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THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

Culture hides more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides
most effectively from its own participants.

—Edward T. Hall[1]

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize that no culture is purely individualistic or purely collectivistic

2. Discuss the research behind the notion of a pancultural self

3. Identify some cultures that are high context and some that are low context

4. Compare value orientations among cultures

5. Compare and contrast large and small power distance cultures

6. Identify some cultures that are weak uncertainty avoidant and some that are strong uncertainty avoidant

7. Compare and contrast long-term and short-term orientation cultures

The cultural context in which human communication occurs is perhaps the most defining influence on human interaction. Culture provides the overall framework wherein humans learn to organize their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in relation to their environment. Although people are born into a culture, it is not innate. Culture is learned. Culture teaches one how to *think*, conditions one how to *feel*, and instructs one how to *act*, especially how to *interact* with others—in other words, how to communicate. In many respects, the terms *communication* and *culture* can be used interchangeably. Yet the influence of culture on human interaction is paradoxical. As we conduct our daily lives, most of us are unaware of our culture; however, culture influences our every thought, feeling, and action. As anthropologist Edward T. Hall asserted in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, culture hides more than it reveals, particularly from its own members. Australian anthropologist Roger Keesing argues that culture provides people with an implicit theory about how to behave and how to interpret the behavior of others.[2]

We often think of culture in terms of its geography; for example, we think of Saudi Arabia as a hot, desert culture and of Siberia as a cold, mountainous one. But culture is more a human phenomenon than a geographic one. And while geography certainly affects how people live within a particular culture, the people, more than the geography, are what constitute culture. So when you think of a culture, think about the people. It is also important to understand that cultures of people are not static but, rather, dynamic. This means that cultures change; they are fluid, always moving. For example, in December 2015, for the first time in history, women in Saudi Arabia were allowed to vote. Xanthe Ackerman and Christina Asquith report that women in Saudi Arabia face numerous barriers to financial and personal freedom, and in these elections, Saudi women won 20 seats, only 1% of the 2,100 municipal seats, which carry little power—but the presence of women in government marks a significant evolution of women's rights and offers a role model for the next generation of Saudi women.[3]

Over the past few decades, anthropologists, communication researchers, psychologists, and sociologists have isolated several dimensions of cultural variability that can be used to differentiate cultures. This chapter focuses on six dimensions of cultural variability: individualism–collectivism, high–low context, value orientations, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long term–short term orientation. Each of these dimensions affects how people communicate.

The six dimensions of cultural variability are presented along cultural continua:

Low [_____] High

The cultural continua allow us to represent the dimensions of cultural variability as continuous and varying in magnitude by degree. In other words, no culture is purely and absolutely individualistic or collectivistic. Instead, a culture may be more individualistic or more collectivistic than some other culture. These cultural dimensions of variability are not opposites; that is, a culture in which a large power distance is practiced should not be thought of as the opposite of a culture in which small power distance is practiced. In some cases, dimensions of cultural variability may coexist in cultures. In addition, as already mentioned, cultures are not static or fixed in time; many cultures are in a state of great transition. Thus, a culture that was once considered collectivistic may now be considered individualistic. For example, Japan is considered a collectivistic, group-oriented society. However, since the 1950s, Japan has been strongly influenced by Western culture. Many Japanese scholars have observed that the younger generation of Japanese, while still considered collectivistic, is more individualistic than that of their parents and especially of their grandparents. Likewise, although the United States is considered very individualistic, many U.S. businesses and corporations employ collectivistic management models in the workplace, focusing on teamwork and cooperation.

Finally, and this is an important point, when we label a culture as *individualistic*—or large power distance and so forth—that does not mean that every person in that culture is an individualist. The United States, for example, is considered an individualistic culture, yet groups within the United States are collectivistic. While reading through this chapter, remember that cultures are not static. Cultures are dynamic, continuously developing and evolving.

INDIVIDUALISM–COLLECTIVISM

Perhaps the single most studied dimension of cultural variability used to compare and contrast cultures and microcultures is individualism–collectivism (see Figure 2.1).

Cultures falling on one side of the continuum are individualistic, while those falling toward the other side are collectivistic. Cultures falling at the midpoint might have both individualistic and collectivistic characteristics. Regardless of culture, most persons carry both individualistic and collectivistic tendencies to some degree. The difference is that in some cultures individualistic tendencies dominate, while in others collectivistic tendencies dominate.[4]

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Individualism–Collectivism

Individualism ⟷ Collectivism

STUDENT VOICES ACROSS CULTURES
INDIVIDUALISM IN A COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURE

Ruqaya Ibrahim

Ruqaya K. Ibrahim

I was born in Sudan and grew up in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. I was raised in an Arab collectivistic culture (between Sudan and the UAE). Yet I sometimes wonder if I would have fit in better in a Western individualistic culture, where communication is more transparent and clearer. I can be quite direct, and I have been this way for as long as I can remember. That got me in trouble sometimes, especially when I was a child. Oftentimes my parents would feel embarrassed by my frank remarks with guests or relatives, as some perceived my candid comments as disrespectful! Moreover, some friends also referred to it as "brutal honesty." Even though my intention was simply to be clear and upfront in my interactions.

In a work context, assertiveness did not work to my advantage in many cases. I worked in the architectural industry in a male-dominated organization in the Middle East. A high-context culture that relied heavily on nonverbal cues, which did not make sense to me at the time. Being candid and direct was not normative, especially since the few females working there were relatively quiet and discreet. In my experience, being assertive communicated self-confidence, yet sometimes it was misinterpreted as aggressive. I admit that I have been in situations where it was perceived as aggressive, after becoming frustrated with the indirectness and evasiveness of my coworkers and managers. These communicative dynamics led me to pursue a shift in my career as an architect.

I recently graduated with a degree in social-organizational psychology, with a focus on workplace coaching, from Columbia University. Workplace coaching is a one-to-one custom-tailored learning and development intervention that uses a collaborative, reflective, goal-focused relationship to achieve professional outcomes that are valued by the client. I'm keen to pursue a career in coaching, where I can leverage my individualistic tendencies of being assertive and direct in supporting professionals in the workplace. I started navigating this by exploring the idea of becoming a professional "breakup" coach, to empower clients to break up from their limiting beliefs, indecisiveness, and reactivity toward unpleasant situations and conflicts. While this concept might be encouraged in individualistic cultures, I was curious about its effectiveness and clients' acceptance to it, especially if they come from collectivistic cultures where assertiveness is a quality mostly reserved for male elders.

Consequently, I started coaching individuals in Sudan. I observed that millennials, across genders, value assertiveness and perceive it positively as a form of self-confidence. I have my doubts that older people would be open to the idea of coaching in the first place, particularly if it comes from me, a young female who is challenging the norms.

Individualism

Researchers at the University of Michigan analyzed more than 250 studies that investigated individualism, collectivism, or both.[5] They found that the most relevant feature of **individualism**, as defined in the majority of the studies they reviewed, was valuing personal independence. Researchers at the University of Auckland in New Zealand point out that valuing personal independence involves emphasizing personal responsibility and freedom of choice, personal autonomy, and achieving self-fulfillment. Moreover, individualists strive to maintain distinctive personal attitudes and opinions and prefer self-directed behavior and independence of groups. Individualists tend to see themselves as unique from others.[6]

Harry C. Triandis, from the University of Illinois, is known for his work on individualism and collectivism. Triandis discusses four defining attributes of individualism–collectivism:

1. How individuals perceive themselves (e.g., "I am distinct and unique" vs. "I am a member of a family, tribe")

2. How individuals relate to others (e.g., "How/what do I gain from this act?" vs. "How will this act affect others?")

3. The goals individuals follow (e.g., "I want to win" vs. "I'm a team player to help the group win")

4. What drives individuals' behavior (e.g., "It is my right to do this" vs. "My duty is to my group")

Triandis writes that in individualistic cultures, emphasis is placed on individuals' goals over group goals. Social behavior is guided by personal goals, perhaps at the expense of other types of goals. Individualistic cultures stress values that benefit the individual person. The self is promoted because each person is viewed as uniquely endowed and having distinctive talent and potential. Individuals are encouraged to pursue and develop their abilities and aptitudes. In many individualistic cultures, people are taught to be creative, self-reliant, and assertive.[7]

Triandis and others have pointed out that an important ingredient of individualistic cultures is that the individual is emotionally disconnected from in-groups such as the family. Because the individual has been taught to be independent, social control depends more on personal guilt than on shame or other social norms or conformity. Ironically, members of individualistic cultures tend to belong to many groups, but their affiliation with those groups is short-lived. Many of the groups to which an individualist belongs are designed to enhance self-worth. Such groups might include self-help groups, therapy groups, or occupational groups.[8]

In many cases, individualistic cultures are highly complex and affluent. Complex cultures have heterogeneous populations and economies based on occupational specialization, in which individuals do different jobs. Cultural complexity also occurs in cultures where people are separated from one another either geographically or through migration patterns. Many individualistic cultures have a history of colonization, for example.[9]

individualism
Cultural orientation in which the individual is unique and individual goals are emphasized over group goals.

