submission, the use of intermediaries or other avoidance strategies, claims of common ground or the intention to act cooperatively, or the use of implication or indirect speech. The specific facework strategies a person uses, however, are shaped and modified by his or her culture. For instance, the Japanese and U.S. Americans have very different reactions when they realize that they have committed a face-threatening act and would like to restore the other's face. The Japanese prefer to adapt their messages to the social status of their interaction partners and provide an appropriate apology. They want to repair the damage, if possible, but without providing reasons that explain or justify their original error. Conversely, U.S. Americans would prefer to adapt their messages to the nature of the provocation and provide verbal justifications for their initial actions. They may use humor or aggression to divert attention from their actions but do not apologize for their original error.⁴⁰

As another example of culture-specific differences in facework behaviors, consider the comments that are commonly appended to the report cards of high school students in the United States and in China. In the United States, evaluations of high school students include specific statements about students' strengths and weaknesses. In China, however, the high school report cards that are issued at the end of each semester never criticize the students directly; rather, teachers use indirect language and say "I wish that you would make more progress in such areas as..." in order to save face while conveying his or her evaluations.⁴¹

Facework is a central and enduring feature of all interpersonal relationships. Facework is concerned with the communication activities that help to create, maintain, and sustain the connections between people. As Robyn Penman says:

Facework is not something we do some of the time, it is something that we unavoidably do all the time-it is the core of our social selves. That it is called face and facework is curious but not critical here. What is critical is that the mechanism the label stands [for] seems to be as enduring as human social existence. In the very act of communicating with others we are inevitably commenting on the other and our relationship with them. And in that commenting we are maintaining or changing the identity of the other in relationship to us.⁴²

Improving Intercultural Relationships

Competent interpersonal relationships among people from different cultures do not happen by accident. They occur as a result of the knowledge and perceptions people have about one another, their motivations to engage in meaningful interactions, and their ability to communicate in ways that are regarded as appropriate and effective. To improve these interpersonal relationships, then, it is necessary to learn about and thereby reduce anxiety and uncertainty about people from other cultures, to share oneself with those people, and to handle the inevitable differences in perceptions and expectations that will occur.

Learning about People from Other Cultures

The need to know, to understand, and to make sense of the world is a fundamental necessity of life. Without a world that is somewhat predictable and that can be interpreted in a sensible and meaningful way, humankind would not survive.

Cultural connections

Like many other newcomers to the Anglo world, I was struck by the elasticity of the English concept of 'friend'; which could be applied to a wide range of relationships, from deep and dose, to quite casual and superficial. This was in stark contrast to the Polish words *przyjaciel* (male) and *przyjaciolka* (female), which could only stand for exceptionally close and intimate relationships. What struck me even more was the importance of the concept embodied in the Polish word *koledzy* (female counterpart *kolezanki*) as a basic conceptual category defining human relations - quite unlike the relatively marginal concept encoded in the, English word colleague, relevant only to professional elites. It became dear tome that concepts such as 'koledzy' ('kolezanki') and 'przyjaciele' ('przyjaciotki') (plural) organised the social universe quite differently from concepts such as 'friends':

Anna Wierzbicka

We have already suggested in Chapter 5 that both individuals and cultures can differ in their need to reduce uncertainty and in the extent to which they can tolerate ambiguity and, therefore, in the means they select to adapt to the world. The human need to learn about others, to make sense of their actions, and to understand their beliefs, values, and behaviors has typically been studied under the general label of uncertainty reduction theory.⁴³ This theory explains the likelihood that people will seek out additional information about one another, but it deals primarily with the knowledge component of communication competence. William B. Gudykunst has recently revised uncertainty reduction theory and renamed it anxiety/uncertainty management theory.⁴⁴ It now focuses more clearly on intercultural communication, incorporates the emotional or motivational component of intercultural competence, and emphasizes ways to cope with or manage the inherent tensions and anxieties that inevitably occur in many intercultural encounters. In the sections that follow, we describe the components, causes, and consequences of uncertainty management behaviors and some strategies for reducing uncertainty in interpersonal relationships among people from different cultures.

Components of Uncertainty and Anxiety Management Some degree of unpredictability exists in all interpersonal relationships, but it is typically much higher in intercultural interactions. There are two broad components involved in

the management of uncertainty behaviors: uncertainty and anxiety. Uncertainty refers to the extent to which a person lacks the knowledge, information, and ability to understand and predict the intentions and behaviors of another. *Anxiety* refers to an individual's degree of emotional tension and her or his inability to cope with change, to live with stress, and to contend with vague and imprecise information.