Collectivism

Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier point out that the central ingredient of **collectivism** is the assumption that groups bind and mutually obligate individuals.[10] In their extensive review of the literature, they found that collectivism is linked to a sense of duty to group, interdependence, harmony, and working with the group. Triandis asserts that in collectivistic societies, group goals take precedence over individual goals.

Collectivistic cultures stress values that serve the in-group by subordinating personal goals for the sake of preserving the in-group. Collectivistic societies are characterized by extended primary groups such as the family, neighborhood, or occupational group in which members have diffuse mutual obligations and expectations based on their status or rank. In collectivistic cultures, people are not seen as isolated individuals. People see themselves as interdependent with others (e.g., their in-group), where responsibility is shared and accountability is collective. A person's identity is defined by his or her group memberships.[11]

Triandis points out that while collectivistic cultures stress the importance of the group over the individual, their members tend to belong to fewer groups than do persons in individualistic cultures. Unlike the individualist, the collectivist is emotionally connected to the in-group. A collectivist's values and beliefs are consistent with and reflect those of the in-group. Moreover, a collectivist's association with his or her in-groups may last a lifetime. In many collectivistic cultures, the primary value is harmony with others.

Triandis observes that because group harmony is so highly valued, obedience to and compliance with in-group pressures is routine. One's behavior is role based, and deviations from the prescribed role are discouraged and often negatively sanctioned. In this sense, a person's behavior is guided more by shame than by personal guilt. A collectivist who stands out from the group disrupts the harmony and may be punished. Most collectivistic cultures value social reciprocity, obligation, dependence, and obedience. But by far, the primary value stressed by many collectivistic cultures is harmony.[12]

collectivism
Cultural orientation where the group is the primary unit of culture. Group goals take precedence over individual goals.

Individualism Versus Collectivism?

Although they sound as though they're opposite dimensions of cultural variability, individualism and collectivism are not mutually exclusive; that is, they can coexist within a person of any culture. Green, Deschamps, and Páez point out that the degree of individualism or collectivism within someone may be triggered by the social context and one's social relations. They suggest that individuals can be characterized by specific combinations of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies. For example, a person may find that individualistic relations are motivated in particular situations, such as in business relationships, whereas with family members, the relationships are collectivistic.[13] C. Harry Hui has shown variation in individualistic and collectivistic attitudes in different types of relationships, such as with one's spouse, parent, neighbor, or coworker.[14]

So Who's an Individualist, and Who's a Collectivist?

Because there can be considerable within-country variation, labeling a particular country or culture as *individualistic* or *collectivistic* is difficult and may lead to overgeneralizations.

However, in their landmark analysis of more than 250 research articles on individualism and collectivism, Oyserman and her colleagues were able to draw some conclusions.[15] The central focus of this study was to answer this question: Are European Americans more individualistic and less collectivistic than other groups? In general, the answer was yes, European Americans are more individualistic and less collectivistic than other groups. In comparison with nearly 50 other nationalities, European Americans were more individualistic than all but 12. European Americans were generally lower in collectivism as well. There were exceptions, though: U.S. citizens were higher in collectivism than were people in New Zealand, France, Singapore, Tanzania, Egypt, Costa Rica, and Venezuela. Oyserman et al. noted one of the most remarkable findings: U.S. citizens were slightly more collectivistic than Japanese, and no difference was observed between the former and Koreans on collectivistic measures.

However, in her recent research, Toshi Imada found that stories in U.S. textbooks highlight themes of individualism, such as self-direction and achievement, whereas Japanese stories highlight themes of collectivism, such as conformity and group harmony. Her study also found cultural differences in story characteristics (e.g., the narrator, attribution of the outcome, picture content) related to individualism and collectivism.[16] Oyserman and colleagues have pointed out that although as a group East Asians were simultaneously lower in individualism and higher in collectivism than were U.S. citizens, there was notable variety within East Asian countries regarding individualism and collectivism. For example, Chinese were highest in collectivism but lowest in individualism, whereas Japanese were highest in individualism but lowest in collectivism. South Koreans were between Chinese and Japanese on these measures. This may be because South Korean culture has unique features that distinguish it from traditional Confucian-based collectivistic cultures—that is, a strong emphasis on family. In a more recent study, Ronald Fischer and colleagues examined 11 countries and found that among these countries, the United States ranked highest in overall individualism.[17]

Overall Individualism

1. United States
2. Germany
3. India
4. Lebanon
5. New Zealand
6. Peru
7. Brazil
8. Taiwan
9. Saudi Arabia
10. United Kingdom
11. Argentina

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION

INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURES

One's individualistic or collectivistic disposition affects communication. In the following exchange, Bill Patterson, a U.S. manager working in Korea, is meeting with his supervisor, Mark Wyman, who is also from the United States. The United States is considered more individualistic than Korea. In this scenario, Mr. Patterson reports to Mr. Wyman about some changes he has made to his sales teams. Later, Park Young Sam, their Korean counterpart, enters the dialogue.[18]

Mr. Patterson: Good morning, Mark. Thanks for meeting with me this morning. As you know, our division has been doing very well this quarter. In fact, our numbers are up across the board.

Mr. Wyman: Yes, I've seen your quarterly reports. Nice job!

Mr. Patterson: Thanks. To recognize their hard work, I've made some changes in our sales teams. I've created team leaders in each group. In our product group, I promoted Lee Young-sam. In the marketing group, I promoted Chun Tae-woo, and in the technology group, I promoted Choi Mino. All of them have been real leaders. I think this idea will really motivate them. In fact, I met with the groups individually and announced the promotions.

Mr. Wyman: Good job, Bill. I can see you're really on top of things. Good work.

Two Months Later

Bill Patterson, Mark Wyman, and Park Young Sam, a Korean manager, are discussing the poor performance of Mr. Patterson's sales teams.

Mr. Wyman: Well, just look at these dismal results. The numbers for this quarter are way down from last quarter. What's happened?

Mr. Patterson: I don't know. Ever since I introduced the team leader concept, the groups' productivity has really plummeted. I thought it was a great idea. I guess I chose the wrong people to lead the teams. I'll assign new leaders tomorrow.

Mr. Sam: Well, you may select new leaders if you want, but the men you chose were all very capable. However, by elevating them, you made them stand out and disrupted the harmony of each group. In Korea, we all work hard for the group, not just one person.

Mr. Patterson: I guess I should have just left things as they were.

Following their individualistic orientations, Mr. Patterson and Mr. Wyman were perfectly comfortable with the idea of appointing team leaders within the individual sales groups. However, as Mr. Sam mentioned, doing so upset the harmony of the groups, which in turn led to poor performance. In the United States, workers are often motivated by the opportunity for promotion and advancement, as this serves the individualistic drive for personal achievement. In less individualistic cultures, however, workers may be motivated by being a part of a cohesive and productive team. Mr. Patterson and Mr. Wyman could have consulted with Mr. Sam prior to making the promotions. He probably would have advised against it.