Uncertainty and anxiety are influenced by culture. In Chapter 5, when we discussed Hofstede's value dimensions, we suggested that cultures differ in the extent to which they prefer or can cope with uncertainty. It should now be obvious that Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension is related to what is here being referred to as anxiety/uncertainty management.

Causes of Uncertainty and Anxiety Three conditions are related to uncertainty and anxiety management behaviors. These are your expectations about future interactions with other people, the incentive value or potential rewards that relationships with other people may have for you, and the degree to which other people exhibit behaviors that deviate from or do not match your expectations.

The first condition is your expectations about future interactions with another person. If you believe that you are very likely to interact with some person on future occasions, the degree to which you can live with ambiguity and insufficient information about that person will be low, and your need for more knowledge about that person will be high. Conversely, if you do not expect to see and talk with someone again, you will be more willing to remain uncertain about her or his motives and intentions, your anxiety level will be relatively low, and you will therefore not attempt to seek out any additional information. This person will continue to be a stranger. Anxiety/uncertainty management theory suggests that sojourners and immigrants who know they will be interacting in a new culture for a long period of time will be more likely to try to reduce their uncertainty about how and why people behave than will a tourist or temporary visitor.

The second condition, incentive value, refers to the perceived likelihood that the other person can fulfill various needs that you have, give you some of the resources that you want, or provide you with certain rewards that you desire. If a person's incentive value is high - that is, if the other person has the potential to be very rewarding to you - your need to find out more about that person will be correspondingly high. As you might expect, a high incentive value also increases the degree to which a person will be preferred or viewed as interpersonally attractive. Of course, the needs or rewards that people might want vary widely: the incentive value of a given person is related to his or her ability to

Cultural connections

Neither that evening nor at virtually any other point during my travels did the Kurds I met ask me any personal questions-not even whether I was married or had children. To have done so, one Kurdish woman explained to me, would have been considered rude.

Christiane Bird

provide such benefits as status, affection, information, services, goods, money, or some combination of these resources.⁴⁵

One form of incentive value that has been widely investigated is the perceived similarity of the other person. The similarity-attraction hypothesis suggests that we like and are attracted to those whom we regard as comparable to

ourselves in ways that we regard as important. Conversely, we are unlikely to be attracted to those who are very different from us. This hypothesis implies that, at least in the initial stages of intercultural encounters, the dissimilarities created by cultural differences may inhibit the development of new interpersonal relationships.

The third condition is the degree of deviance that the other person exhibits. Deviant behaviors are those that are not typically expected because they are inconsistent with the common norms that govern particular social situations. When a person acts deviantly, both your level of anxiety and your degree of uncertainty about that person increase, because he or she is far less predictable to you. Conversely, when a person conforms to your expectations by behaving in a predictable way, your level of anxiety and your degree of uncertainty about that person decrease. A person who behaves in deviant and unexpected ways is often disliked and is regarded as interpersonally unattractive, whereas one who conforms to others' expectations and is therefore predictable is often most liked and preferred. In intercultural communication, it is extremely likely that the other person will behave "deviantly" or differently from what you might expect. Thus, uncertainty about people from other cultures will typically be high, as will the level of anxiety and tension that you experience.

Consequences of Uncertainty and Anxiety Management Because intercultural communication involves people from dissimilar cultures, each person's behaviors are likely to violate the others' expectations and create uncertainty and anxiety. Consequently, there is always the possibility that fear, distrust, and similar negative emotions may prevail. Often, but not always, the negative emotions can be overcome, and positive outcomes can result.

Judee Burgoon has developed expectancy violations theory to explain when deviations from expectations will be regarded as positive or as negative.⁴⁶ All behaviors that differ from expectations will increase the degree of uncertainty in an interaction. Burgoon suggests that how a person interprets and reacts to the deviations of another depends on how favorably that person is perceived. If the other person is perceived positively, violations of your expectation that increase interaction involvement will be seen as favorable, whereas violations of expectations that decrease interaction involvement will be viewed as unfavorable. To illustrate, imagine that you are having a conversation with someone who is standing closer to you than you would expect. This is clearly a violation of your expectations, but how would you likely react to this situation? Burgoon suggests that, if the person is positively valenced - -because, for example, you regard the person as physically attractive-then you may view the violation and the other person favorably, whereas if the other person is negatively valenced, then you will regard the violation and the other person unfavorably and may attempt to back away or escape. Conversely, imagine that your conversation is with someone who is standing farther away than your typical or expected interaction distance. If the person is positively valenced, you may attempt to compensate for the violation by moving closer, whereas if the person is negatively valenced, you will likely attribute negative connotations-he or she is aloof, cold - to the person.