Patterns of Individualism and Collectivism Across the United States

As previously mentioned, although the United States is considered individualistic, considerable regional variation exists. Because of ecological, historical, and institutional practices, the Deep South is the most collectivistic region of the United States. Defeat in the Civil War, the institution of slavery, relative poverty, and the prominence of religion all contribute to the collectivistic tendencies of the South. In addition, the Southwest, having been settled by Mexican and Spanish populations before White settlers entered the area, is also considered fairly collectivistic. Hawaii, too, has a culture different from the rest of the United States, with about 65% of its population coming from Asian cultures. Hence, much of its culture has collectivistic characteristics, and Hawaii would be considered collectivistic. On the other hand, the Mountain West and Great Plains are thought to be the most individualistic regions in the United States.[19]

TABLE 2.1 ■ The Most Collectivistic States and the Most Individualistic States	
Most Collectivistic States	**Most Individualistic States**
Hawaii	Montana
Louisiana	Oregon
South Carolina	Nebraska
Mississippi	Wyoming
Maryland	South Dakota
Utah	Colorado
Virginia	North Dakota
Georgia	Washington
California	Kansas
New Jersey	Iowa

In their research, Joseph A. Vandello and Dov Cohen created an index designed to measure collectivism in different regions of the United States. Their index was composed of eight items: the percentage of all people living alone, percentage of elderly people living alone, percentage of households with grandchildren in them, divorce-to-marriage ratio, percentage of people with no religious affiliation, average percentage of those voting Libertarian over the past four presidential elections, ratio of people carpooling to work to people living alone, and percentage of self-employed people. Their index showed a general pattern of relative collectivism in the South, particularly in the former slave states, with maximum individualism in the Great Plains and Mountain West. Montana was the most individualistic state, and Hawaii was the most collectivistic (see Table 2.1).[20]

Communication Consequences of Individualism–Collectivism

A given culture's orientation toward individualism or collectivism has important behavioral consequences for that culture's members. Among collectivists, social behavior is guided by the group. Along with group membership come prescribed duties and obligations. Among individualists, social behavior is guided by one's personal attitudes, motivations, and other internal processes. To be sure, individualistic cultures value and reward an individual's uniqueness. The United States, for example, is replete with contests and ceremonies that recognize individual accomplishment. People are publicly rewarded for being the most beautiful, thinnest, strongest, fastest, tallest, smartest, youngest,

oldest, funniest, or "best" at whatever they aspire to do. Collectivistic cultures, on the other hand, stress harmony and cooperation. Collectivists strive for the approval of the in-group, which is accomplished not by standing out but by conforming to the group's norm. From the collectivist's perspective, an individual who stands out from the group disrupts harmony. In the United States, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease," but in Japan, "the tallest nail gets hammered down."[21]

Triandis maintains that a culture's individualistic or collectivistic orientation will likely affect child-rearing practices. In individualistic cultures, child-rearing emphasizes independence, exploration, creativity, and self-reliance. Individualistic parents encourage their children to be unique, express themselves, and be independent. The children of individualistic parents understand that they are to leave home once they reach a certain age or education level. It is thought odd or unusual if children past the age of about 21 still live at home with their parents. Though rank order exists in the individualist's family, decisions are often made democratically. In collectivistic cultures, child-rearing emphasizes conformity, obedience, security, and reliability. Collectivistic parents teach their children the importance of family lineage and ancestry. Typically, the father dominates the collectivist's home, where rank in the family is often determined by sex and age.[22]

Collectivists are more conscious of in-group/out-group distinctions than are individualists. According to William B. Gudykunst and his colleagues, individualists tend to initiate and maintain specific friendships based on desirable qualities of the other person. Collectivists form friendships determined by their hierarchical role in society. Collectivists perceive and rate their in-group friendships as more intimate than do individualists. On the other hand, individualists tend to apply the same value standards to all, whereas collectivists tend to apply different value standards to members of their in-groups and out-groups. For example, collectivists are likely to use the equality norm (i.e., equal distribution of resources) with in-group members and the equity norm (i.e., unequal distribution of resources) with out-group members.[23]

Finally, in their exhaustive review of studies, Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier summarized behavioral traits shown to be associated with individualism and collectivism (see Table 2.2).[24]

TABLE 2.2 ■ Behavioral Traits Associated With Individualism and Collectivism	
Individualism	**Collectivism**
Optimism	Social self-concept
High self-esteem	Need for affiliation
Lower social anxiety	Sensitivity to rejection
Emotional expression	Sensitivity to embarrassment
Satisfaction with self	In-group relationship preferences
Satisfaction with freedom	Indirect communication style
Ease of interacting with strangers	Valuing of social networks
Direct communication style	
Lower relational commitment	
Preference to work alone	

Vertical and Horizontal Individualism and Collectivism

While it is clear that individualistic cultures differ from collectivistic cultures, individualistic cultures can, and do, differ from other individualistic cultures. The same can be said of collectivistic cultures. Some individualistic cultures, for example, link self-reliance with competition, while other individualistic cultures do not. Some collectivistic cultures emphasize in-group harmony above all else, while other collectivistic cultures do not. To account for some of these finer distinctions among individualistic and collectivistic cultures, Triandis and his colleagues differentiate between vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 2.1
INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM SCALE

Over the past decades, cross-cultural researchers have spent considerable effort developing instruments designed to measure one's relative degree of individualism and collectivism. Researchers at the University of Auckland in New Zealand recently developed the Auckland Individualism and Collectivism Scale.[25]

Directions: The following are 20 statements that may or may not reflect how you act in your relationships with others. For each statement, indicate the *frequency* with which you engage (or not) in the behaviors described—(1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) usually, or (5) always. For example, if you *always* discuss job- or study-related problems with your parents, you would put a *5* in the blank. Work quickly and record your initial response.

_____ 1. I discuss job- or study-related problems with my parents.

_____ 2. I consult my family before making an important decision.

_____ 3. Before taking a major trip, I consult with most members of my family and many friends.

_____ 4. It is important to consult close friends and get their ideas before making a decision.

_____ 5. Even when I strongly disagree with my group members, I avoid an argument.

_____ 6. I hate to disagree with others in my group.

_____ 7. In interacting with superiors, I am always polite.

_____ 8. I sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group.

_____ 9. I define myself as a competitive person.

_____ 10. I enjoy working in situations involving competition with others.

_____ 11. Without competition, it is impossible to have a good society.

_____ 12. Competition is the law of nature.

_____ 13. I consider myself as a unique person, separate from others.

_____ 14. I enjoy being unique and different from others.

_____ 15. I see myself as "my own person."

_____ 16. It is important for me to act as an independent person.

_____ 17. I take responsibility for my own actions.

_____ 18. Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me.

_____ 19. I consult with my superior on work-related matters.

_____ 20. I prefer to be self-reliant rather than depend on others.

Scoring: To compute your _collectivism_ score, sum your responses for Items 1 through 8. Your sum must be between 8 and 40. Higher sums (e.g., > 30) indicate a prevalence for collectivism. To compute your _individualism_ score, sum your responses for Items 9 through 20. Your sum must be between 12 and 60. Higher sums (e.g., > 45) indicate a prevalence for individualism.

According to Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand, **horizontal individualism** is a cultural orientation in which an autonomous self is valued, but the individual is more or less equal in status to others. The self is perceived as independent but nevertheless the same as others. **Vertical individualism** is the cultural orientation in which an autonomous self is also valued, but the self is seen as different from and perhaps unequal to others. Status and competition are important aspects of this orientation. The United States and France are examples of vertical individualism, whereas Sweden and Austria are examples of horizontal individualism.[26] **Horizontal collectivism** is the cultural orientation in which the individual sees the self as a member of an in-group whose members are similar to one another. The self is interdependent and the same as the self of others. Equality is expected and practiced within this orientation. China is probably a good example of horizontal collectivism. Theoretical communism is an example of extreme horizontal collectivism. **Vertical collectivism** is the cultural orientation in which the individual sees the self as an integral part of the in-group, but the members are different from one another, some having more status than others. The self is interdependent, and inequality within the group is valued. In this orientation, serving and sacrifice are important. Japan, India, and rural traditional Greece are examples of vertical collectivism.

horizontal individualism
Cultural orientation in which an autonomous self is valued, but the self is more or less equal to others.

vertical individualism
Cultural orientation in which an autonomous self is valued and the self is seen as different from and perhaps unequal to others.

horizontal collectivism
Cultural orientation in which the self is seen as a member of an in-group whose members are similar to one another.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 2.2
MEASURING HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL INDIVIDUALISM–COLLECTIVISM

Consider the following situations. Place a check next to the response that most closely fits how you would act.