The positive consequences of anxiety and uncertainty management behaviors that are applicable to intercultural communication can be grouped under two general labels: informational consequences and emotional consequences. *Informational consequences* result from the additional knowledge that has been gained about other people, including facts or inferences about their culture; increased accuracy in the judgments made about their beliefs,

values, norms, and social practices; and an increased degree of confidence that they are being perceived accurately.

Emotional consequences may include increased levels of self-disclosure, heightened interpersonal attraction, increases in intimacy behaviors, more frequent nonverbal displays of positive emotions, and an increased likelihood that future intercultural contacts will be regarded as favorable. Of course, these positive outcomes all presume that the reduction in anxiety and uncertainty about another person will result in an increase in positive communicator valence, which is not necessarily so. Unfortunately, as Gudykunst suggests, negative perceptions in intercultural encounters frequently occur because people are not *mindful-focused*, aware, open to new information, and tolerant of differences. This allows our cultural assumptions to remain unchallenged. As we have seen, the perception that a person is acting in a deviant way (as defined by one's own cultural expectations) will often lead to decreased satisfaction with the encounter.

Strategies for Reducing Uncertainty and Anxiety To behave both appropriately and effectively in an intercultural encounter, you must make an accurate assessment about many kinds of information: the individual characteristics of the person with whom you interact, the social episodes that are typical of the particular setting and occasion, the specific roles that are being played within the episode, the rules of interaction that govern what people can say and do, the setting or context within which the interaction occurs, and the cultural patterns that influence what is regarded as appropriate and effective. Thus, uncertainty is not reduced for its own sake, but occurs every day for strategic purposes. As Charles R. Berger suggested:

To interact in a relatively smooth, coordinated, and understandable manner, one must be able both to predict how one's interaction partner is likely to behave, and, based on these predictions, to select from one's own repertoire those responses that will optimize outcomes in the encounter.⁴⁷

There are three general types of strategies—passive, active, and interactive—that can be used to gain information about other people and thus reduce one's level of uncertainty and degree of anxiety. *Passive* strategies involve quiet and surreptitious observation of another person to learn how he or she behaves. *Active* strategies include efforts to obtain information about another person by asking others or structuring the environment to place the person in a situation that provides the needed information. *Interactive* strategies involve actually conversing with the other person in an attempt to gather the needed information. As you might expect, there are large cultural differences in the preferred strategies that are used to reduce uncertainty and manage anxiety in intercultural encounters. For example, European Americans are more likely than their Japanese counterparts to use active strategies such as asking questions and self-disclosing as a way to obtain information about another person, whereas the Japanese are more likely to use passive strategies.⁴⁸

Sharing Oneself with People from Other Cultures

The human tendency to reveal personal information about oneself and to explain one's inner experiences and private thoughts is called self-disclosure. Self-disclosure occurs among people of all cultures, but there are tremendous cultural differences in the breadth, depth, valence, timing, and targets of self-disclosing events.

The *breadth* of self-disclosing information refers to the range of topics that are revealed, and European Americans tend to self-disclose about more topics

than do members of most other cultures. For example, Tsukasa Nishida found that European Americans discussed a much wider range of topics that were related to the self (such as health and personality) with strangers than did Japanese; also, Japanese had far more self-related topics than did European Americans that they would never discuss with others.⁴⁹ Ghanaians tend to self-disclose about family and background matters, whereas U.S. Americans self-disclose about career concerns.⁵⁰ In contrast,

Chinese culture takes a conservative stand on self-disclosure. For a Chinese, self-centered, speech would be considered boastful and pretentious. Chinese tend to scorn those who often talk about themselves and doubt their motives when they do so. Chinese seem to prefer talking about external matters, such as world events. For Americans, self-disclosure is a strategy to make various types of relationships work; for Chinese, it is a gift shared only with the most intimate relatives and friends.⁵¹

The *depth* of the self-disclosing information refers to the degree of "personalness" about oneself that is revealed. Self-disclosure can reveal superficial aspects ("I like broccoli") or very private thoughts and feelings ("I'm afraid of my father"). Of the many cultures that have been studied, European Americans are among the most revealing self-disclosers. European Americans disclose more than African Americans, who in turn disclose more than Mexican Americans.⁵² European Americans also disclose more than the British,⁵³ French⁵⁴ Germans, Japanese,⁵⁵ and Puerto Ricans.⁵⁶

Valence refers to whether the self-disclosure is positive or negative, and thus favorable or unfavorable. Not only do European Americans disclose more about themselves than do members of many other cultures but they are also more likely to provide negatively valenced information. Compared to many Asian cultures, for example, European Americans are far less concerned with issues of "face" and are therefore more inclined to share information that may not portray them in the most favorable way.