1. You and your friends decided spontaneously to go out to dinner at a restaurant. What do you think is the best way to handle the bill?

A. _____ Split it equally, without regard to who ordered what

B. _____ Split it according to how much each person makes

C. _____ The group leader pays the bill or decides how to split it

D. _____ Compute each person's charge according to what that person ordered

(Continued)

(Continued)

2. Which of these four book topics are you more likely to find interesting?

   A. _____How to make friends

   B. _____How to succeed in business

   C. _____How to make sure you are meeting your obligations

   D. _____How to enjoy yourself inexpensively

3. When you buy clothing for a major social event, you would be most satisfied if . . .

   A. _____your friends like it.

   B. _____it is so elegant it will dazzle everyone.

   C. _____your parents like it.

   D. _____you like it.

4. When people ask me about myself, I . . .

   A. _____talk about my friends and what we like to do.

   B. _____talk about my accomplishments.

   C. _____talk about my ancestors and their traditions.

   D. _____talk about what makes me unique.

5. Suppose your boyfriend or girlfriend and your parents do not get along very well. What would you do?

   A. _____Tell my boyfriend or girlfriend that he or she should make a greater effort to "fit in with my family"

   B. _____Tell my boyfriend or girlfriend that I need my parents' financial support, and he or she should learn to handle them

   C. _____Remind my boyfriend or girlfriend that my parents and family are very important to me, and he or she should submit to their wishes

   D. _____Nothing

6. Suppose you had one word to describe yourself. What would it be?

   A. _____Cooperative

   B. _____Competitive

   C. _____Dutiful

   D. _____Unique

7. Happiness is attained by . . .

   A. _____linking with a lot of friendly people.

   B. _____winning in competition.

   C. _____gaining a lot of status in the community.

   D. _____keeping one's privacy.

8. You are at a pizza restaurant with a group of friends. How should you decide what kind of pizza to order?

   A. _____We select the pizza that most people prefer.

   B. _____We order the most extravagant pizza available.

   C. _____The leader of the group orders for everyone.

   D. _____I order what I like.

Scoring: Indicate the number of times you selected letters *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D*. The frequency that is the highest represents your general HC, VI, VC, or HI orientation.

   A. _____Horizontal collectivism (HC)

   B. _____Vertical individualism (VI)

   C. _____Vertical collectivism (VC)

   D. _____Horizontal individualism (HI)

Source: This scale for measuring horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism is adapted from Triandis, H. C., Chen, X. P., & Chan, D. K. S. (1998). Scenarios for the Measurement of Collectivism and Individualism. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 29,* 275–289.

In a recent comparison of U.S., Thai, and Japanese students on horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism, McCann, Honeycutt, and Keaton found significant differences among the three groups and within each group. Regarding horizontal individualism, the U.S. students scored higher than the Japanese, who scored higher than the Thai students. Interestingly, there were no significant differences among the three groups on vertical individualism, where we might have expected the U.S. students to score higher than the other groups. Finally, the Japanese scored higher on horizontal and vertical collectivism than the U.S. and Thai students. Within each culture, the U.S. students scored highest on horizontal individualism, then, in order, horizontal collectivism, vertical collectivism, and vertical individualism. The Japanese students scored highest on horizontal collectivism, virtually the same on vertical collectivism and horizontal individualism, then lowest on vertical individualism. Finally, the Thai students scored highest on horizontal collectivism, then, in order, horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, and vertical collectivism.[27]

There are advantages and disadvantages to being an individualist, just as there are to being a collectivist. Neither approach is "better" than the other; they are simply different orientations. The goal is to recognize and understand the differences, thereby increasing your intercultural competence. To be sure, the individualism–collectivism dimension of cultural variability has been used extensively in describing cultural differences—perhaps too much. Asian cultures, in particular, are often branded as collectivistic. Recently, the individualism–collectivism dichotomy has been the subject of criticism. In her analysis of the Chinese, Hui-Ching Chang argues that by describing cultures as only collectivistic— which focuses on the structure of society—much of the creativity of individual Asian cultures, including rich histories, has been ignored. As Chang asserts,

> Although it is through the lens of the metaphor "collectivism" that we are allowed to focus on group membership and patterns of relationships in Asian cultures, at the same time, we lose sight of other aspects of delicate cultural reasoning that underlie manifested behavior patterns.[28]

The essence of Chang's argument is that we cannot rely on single metaphorical distinctions such as individualism–collectivism if we really want to accurately describe and ultimately understand other cultures.

THE PANCULTURAL SELF

As mentioned earlier, in individualistic cultures, emphasis is placed on individual goals over group goals, values that benefit the self are championed, the self is promoted, and individuals are encouraged to pursue and develop their individual abilities and aptitudes. In these cultures, people are taught to be creative, self-reliant, competitive, and assertive. The *individual self* is the most fundamental basis for self-definition. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, group goals take precedence over individual goals, values that serve the in-group are stressed, and people are not seen as isolated individuals but as interdependent with others. In these cultures, the *collective self* is the most fundamental basis of self-definition.

vertical collectivism
Cultural orientation in which the individual sees the self as an integral part of the in-group, but the members are different from one another (e.g., status).

Yet a growing body of literature suggests that the individual self is pancultural—that is, that the individual self is more fundamental to self-definition across cultures than is the collective self. Constantine Sedikides and her colleagues have spent the past decade studying the idea that across cultures people are motivated to enhance and protect their self-worth. She and her associates maintain that two factors play a key role here—*self-enhancement* and *self-protection*.

Self-enhancement refers to the idea that people desire to maintain and enhance positive self-views. Self-protection is conceptually the opposite—that is, to minimize negative self-views. Sedikides maintains that self-enhancement and self-protection significantly influence how people think, feel, and act in communicative situations across cultures.[29]

According to Sedikides, to preserve *self-enhancement*, individuals engage three communicative strategies: positivity embracement, favorable construals, and self-affirming reflections. Positivity embracement refers to those communicative tactics whereby people approach and interact with others who are likely to provide them with positive feedback. When the positive feedback is given, the individual then takes credit for it. For example, when students receive good grades, they assume it was due to their abilities. Favorable construal strategies involve individuals creating self-serving cognitions about the world around them. Sedikides argues that during communication most people compare themselves with others and believe they are better than average on important traits and often interpret ambiguous feedback from others as flattering. When faced with threats, however, individuals engage in self-affirming reflections. Here, individuals reflect on their past successes to counter possible threats. On the other hand, during *self-protection* communication, the individual proactively prepares for negative feedback. For example, Sedikides asserts that people often self-handicap before potentially evaluative situations to provide an excuse for failure. They often attribute negative feedback to external causes rather than to their own failures, and discount such feedback. For example, when students perform poorly on an exam, they may attribute it to poor instruction or to the exam being loaded with "trick questions."[30]

Considerable debate surrounds the idea of whether self-enhancement and self-protection motivation is equally forceful across cultures. Some scholars maintain that collectivistic values are in direct opposition to self-enhancement and self-protection—that the group is primary. Others maintain that self-enhancement and self-protection are universally held across cultures but are practiced differently according to specific cultural norms and values. Most of the current research suggests that both individualistic and collectivistic cultures sanction and even endorse self-enhancement and self-protection but via different means. Collectivism is just another way to promote the self.

For example, in individualistic cultures of the West (e.g., the United States, Canada, Great Britain), it is accepted and tolerated to show off one's success. In Eastern cultures (e.g., Japan, Korea, China), it is accepted and tolerated to expect reciprocity based on seniority. In other words, in both types of cultures, a person's motivations for behavior and self-definition stem primarily from personal identity and an independent sense of self. Moreover, research demonstrates that on self-description tasks, people generate more aspects of their individual self than their collective self, regardless of their cultural individualism or collectivism. Some researchers have even suggested that social harmony—a primary value among collectivists—often serves as a means through which to accomplish individual goals. Still others maintain that in collectivistic cultures, individuals

may temporarily sacrifice their self-interest for the group as long as they expect to receive rewards from the group eventually (e.g., being perceived as a good team member). Finally, in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures, self-enhancement is sanctioned through upward mobility, status seeking, and general promotions of the self.[31]

Nao Oyama points out that collectivism has long been used to describe Japanese culture. But as Oyama asserts, Japanese society is changing, and Japanese values also have changed, especially since World War II. Oyama argues that the Japanese collectivistic orientation has been decreasing and that many Japanese now have an individualistic orientation. To be sure, collectivism remains as a cultural system in Japan, especially in decision-making in companies or government and in cases of company loyalty or village exclusiveness, but such an expression of collectivism is sometimes just a means of achieving an individually oriented goal. In such circumstances, Oyama contends, seeming collectivistic is a false appearance produced by individually oriented people using collectivistic methods for the realization of personal goals. For example, to value hard work to get rich or to study hard to make a name for oneself indicates an individual orientation that depends on a social system. People are obedient to the social system as a means to get money or honor. In behavioral terms, obedience to a social system resembles the behavior of persons with a collective orientation, but the real value orientation underlying the behavior is individual. According to Oyama, this means that individualism and collectivism, at least as practiced and valued in Japan, are not so different.[32] As Gaertner, Sedikides, and Graetz note, given a choice, however, most persons would opt to stay home rather than go to war, save their hard-earned money rather than pay taxes, and relax in the company of their favorite music than engage in community volunteer work. At the same time, most persons would cherish the protection of the group when attacked individually, seek the financial support of the group when experiencing individual financial troubles, and call on the aid of the community in times of individual disaster. The individual self is the primary basis for self-definition.[33]

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION
THE PANCULTURAL SELF ON EXAMINATION DAY

In the following intercultural conversation, undergraduate students Gary, Karen, and Quan are discussing their performance on a recent exam. Gary and Karen are from the United States, and Quan is an exchange student from China.

Karen: Hey, Quan, we're walking over to the library. Want to join us?

Quan: Sure, thanks.

Gary: Guess what? Karen got an A on that exam.

Quan: That's great! Wow, Karen, you are so smart!

Karen: Yeah, I studied really hard for that exam. That's why I did so well. How did you do, Quan?

Quan: I got an A, too. My parents will be so proud of me! They taught me good

(Continued)

(Continued)

study habits. I can't wait to tell them of my success. I think the instructor is excellent as well. How did you do, Gary?

Gary: I got a D. I think the professor sucks, and I think a lot of the questions on that exam were pretty tricky. I think he just wants us to do poorly.

Karen: I don't know about that. I worked really hard to do well. I think I've become a pretty good student in the past few years. Maybe you just need to study more.

Gary: He just doesn't like me.

Quan: I have honored my parents. That is a very good thing in my country.

Notice how all three attribute their performance on the exam to different causes, but each can be seen as a dimension of self-enhancement or self-protection. In the conversation, Karen asks Quan to join her and Gary. Quan offers positive feedback to Karen, and Karen attributes her success on the exam to her study habits. Both are examples of positivity embracement. Quan attributes his success to his upbringing and the professor's excellent instruction, but he recognizes that the success is his own and feels good about himself. Honoring his parents brings him a great deal of personal satisfaction. The instructor and his parents have given or will provide him with positive feedback. This is another example of positivity embracement. Gary, on the other hand, engages in self-protection by suggesting that his poor performance on the exam was not his fault but, rather, was due to poor instruction and tricky exam questions.

HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION

Human communication depends on the context in which it occurs. In addition to the verbal and nonverbal codes exchanged between interactants, the salient features of a communicative context include the cultural, physical, sociorelational, and perceptual environments (see Table 2.3).

TABLE 2.3 ■ Human Communication Depends on the Context in Which It Occurs	
Contextual Features	**Communication Decisions → Message**
Culture (e.g., race, language)	Verbal choices
Physical environment (e.g., office, place of worship)	Nonverbal choices
Sociorelational (e.g., superior, subordinate)	
Perceptual (e.g., attitudes, emotions)	

The cultural context includes, among myriad other variables, such features as individualism and collectivism. The physical environment includes the actual geographical location of the interaction (e.g., office, classroom, bedroom). The sociorelational environment encompasses the relationship between the interactants (e.g., superior–subordinate, teacher–student, husband–wife). The perceptual environment consists of the attitudes, motivations, and cognitive dispositions of the interactants. Each of these contexts provides a wealth of information to the interactants about how to communicate. Here's the important point: *The degree to which interactants focus on these contexts while communicating varies considerably from culture to culture.*

Depending on contextual features present during communication, some persons choose to focus more on the verbal codes than on the nonverbal elements, while others actively monitor the nonverbal elements of the context. Hall described the former as **low context** and the latter as **high context**. Hall asserted that

> a high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or is internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of information is vested in the explicit code.[34]

Like individualism and collectivism, high–low context is best conceptualized along a cultural continuum (see Figure 2.2). No culture exists exclusively on one end of the continuum.

low context
Cultural orientation in which meanings are encoded in the verbal code.

high context
Cultural orientation in which meanings are gleaned from the physical, social, and psychological contexts.

FIGURE 2.2 ■ Low and High Context

Low Context ⟵――――――――――⟶ High Context

Characteristics of High- and Low-Context Cultures

Hall argued that the environmental, sociorelational, and perceptual contexts have an immense impact on communication. High-context cultures generally have restricted code systems. Users of a restricted code system rely more on the contextual elements of the communication setting for information than on the actual language code. In restricted-code cultures, communication is not general in content across individuals but is specific to particular people, places, and times. Within a high-context transaction, the interactant will look to the physical, sociorelational, and perceptual environment for information. Of particular importance is the social relationship between the interactants, especially their statuses. As Hall noted,

> Twins who have grown up together can and do communicate more economically (HC) than two lawyers in a courtroom during a trial (LC), a mathematician programming a computer, two politicians drafting legislation, two administrators writing a regulation, or a child trying to explain to his mother why he got into a fight.[35]

Because interactants in a high-context culture know and understand each other and their appropriate roles, words are not necessary to convey meaning. One acts according to

one's role. Words and sentences may be collapsed and shortened. In this sense, restricted codes are not unlike local dialects, vernacular, or even jargon used by a well-defined group. Users of restricted codes interpret messages based on their accumulation of shared experiences and expectations.

Hall contended that persons communicating in high-context cultures understand that information from the physical, sociorelational, and perceptual environment already exists and need not be codified verbally. Therefore, high-context communication is fast, proficient, and gratifying. Unlike low-context communication, the burden of understanding in high-context communication rests with each interactant. The rules for communication are implicit, and communicators are expected to know and understand unspoken communication. High-context communication involves using and interpreting messages that are not explicit, minimizing the content of verbal messages, and being sensitive to the social roles of others. Although there are exceptions, many high-context cultures have collectivistic tendencies, including China, Japan, North and South Korea, Vietnam, and many Arab and African cultures.[36]

According to Hall, in a low-context transaction, the verbal code is the primary source of information. Low-context cultures generally rely on elaborated codes. Unlike users of restricted codes, users of elaborated codes rely extensively on the verbal code system for creating and interpreting meaning. Information to be shared with others is coded in the verbal message. Although persons in low-context transactions recognize the nonverbal environment, they tend to focus more on the verbal context. Moreover, the rules and expectations are explicitly outlined. Users of elaborated codes depend on words to convey meaning and may become uncomfortable with silence. In low-context transactions, the communicants feel a need to speak. People using low-context communication are expected to communicate in ways consistent with their feelings. Hence, low-context communication typically involves transmitting direct, explicit messages. Although there are exceptions, many low-context cultures are individualistic, including Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom.[37]

Communication Consequences of Low- and High-Context Cultural Orientations

Members of high- and low-context cultures communicate differently, especially with the use of silence. Charles Braithwaite argues that one of the fundamental components of cultural and linguistic competence is knowing how and when to use silence as a communicative tactic.[38] During a high-context communicative exchange, the interactants generally are content with silence because they do not rely on verbal communication as their main source of information. Silence, in fact, communicates mutual understanding. Much of the meaning in communication is expected to be interpreted by the receiver. In communicative exchanges between persons of differing status, the person with lower status may recognize the higher status of the other through silence.