Timing refers to when the self-disclosure occurs in the course of the relationship. For European Americans, self-disclosure in new relationships is generally high because the participants share information about themselves that the others do not know. A person's name, hometown, employment or educational affiliations, and personal interests are all likely to be shared in initial interactions. As the relationship progresses, the amount of self-disclosure diminishes because the participants have already learned what they need to know to interact appropriately and effectively. Only if the relationship becomes more personal and intimate will the amount of self-disclosure again begin to increase. But the timing of the self-disclosure process can be very different in other cultures. For example, Native Americans typically reveal very little about themselves initially because they believe that too much self-disclosure at that stage is inappropriate. A similar pattern may be found among members of Asian cultures.

Target refers to the person to whom self-disclosing information is given. Among European Americans, spouses are usually the targets of a great deal of self-disclosure, and mutual self-disclosure is widely regarded as contributing to an ideal and satisfactory marriage." The breadth and depth of self-disclosure among other European American family members are of much lesser degree. Other cultures have different patterns. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, for instance, age is used to determine the appropriate degree of self-disclosure among interactants, younger interactants being expected to self-disclose far more than their older counterparts. As a cultural norm, when elder Igbos are in an initial

encounter with someone who is younger, they have the right to inquire about the young person's background, parents, hometown, and similar information that may ultimately lead to contact with distant relatives or old friends.

Handling Differences in Intercultural Relationships

Conflict in interpersonal relationships is a major nemesis for most people. Add the complications of different cultural backgrounds, and problems in managing conflict can become

Cultural connections

I was doing everything wrong when I visited Paris. I would walk down the Champ Elysees smiling and greeting people, as if I were in St. Louis. In shops, I said I wanted this or that, and I was ignored. When Parisians refused to help me with a problem, I went away meekly.

Pretty soon, I figured the diches about the mean, arrogant French were true....

[I've since learned that] the French smile at people they know, not at strangers. Shopkeepers expect a little small talk, and all you need to start getting along in France are five magic words: "*Excusez-moi de vous deranger*" ("Excuse me for bothering you").

Bombs may fall or the house may catch fire... but the French people will not shorten this formality by so much as a syllable.

Susan Spano

even more severe. Stella Ting-Toomey and John Oetzel's work provides some direction for managing intercultural conflict.⁵⁸

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel use the distinction between collectivism and individualism, which is discussed more fully in Chapter 5. Briefly, in collectivist cultures, interpersonal bonds are relatively enduring, and there are distinct ingroups and outgroups. Collectivist cultures are often very traditional. In individualistic cultures, the bonds between people are more fragile, and because people belong to many different groups that often change, membership in ingroups and outgroups is very flexible. Individualistic cultures are therefore often characterized by rapid innovation and change.

Conflict may involve either task or instrumental issues. Task issues are concerned with how to do something or how to 'achieve a specific goal, whereas instrumental issues are concerned with personal or relationship problems, such as hostility toward another person. The distinction therefore focuses on conflict about ideas versus conflict about people.

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel believe that people in collectivistic and individualistic cultures typically define and respond to conflict differently. In collectivistic cultures, people are more likely to merge task and instrumental concerns, and conflict is therefore likely to be seen as personal. To shout and scream publicly, thus displaying the conflict to others, threatens everyone's face to such an extreme degree that such behavior is usually avoided at all costs. In contrast, people from individualistic cultures are more likely to separate the task and the instrumental dimensions. Thus, they are able to express their agitation and anger (perhaps including shouting and strong nonverbal actions) about an issue and then joke and socialize with the other person once the disagreement is over. It is almost as if once the conflict is resolved, it is completely forgotten.

Because there is a great deal of volatility and variability in people's behaviors in individualistic cultures, there is often considerable potential for conflict. Because

people are encouraged to be unique, their behaviors are not as predictable as they would be in collectivistic cultures. Also, because expectations are individually based rather than group-centered, there is always the possibility that the behavior of any one person will violate the expectations of another, possibly producing conflict.