Steven Pratt and Lawrence Weider contend that many Native American and American Indian tribes use silence as a way of recognizing "Indianness." A "real" Indian recognizes another real Indian with silence rather than speech. A recognizable Indian knows that neither he nor she nor the others have an obligation to speak and that silence on the part of all conversants is permissible.[39] In her book on the contemporary Japanese woman,

Sumiko Iwao writes that most Japanese feel that expressing especially personal or intimate details is best done nonverbally or intuitively—that is, without words. Iwao writes,

> There is an unspoken belief among the Japanese in general that putting deep feelings into words somehow lowers or spoils their value and that understanding attained without words is more precious than that attained through precise articulation.[40]

Unlike in high-context communication, during most low-context transactions, silence is uncomfortable. Persons who do not talk are often perceived negatively. When someone is quiet in a low-context transaction, others may suspect that something is amiss. Silence somehow communicates a problem. Low-context communicators are expected to be direct and to say what they think. Persons in low-context cultures typically separate the issue of communication from the person with whom they are interacting. A manager might say to an employee, "Don't take it personally," as he or she reprimands the person. High-context cultures, on the other hand, tend to see the topic of communication as intrinsic to the person. A person is seen as a role. If the issue is attacked, so is the person. This results in low-context cultures that deliver a direct style of communication, whereas a high-context person prefers indirectness typified by extreme politeness and discretion.

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION
HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

In the following exchange, Mr. Hutchinson is the head of information technology within his organization. Mr. Wong is the lead computer programmer. Mr. Wong was born and raised in Malaysia, a high-context culture. The two are discussing when Mr. Wong will put a computer program into production. Note that Mr. Hutchinson's speech is direct and to the point, while Mr. Wong's is indirect and subtle. In simple frequency, Mr. Hutchinson uses 4 times as many words as Mr. Wong.[41]

Mr. Hutchinson: The program looks good and passed the test run with only minor errors. When do you think you can put it into production? I don't see any production schedule here.

The changes need to go into the system by the end of the month. Is that possible? When do you want to go with this?

Mr. Wong: Maybe I should review the requirements.

Mr. Hutchinson: The errors were minor. Quality Control needs to know when it will go into production. Let's set the production date now. Just tell me when you'll fix the errors. I'll tell QC.

Mr. Wong: Perhaps I can e-mail you an estimate. I'll talk to the team.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Mr. Hutchinson:	Couldn't you just tell me when you'll have them fixed? Here, it's no big deal. (Hands Mr. Wong the program.) Don't they seem like easy fixes?
Mr. Wong:	(Looks at the program but says nothing—as if not hearing Mr. Hutchinson's suggestion.)
Mr. Hutchinson:	Mr. Wong? Just give me a date.
Mr. Wong:	Yes. Whenever you prefer is fine. (Hands the program back to Mr. Hutchinson.)
Mr. Hutchinson:	I don't need this. (Hands it back to Mr. Wong.) Well, it's got to go in by the first of next month. OK?
Mr. Wong:	Yes, that is fine.

In the previous dialogue, Mr. Hutchinson misses the hint that Mr. Wong is unable to set a production date. When Mr. Wong indicates that setting a date is difficult and will require some expertise, he is indirectly telling Mr. Hutchinson that he is not in a position to make the decision on his own and would prefer to discuss it with the team. Mr. Wong further signals his discomfort by telling Mr. Hutchinson that he could e-mail him the date.

Mr. Hutchinson ignores Mr. Wong's status in the organization and further complicates the issue by handing Mr. Wong the program. Trying to avoid any disagreement, Mr. Wong simply asks Mr. Hutchinson to set the date for production and agrees to whatever he says.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 2.3
LOW- AND HIGH-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION SCALE

Communication researcher Gudykunst and his colleagues have developed a survey designed to measure low- and high-context communication styles. The instrument that follows is an adaptation of Gudykunst's scale.[42]

At this point in the chapter, you have been given the opportunity to assess your own level of individualism–collectivism and the degree to which your communication style is high or low context. Whatever the outcome on these surveys, one style is not better than the other; they are simply different. The goal is for you to have a better understanding of yourself and those persons with different cultural backgrounds. Individualism–collectivism and high–low context are two dominant ways cultures differ. But perhaps what guides cultural behavior more than anything else is the values held by large collectives.

Directions: The following are 32 statements regarding how you feel about communicating in different ways. In the blank to the left of each item, indicate the degree (1–9) to which you agree or disagree with each statement. If you are unsure or think that an item does not apply to you, enter a *5* in the blank.

Strongly Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   Strongly Agree

_____ 1. I catch on to what others mean, even when they do not say it directly.

_____ 2. I show respect to superiors, even if I dislike them.

_____ 3. I use my feelings to determine whether to trust another person.

_____ 4. I find silence awkward in conversation.

_____ 5. I communicate in an indirect fashion.

_____ 6. I use many colorful words when I talk.

_____ 7. In an argument, I insist on very precise definitions.

_____ 8. I avoid clear-cut expressions of feelings when I communicate with others.

_____ 9. I am good at figuring out what others think of me.

_____ 10. My verbal and nonverbal speech tends to be very dramatic.

_____ 11. I listen attentively, even when others are talking in an uninteresting manner.

_____ 12. I maintain harmony in my communication with others.

_____ 13. Feelings are a valuable source of information.

_____ 14. When pressed for an opinion, I respond with an ambiguous statement or position.

_____ 15. I try to adjust myself to the feelings of the person with whom I am communicating.

_____ 16. I actively use a lot of facial expressions when I talk.

_____ 17. My feelings tell me how to act in a given situation.

_____ 18. I am able to distinguish between a sincere invitation and one intended as a gesture of politeness.

_____ 19. I believe that exaggerating stories makes conversation fun.

_____ 20. I orient people through my emotions.

_____ 21. I find myself initiating conversations with strangers while waiting in line.

_____ 22. As a rule, I openly express my feelings and emotions.

_____ 23. I feel uncomfortable and awkward in social situations where everybody else is talking except me.

_____ 24. I readily reveal personal things about myself.

_____ 25. I like to be accurate when I communicate.

_____ 26. I can read another person "like a book."

_____ 27. I use silence to avoid upsetting others when I communicate.

_____ 28. I openly show my disagreement with others.

_____ 29. I am a very precise communicator.

_____ 30. I can sit with another person, not say anything, and still be comfortable.

_____ 31. I think that untalkative people are boring.

_____ 32. I am an extremely open communicator.

Scoring: Reverse your score for Items 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 31, and 32. If your original score was 1, reverse it to a 9; if your original score was a 2, reverse it to an 8; and so on. After reversing the scores for those 15 items, simply sum the 32 items. Lower scores indicate low-context communication. Higher scores indicate high-context communication.

VALUE ORIENTATIONS

In his seminal book on values, Milton Rokeach argues that

> the value concept, more than any other, should occupy a central position across all social sciences. . . . It is an intervening variable that shows promise of being able to unify the apparently diverse interests of all sciences concerned with human behavior.[43]

Values affect intercultural communication. When people from different cultures come together to interact, their messages are guided by and reflect their fundamental value orientations. People who strongly value individuality will likely interact differently than will people who strongly value collectivism. An understanding of cultural value systems can help identify similarities and differences between people from different cultures, from which intercultural communication can proceed. Like culture, values are learned; they are not innate or universal. Rokeach argues that values guide us in the selection and justification of social behavior. Values prescribe what is preferred or prohibited. Values are the evaluative component of an individual's attitudes and beliefs. Values guide how we think about things in terms of what is right or wrong or correct or incorrect. Values trigger positive or negative emotions. Values also guide our actions.[44]

Shalom Schwartz asserts that values are concepts or beliefs that pertain to outcomes and behaviors, guide the selection and evaluation of behaviors, and are rank ordered according to their relative importance to the individual.[45] Although any individual probably has a unique set of values, there are also sets of values that are representative of a particular culture. Francis Hsu, an anthropologist who has lived much of his life in China and the United States, has outlined what he thinks are the nine basic values of U.S. citizens. His list was generated from his personal experiences, U.S. literature and prose, social science research, and studies of criminal behavior in the United States.[46]

Most of Hsu's values reflect U.S. individualistic tendencies. In addition, they echo our emphasis on equality (discussed later under Power Distance) and our determination to push toward the future.

HSU'S NINE BASIC U.S. VALUES

1. An individual's most important concerns are self-interest, self-expression, self-improvement, self-gratification, and independence. This takes precedence over all group interests.

2. The privacy of the individual is the individual's inalienable right. Intrusion into it by others is permitted only by invitation.

3. Because the government exists for the benefit of the individual and not vice versa, all forms of authority, including government, are suspect. Patriotism is good.

4. An individual's success in life depends on acceptance among his or her peers.

5. An individual should believe in or acknowledge God and should belong to

an organized church or other religious institution. Religion is good. Any religion is better than no religion.

6. Men and women are equal.

7. All human beings are equal.

8. Progress is good and inevitable. An individual must improve himself or herself

(minimize efforts and maximize returns); the government must be more efficient to tackle new problems; institutions such as churches must modernize to make themselves more attractive.

9. Being a U.S. citizen is synonymous with being progressive, and the United States is the utmost symbol of progress.

An interesting contrast to the values of the United States—an individualistic, low-context culture—are those of China—a collectivistic, high-context culture. A group of cross-cultural researchers calling themselves the Chinese Culture Connection (CCC) constructed a list of 40 dominant Chinese values. The CCC is an international network of social scientists under the direction of Michael Harris Bond, a professor in the Department of Management and Marketing at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The members of the CCC approached a number of Chinese social scientists and asked each of them to prepare a list of 10 fundamental and basic Chinese values. Although their procedure resulted in considerable overlap, they were able to eliminate redundancy by creating a master list of 40 values.[47]

THE CHINESE VALUES SURVEY

1. Filial piety (obedience to parents, respect for parents, honoring of ancestors)

2. Industry (working hard)

3. Tolerance of others

4. Harmony with others

5. Humbleness

6. Loyalty to superiors

7. Observation of rites and social rituals

8. Reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts

9. Kindness

10. Knowledge (education)

11. Solidarity with others

12. Moderation, following the middle way

13. Self-culturation

14. Ordering relationships by status and observing this order

15. Sense of righteousness

16. Benevolent authority

17. Noncompetitiveness

18. Personal steadiness and stability

19. Resistance to corruption

20. Patriotism

21. Sincerity

22. Keeping oneself disinterested and pure

23. Thrift

24. Persistence

(Continued)

(Continued)

25. Patience

26. Repayment of both the good and evil another person has caused you

27. A sense of cultural superiority

28. Adaptability

29. Prudence (carefulness)

30. Trustworthiness

31. Having a sense of shame

32. Courtesy

33. Contentedness with one's position in life

34. Being conservative

35. Protecting your "face"

36. A close, intimate friend

37. Chastity in women

38. Having few desires

39. Respect for tradition

40. Wealth

In the Chinese Values Survey, Jianxin Zhang and Michael Harris Bond affirmed the dominance of filial piety in China. They argue that filial piety surpasses all other cultural ethics in Chinese culture. Specifically, filial piety prescribes how children should behave toward their parents, living or dead, as well as toward their ancestors. Chinese children are taught to provide for their parents' material and mental well-being, perform ceremonial ancestral worship, ensure the continuity of the family line, and conduct themselves in a way that brings honor to and avoids shaming the family name. Zhang and Bond assert that Chinese filial piety extends beyond the limits of one's direct nuclear family. Chinese filial piety prescribes not only absolute parental authority over children but also, by extension, the authority of those senior in rank (i.e., age) over those junior in rank. Zhang and Bond maintain that Chinese filial piety influences myriad social behaviors—even in modern China, where Western, individualistic culture has been introduced.[48]

In their research on Chinese values in work organizations, Henry S. R. Kao and Ng Sek-Hong discovered that the Chinese values of trust, fidelity, altruism, and unspecified obligations of reciprocity norms are an important source of strategic advantage, giving Chinese corporations resilience and flexibility to cope with change.[49] Researchers George Domino and Mo Therese Hannah argue that Chinese values are taught early and can be seen in the stories told by Chinese children. In comparison with stories told by U.S. children, the Chinese stories demonstrated greater social orientation, greater emphasis on public shame, fewer interpersonal confrontations, more instances of teamwork, more concern for the role of authority, greater preoccupation with moral and ethical rectitude, more expressions of sorrow and happiness, fewer instances of physical aggression, and less economic orientation.[50]

Schwartz Theory of Basic Values

Shalom Schwartz, professor emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has studied human value systems for nearly 30 years and developed the Schwartz theory of basic human values. Schwartz's theory describes the nature of values and identifies

characteristics common to all values and those that differentiate one value from another. Perhaps the most debated aspect of this theory is that Schwartz identifies 10 basic personal values that he argues are universal and recognized across cultures. These 10 values are considered universal because they are based on what Schwartz believes are three universal requirements of human existence: (a) the needs of individuals as biological organisms, (b) the fundamentals of coordinated social interaction, and (c) survival and welfare needs of groups. Schwartz's theory has been tested in a number of studies, and most of them reveal a remarkable consistency in these 10 values across the world's cultures.[51]

As we have seen in this chapter, scholars from across a wide range of academic disciplines have studied human value systems, and many of them tend to treat values as a way to distinguish and characterize the uniqueness of a particular culture. Schwartz argues that although his typology of 10 basic human values is universal, individuals and groups may differ significantly in terms of the relative importance of a specific value. Regarding the nature of values, Schwartz outlines six characteristics he believes are true for all values. First, Schwartz points out that values are beliefs linked to affect; that is, people are emotionally connected to values and become aroused (positively or negatively) if a value is triggered. Second, Schwartz maintains that values are linked to goals that motivate people to act. For example, people who value benevolence are prompted to help others in need. Third, values transcend (exceed or go beyond) specific actions and situations. The value of benevolence, for example, will motivate the individual at home, work, school, and so on. Fourth, values serve as a standard or criteria, or a kind of barometer, for deciding what is good or bad, right or wrong. Fifth, an individual's values are ranked hierarchically. Individuals across cultures order and prioritize their values. Sixth, attitudes and behavior are typically motivated and driven by more than one value; that is, multiple values guide social action. Once again, Schwartz argues that these six features are true for all values, but what distinguishes one value from another is the type of goal or motivation it expresses.[52]

SCHWARTZ'S 10 BASIC HUMAN VALUES

1. *Self-direction:* The defining goal of this value type is independent thought and action. (Freedom, creativity, independence, choosing own goals, curiosity, self-respect)

2. *Stimulation:* The goal is derived from the need for variety and stimulation to maintain an optimal level of activation. Some of these needs are biological, while others are learned or cultural. (An exciting life, a varied life, daring)

3. *Hedonism:* The goal here is the need and motivation for pleasure. (Pleasure, enjoying life)

4. *Achievement:* The goal of this value type is the need and value of personal success and prestige. (Ambition, influence, capability, success, intelligence, self-respect)

5. *Power:* This value is satisfied by the attainment of social status. (Social power, wealth, authority, preserving public image, social recognition)

6. *Security:* The goal here is the need for safety, harmony, and the stability of society and relationships. (National security,

(Continued)

(Continued)

reciprocation of favors, family security, sense of belonging, social order, health, cleanliness)

7. *Conformity:* This value is embodied in the restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses. (Obedience, self-discipline, politeness, honoring of parents and elders)

8. *Tradition:* This value is characterized by the importance of religious rites, beliefs, and norms of behavior that, over time, are valued and passed on by a collective. (Respect for children, devotion, acceptance of one's portion in life, humility, moderation)

9. *Benevolence:* The goal of this value is the need and motivation for positive interaction and affiliation. (Helpfulness, responsibility, forgiveness, honesty, loyalty, mature love, true friendship)

10. *Universalism:* The value of understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. (Equality, unity with nature, wisdom, a world of beauty, social justice, broad-mindedness, protection of the environment, a world at peace)

In earlier typologies, Schwartz included an 11th value of spirituality. Here, the defining goal is meaning, coherence, and inner harmony. In a number of studies, however, this value did not appear consistently across cultures.