Cultures also shape attitudes toward conflict. In collectivistic cultures, which value indirectness and ambiguity, conflicts and confrontations are typically avoided. Thus, rather than trying to resolve the problem directly, people in collectivistic cultures will attempt to maintain the external smoothness of the relationship. In individualistic cultures, which are also more likely to be "doing" or activity-oriented cultures, people's approach to conflict will be action-oriented. That is, the conflict precipitates actions, and the conflict is explicitly revealed and named.⁵⁹

A very important concept for understanding how people from different cultures handle conflict is that of face, which we discussed earlier in this chapter. In conflicts, in particular, face is very likely to be threatened, and all participants are vulnerable to the face-threatening acts that can occur.

The actions of people in conflict can include attempts to save face for themselves, others, or all participants. Members of collectivistic cultures are likely to deal with face threats such as conflicts by selecting strategies that smooth over their disagreements and allow them to maintain the face of both parties, that is, mutual face-saving. As Ringo Ma suggests, however, such strategies do not simply ignore the conflicting issues; after all, conflicts do get resolved in high-context cultures. Rather, nonconfrontational alternatives are used to resolve differences. Often, for instance, a friend of those involved in the conflict, or an elderly person respected by all, will function as an unofficial intermediary who attempts to preserve the face of each person and the relationship by preventing rejection and embarrassment.⁶⁰ Members of individualistic cultures, conversely, are likely to deal with face threats in a direct, controlling way. It is important to their sense of self to maintain their own face, to take charge, to direct the course of action, and in so doing to protect their own dignity and self-respect even at the expense of others.⁶¹

Imagine a scene involving two employees assigned to an important and high-tension project. Perhaps they are operating under serious time constraints, or perhaps the lives of many people depend on their success. Inevitably, disagreements about how to approach the assignment, as well as the specifics of the assignment itself, are likely to occur. Now assume that one employee is from a collectivistic culture such as Korea and the other is from an individualistic culture such as England. The difficulties inherent in completing their assignment will probably be increased by the great differences in their approaches to the problems that will arise. Each person's attempt to maintain face may induce the other to make negative judgments and evaluations. Each person's attempt to cope with the conflict and accomplish the task may produce even more conflict.⁶² As Ting-Toomey and Oetzel suggest, these differences will need to be addressed before the work can be accomplished successfully.

Cultural connections

Presented by the couples as an often unresolvable problem was the loss of place, culture and family that resulted from one partner's leaving his or her home of origin. The immigrant partner in the couple almost invariably expressed a longing for his or her own landscape and climate, and a deep sadness about the distance from extended family members. Other topics that frequently arose were loss of

religion and language. While many couples were originally optimistic about importing religion and language from their native lands, they found that the United States exerted a pressure to assimilate that was very difficult to resist. As a result, these essential elements of culture were preserved only through great effort, if at all. For example, while Hueping Chin has managed to teach her son to speak Chinese fluently, as he grows older, their dialogue in Chinese sometimes falters in the face of new topics: "How does the space shuttle work? I find it hard to explain that to him in Chinese: "The words of Jat Aluwalia capture the sense of regret that some felt: "I admit defeat; I guess the sense of being Indian ends with me:"

Jessie Carroll Grearson and Lauren B. Smith

Interpersonal Relationships and Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence in interpersonal relationships requires knowledge, motivation, and skill in using verbal and nonverbal codes, as described in previous chapters. In addition, it requires behaviors that are appropriate and effective for the different types and dimensions of interpersonal relationships described in this chapter.

Competence in intercultural relationships requires that you understand the meanings attributed to particular types of interpersonal relationships. Whom should you consider to be a stranger, an acquaintance, a friend, or a family member? What expectations should you have for people in these categories? What clues do people from other cultures offer about their expectations for you? Your expectations about the nature of interpersonal relationships affect how you assign meaning to other people's behaviors. .

Your willingness to understand the face needs of people from other cultures and to behave appropriately to preserve and enhance their sense of face is critical to your intercultural competence. Always consider a person's need to maintain a favorable face in her or his interactions with others. Perceptions of autonomy, approval, and respect by others are important, but you must meet these face needs with facework that is appropriate to the other's cultural beliefs.

Your expectations about self-disclosure, obtaining information about others, and handling disagreements will not, in all likelihood, be the same as those of people from other cultures. Competence in developing and maintaining intercultural relationships requires knowledge of differences, a willingness to consider and try alternatives, and the skill to enact alternative relational dynamics.

Summary

People in an intercultural relationship may have very different expectations about the preferred nature of their social interactions. The types of interpersonal relationships, including those among strangers, acquaintances, friends, romantic partners, and family members, may also vary greatly across cultures.

Interpersonal relationships can be interpreted along the three dimensions of control, affiliation, and activation. The control dimension provides interpretations about status or social dominance. The affiliation dimension indicates the degree of friendliness, liking, and social warmth that is being communicated. The activation dimension is concerned with interpersonal responsiveness.

The concept of face refers to the positive social impressions that people want to have and would like others to acknowledge. Face includes the need for autonomy or individual freedom of action, approval or inclusion in social groups,

and admiration or respect from others because of one's accomplishments. The need for facework depends on the control and affiliation dimensions of interpersonal communication and on culture-specific judgments about the extent to which certain actions inherently threaten one's face.

To improve intercultural relationships, you must learn about people from other cultures and thereby reduce the degree of uncertainty. Sharing yourself in appropriate ways with people from other cultures and learning to use culturally sensitive ways to handle the differences and disagreements that may arise are additional ways to improve intercultural relationships.

For Discussion

1. What is a friend to you? What do you expect of your friends?
2. What is meant by the concept of "face"? Have you ever experienced a loss of face?
3. Describe the relationship among the following terms: *face*, *face maintenance*, *facework*, *embarrassment*, *truthfulness*, *dishonesty*, *fear*, and *withdrawal*.
4. Why do anxiety and uncertainty management play a particularly powerful role in intercultural communication?
5. Do differences in what we categorize as "public" and "private" information hold any consequences for the development of a relationship?
6. How do you think email, text messaging, and other forms of Internet communication have affected the development of intercultural relationships?

For Further Reading

- Rosemary Breger and Rosanna Hill (eds.), *CrossCultural Marriage: Identity and Choice* (New York: Berg, 1998). Contributions in this volume explore the personal experiences of those in intercultural marriages, as well as placing the positive and negative issues that emerge in such marriages in social, legal, and psychological contexts.
- Kathy Domenici and Stephen W Littlejohn, *Facework: Bridging Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006). Thoroughly researched and very practical, this book on face and facework in interpersonal communication is an excellent sourcebook. A useful balance between conceptual and the applied ideas.
- Laura K. Guerrero, Peter A. Andersen, and Walid A. Afifi, *Close Encounters: Communication in Relationships*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007). An intermediate-level textbook, it provides an excellent and readable summary of current theory and research. Explains and explores the theories that dominate the study of interpersonal communication.
- Min-Sun Kim, *Non-Western Perspectives on Human Communication: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002). A useful and very readable compendium that takes a non-U.S. view of interpersonal communication theories and practices.
- John G. Oetzel and Stella Ting-Toomey (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Communication: Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006). Provides a comprehensive overview of theory and research on conflict in a variety of human communication settings. Includes a substantial section on conflict in intercultural communication.
- Julia T. Wood, *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters* 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/ Wadsworth, 2007). A presentation of the fundamentals of interpersonal communication that parallels some of the major topics in this textbook. For additional information about

intercultural films and about Web sites for researching specific cultures, please turn to the Resources section at the back of this book.

End notes:

Chapter 10

1. John Paul Feig, *A Common Core: Thais and Americans*, rev. Elizabeth Mortlock (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1989), 50.
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7. Stanley O. Gaines, Jr., "Communalism and the Reciprocity of Affection and Respect among Interethnic Married Couples," *Journal of Black Studies* 27 (1997): 352-364; Stanley O. Gaines, Jr., et al., "Patterns of Attachment and Responses to Accommodative Dilemmas Among Interethnic/Interracial Couples," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 16 (1999): 275-285; Stanley O. Gaines, Jr., et al., "Links between Race/Ethnicity and Cultural Values as Mediated by Racial/Ethnic Identity and Moderated by Gender," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72 (1997): 1460-1476; Stanley O. Gaines, Jr., with Raymond Buriel, James H. Liu, and Diana I. Rios, *Culture, Ethnicity, and Personal Relationship Processes* (New York: Routledge, 1997). See also: Stella D. Garcia and Semilla M. Rivera, "Perceptions of Hispanic and African-American Couples at the Friendship or Engagement Stage of a Relationship," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 16 (1999): 65-86; Regan A. R. Gurung and Tenor Duong, "Mixing and Matching: Assessing the Concomitants of Mixed Ethnic Relationships," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 16 (1999): 639-657; John McFadden, "Intercultural Marriage and Family: Beyond the Racial Divide," *Family Journal* 9 (2001): 39-42.
8. Irene I. Blea, *Toward a Chicano Social Science* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Richard Lewis, Jr., George Yancy, and Siri S. Bletzer, "Racial and Nonracial Factors That Influence Spouse Choice in Black/White Marriages," *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (1997): 60-78.
9. Don C. Locke, *Increasing Multicultural Understanding: A Comprehensive Model* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 55. 10. Lin Yutang, *The Chinese Way of Life* (New York: World, 1972), 78.
11. We have synthesized a variety of sources to provide this generalization.

12. William D. Wilder, *Communication, Social Structure and Development in Rural Malaysia: A Study of Kampung Kuala Bera* (London: Athlone Press, 1982), 107.
13. Joe Cummings, Susan Forsyth, John Noble, Alan Samagalski, and Tony Wheelan, *Indonesia: A Travel Survival Guide* (Berkeley, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 1990), 321.
14. Albert Mehrabian, *Silent Messages* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1971).
15. Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).
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17. Wilder, 105.. 18. Feig, 41.
19. William O. Beeman, *Language, Status, and Power in Iran* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 86.
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- Interpersonal Issues*, ed. Stella Ting-Toomey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 287-305.
25. Greg Leichty and James L. Applegate, "Social-Cognitive and Situational Influences on the Use of Face-Saving Persuasive Strategies," *Human Communication Research* 17 (1991): 451-484.
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Intercultural Films

Here are some suggestions for films you might want to view. Many of these films may be available at your local video rental store. In addition, many schools have audiovisual departments that might carry some of these titles.

Each of the film titles is followed (in parentheses) by the culture(s) portrayed. Typically, the central characters in the films are from the indicated cultures, and the action of the film's story is usually set in those cultures as well.

As we have mentioned at numerous places throughout this book, a word of caution is warranted. The characters in these films, like all other individuals you might experience, are not perfect representations of their cultures. While some of the revealed beliefs, values, norms, and social practices may be "typical" of a majority of members of the portrayed cultures, others may be common only to a few cultural members, and some characteristics will undoubtedly be unique to the individuals in the films. We caution you, therefore, to guard against the

presumption that *any* depiction of cultural members will be a completely accurate one.

In our judgment, each of the listed films portrays the members of a culture with complexity and integrity. Omitted from this list are Hollywood blockbuster films such as *Dances with Wolves*, *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Schindler's List*. Although such films are often excellent (and, as is true with these four examples, are often must-see films), they are likely to be better known than those we list here. Our listing is by no means complete, but it does contain some of our favorites. Enjoy!

Babette's Feast (Danish)
The Barbarian Invasion (French Canadian)
Before the Rains (Asian Indian)
Bella (Latino)
Beyond Rangoon (Burmese) *Blue Kite* (Chinese)
Bread and Chocolate (Swiss, Italian)
Bride and Prejudice (Asian Indian)
Children of Heaven (Iranian) *Cinema Paradiso* (Italian)
The Circle (Iranian)
City of God (Brazilian)
Crash (various U.S. American)
Cry, The Beloved Country (South African)
Daughter from Danang (Vietnamese)
Eat Drink Man Woman (Chinese)
The Edge of America (Native American)
El Norte (Guatemalan, European American)
Eureka (Japanese)
Europa Europa (European)
The Gods Must Be Crazy (Sho Bushmen)
Good Bye Lenin (German)
A Great Wall (Chinese, Chinese-American)
Higher Learning (African American)
Il Postino (The Postman) (Italian)
Indochine (Vietnamese)
King of Masks (Chinese) *Kundun* (Tibetan)
The Last Emperor (Chinese)
Like Water for Chocolate (Mexican)
Little Buddha (Tibetan)
To Live (Chinese)
The Makioka Sisters (Japanese)
Maria Full of Grace (Colombian)
Mediterraneo (Italian, Greek)
Mi Familia (Latino)
Mississippi Massala (African American, Indian American)
Mongolian Ping Pong (Mongolian)
My Favorite Season (French)
My Life as a Dog (Swedish)
My Sassy Girl (Yeopgijeogin geunyeo) (Korean)
Picture Bride (Japanese)
Pushing Hands (Chinese, Chinese American)
Raise the Red Lantern (Chinese)
Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker (Chinese)
The Road Home (Chinese)

The Scent of Green Papaya (Vietnamese)
Shall We Dance? (Japanese)
Soul Food (African American)
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter ... and Spring (Korean)
The Story of Qui Ju (Chinese) *Tortilla Soup* (Latino)
The Vertical Ray of the Sun (Vietnamese)
A Walk in the Clouds (Latino)
Water (Asian Indian) *The Way Home* (Korean)
Witness (Amish)

Online Resources

Arab Net <http://www.arab.net/> Links to information about the geography, history, and culture of more than 20 countries in or near the Middle East.

Latin America <http://lanic.utexas.edu/subject/countries.html> Links to information about more than 40 countries in Central and South America.

Library of Congress Country Studies <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs> The Library of Congress provides in-depth information about the culture, geography, and history of more than 100 countries around the world, from Albania to Zaire.

Lonely Planet: Travel Guides
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations> Wherein the world do you want to go? The Lonely Planet series of travel guides provides information about many of the world's countries and cultures.

Rough Guides: Travel Guides <http://www.roughguides.com/> The Rough Guide series of travel guides provides an alternative set of information about many of the world's countries and cultures.

WorldFactbook
<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html#information> the geography, people, government, and other information for hundreds of countries.

Web sites about Specific Countries and Their Cultures

Albania <http://www.albanian.com/> Angola <http://www.angola.org/>
Australia <http://www.csu.edu.au/australia/>
Azerbaijan <http://www.friends-partners.org/oldfriends/azerbaijan/index.html>
Bangladesh <http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/>
Belgium <http://belgium.fgov.be/>
Belize Government Page <http://www.belize.gov.bz/>
Belize Online <http://www.belize.com/>
Cambodia <http://www.cambodia.org/>
Canada <http://canada.gc.ca/>
Cape Verde <http://www.umassd.edu/specialprograms/caboverde/capeverdean.html>
China, Republic of (Taiwan) <http://www.gio.gov.tw/>
Denmark <http://www.denmarkemb.org/>
Estonia: Country Guide <http://www.ciesin.ee/ESTCG/>
Estonia: Institute of Baltic Studies <http://www.ibs.ee/>
Finland <http://virtual.finland.fi/>
France: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/index.gb.html>
Georgia <http://www.parliament.ge/>
Germany <http://www.germany-info.org>

Ghana <http://www.ghanaweb.com>
Guyana <http://www.guyana.org/>
Hungary <http://www.fsz.bme.hu/hungary/homepage.html>
Iceland <http://www.whatson.is/>
Iran: Iranian Cultural Information Center <http://persia.org/> .Iran:
<http://www.iraqfoundation.org/>
Ireland, Northern <http://www.interknowledge.com/northern-ireland/index.html>
Italy: Dolce Vita <http://www.dolcevita.com/>
Italy: Embassy in U.S. <http://www.italyemb.org/>
Jamaica <http://www.jamaicans.com/>
Japan: Information Network <http://www.jinjapan.org/>
Jewish: Judaism 101 <http://www.jewfaq.org/>
Jewish: Resources <http://shamash.org/trb/judaism.html>
Kurdistan <http://www.xs4all.nU~tank/kurdish/htdocs/index.html>
Libya http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dr_ibrahim_ighneiwa/
Mexico: Reference Desk <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/Mexico/>
Nepal <http://www.info-nepal.com/> Netherlands <http://www.nbt.nl/>
New Zealand <http://nz.com/>
Norway <http://www.norwayorg/>
Papua New Guinea <http://www.niugini.com/>
Scotland <http://members.aol.com/sconemac/index.html>
Singapore: Government <http://www.gov.sg/>
Singapore: InfoMap <http://www.sg/>
South Africa <http://www.polityorg.za/>
Spain <http://www.docuweb.ca/SiSpain/english/index.html>
Sweden <http://www.sverigeturism.se/smorgasbord/> Tunisia
<http://www.tunisiaonline.com/>
Turkey <http://www.turkey.org/>
United Kingdom: Travel Guide <http://www.uktravel.com/index.html>
United Kingdom: UK Online <http://www.open.gov.uk/>
USA, African American: Black Network <http://www.netnoir.com>
USA, Asian American: Asian American Net <http://www.asianamerican.net/>
USA, Hawaiian <http://www.hawaii-nation.org/>
USA, Latino: Hispanic Online <http://www.hispaniconline.com/>
USA, Native Americans <http://www.indians.org/welker/nationsl.htm>
, USA, Native Americans, Lakota <http://puffin.creighton.edu/lakota/index.html>
USA, Native Americans, Seneca <http://www.sni.org/>