As already mentioned, while individuals and groups may differ in how they rank the 10 values, most studies demonstrate remarkable consistency among cultures and their rankings of these values. Studies by numerous scholars have gathered data from hundreds of diverse geographic, cultural, linguistic, religious, age, gender, and occupational groups from more than 80 countries. These studies show that benevolence, universalism, and self-direction are typically ranked highest, whereas power and stimulation are ranked lowest.[53]

In trying to explain why these 10 values are pancultural (across cultures), Schwartz points to two factors: (a) human nature and (b) maintaining societies and social order. Simply put, values that conflict with human nature are unimportant across most cultures. But according to Schwartz, the social function of values is to motivate and control the actions of group members for the sake of the group. Here, two points are critical:

First, Schwartz contends that values function as guides for individuals and their social behavior in that they mitigate the necessary and constant monitoring of the individual by the group.

Second, these values prescribe specific behaviors that are appropriate and discourage those that thwart the goals of the group.

For example, Schwartz maintains that the high ranking of benevolence across cultures stems from the importance of cooperative social relations in the family—where children learn the values of the larger society and culture that surrounds them. Universalism (which often ranks second among cultures) also motivates positive social interactions,

especially among those perceived as different, such as in school, work, or social settings. Self-direction values cultivate creativity and innovation, which satisfy individual needs without necessarily hurting the group. Schwartz notes that power often ranks low among cultures because it often leads to exploitation of others. On the other hand, power is in the top 10 because it motivates people to work for group interests, such as seeking out a high-ranking political or religious position whose function is to help the group.[54]

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Value Orientations

In the early 1960s, Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck developed the concept of value orientations. They argued that every culture has universal problems and conditions that must be addressed. For example, every culture must deal with the natural environment. All cultures must feed themselves. All cultures must face the issues of child-rearing. For a given culture, however, there are a limited number of solutions to these problems. These possible solutions are motivated by the values of the culture. Initially, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck created five sets of value orientations.[55] Several years later, communication researchers John Condon and Fathi Yousef extended the set to a total of 25 value orientations. Condon and Yousef organized the value orientations around six dominant themes: the self, the family, society, human nature, nature, and the supernatural.[56]

The Condon and Yousef set of value orientations provides a structure and vocabulary that can be used to compare cultures. Although there are exceptions, many of the values on the left of the continuum are representative of individualistic, low-context cultures, while those on the right are representative of collectivistic, high-context cultures (see Table 2.4).

The Self

In all cultures, people develop their self-identity. How that identity is fostered is influenced by the culture's values. For example, people in individualistic societies, such as the United States, tend to view their accomplishments and failures personally. In the United States, a person is seen as a unique individual and strives for independence from others. When individuals succeed or win, they receive a great deal of attention and adulation. Likewise, when individuals lose, they are often left to suffer alone. No one wants to be seen with a loser. Whether on the top or on the bottom, the individual experiences intense emotions. Hsu contends that strong emotions are unavoidable because they are concentrated in one individual. The Chinese, however, are interdependent with others, and for them, responsibility and accountability are shared and divided among the group members. If the group wins, everyone in the group wins; there is no "most valuable player," so to speak. Therefore, the intense emotions experienced by winning or failing are tempered and moderated because they are shared.[57]

The second variation on the self-continuum is age. Western, individualistic, low-context cultures tend to value youth. Conversely, old age is valued in many cultures, such as Nigeria, where it is associated with wisdom. According to Philip R. Harris and Robert T. Moran, in Nigeria the elderly are respected because they have much experience and can pass on family history and tradition.[58]

The third variation on the self is activity. U.S. citizens identify themselves in terms of their activities, usually professions and occupations. Condon and Yousef hold that

TABLE 2.4 ■ The Condon and Yousef Set of Value Orientations			
	Individualistic Low Context		**Collectivistic High Context**
THE SELF			
1. Individualism	Individualism	Individuality	Interdependence
2. Age	Youth	Middle years	Old age
3. Sex	Equality of sexes	Female superiority	Male superiority
4. Activity	Doing	Being-in-becoming	Being
THE FAMILY			
1. Relational orientations	Individualistic	Collateral	Lineal
2. Authority	Democratic	Authority centered	Authoritarian
3. Positional role behavior	Open	General	Specific—prescribed
4. Mobility	High mobility	Phasic mobility	Low mobility—stasis
HUMAN NATURE			
1. Rationality	Rational	Intuitive	Irrational
2. Good/evil	Good	Mixture	Evil
3. Happiness/pleasure	Happiness as goal	Inextricable bond of happiness and sadness	Life is mostly sad
4. Mutability	Change, growth, learning	Some change	Unchanging
NATURE			
1. Relationship between humans and nature	Humans dominate nature	Harmonious	Nature dominates humans
2. Ways of knowing nature	Abstract	Circle of induction and deduction	Specific—direct
3. Structure of nature	Mechanistic	Spiritual	Organic
4. Concept of time	Future	Present	Past
THE SUPERNATURAL			
1. Relationship between humans and the supernatural	Humans as God	Pantheism	Humans controlled by supernatural
2. Meaning of life	Physical/material goals	Intellectual goals	Spiritual goals
3. Providence	Good is unlimited	Balance of good and misfortune	Good in life is limited
4. Knowledge of cosmic order	Order is comprehensible	Faith and reason	Mysterious and unknowable

Source: Based on Condon, J. C., & Yousef, F. (1975). *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication.* New York: Macmillan.

many English names indicate "doers," such as *Baker*, *Smith*, and *Carpenter*. In the United States, people are often asked about what they "do" for a living. Some non-Western cultures emphasize *being*, a form of self-actualization. In this view, life is an organic whole; it is human to embrace life and to become one with the universe and oneself.[59]

The Family

Familial relationships differ across cultures. Harris and Moran write that in Nigeria, for example, the family is the core group of society. Nigerians value their family lineage through the male head of the household. A Nigerian is known by his or her family lineage and may have privileges and responsibilities based on family name. Furthermore, marriage is seen as a way of producing more children to contribute to this lineage. If one's spouse is sterile, it is grounds for divorce. Some ethnic groups in Nigeria also practice polygamy. Wives are often acquired through the payment of a bride price to the bride's parents.[60]

Positional role behavior within families refers to how strictly roles are prescribed among family members. The Guatemalan Ladinos (a term used to refer to people born through interracial relationships or those who have Spanish and indigenous heritage) define a man's and woman's role within the family quite differently. Mike Keberlein, who grew up in Guatemala, argues that machismo is a Spanish concept that deals mainly with how male and female roles are performed in the home. Ladinos view the men as protectors and providers and women as child-rearers and homemakers. Children are taught early by their mother to recognize their responsibilities as men and women. A boy as young as 5 years old may be sent to work in the fields. A girl might start household chores at the same age, where she is taught to care for younger children of the house and to cook. Young boys are expected never to cry or show signs of pain, whereas young girls are taught to show emotion whenever appropriate.[61]

Society

According to Condon and Yousef, social reciprocity refers to the mutual exchanges people make in their dealings with others. What is perceived as a relatively innocuous request in one country may be interpreted quite seriously in others. In the United States, a request for a favor (e.g., "Can I borrow your car?") may imply no necessary reciprocity. In other cultures, one is required to return favors and obligations in kind. Equal exchanges are expected and obligatory.[62]

The second value orientation, group membership, differs greatly among individualistic and collectivistic cultures. According to Condon and Yousef, members of individualistic cultures tend to join many groups throughout their lifetimes, yet their affiliation with any particular group may be brief. The group is subordinate to the individual's needs. In the United States, for example, people join political groups, social groups, hobby groups, occupational groups, self-help groups, fraternal groups, and so on. In collectivistic cultures, people tend to belong to fewer groups (e.g., family and occupational) but belong to those groups for a lifetime.[63]

Human Nature

The human nature orientation deals with how cultures perceive human character and temperament. In Western countries such as the United States, people are viewed as

essentially rational. Children in the United States are taught to "use their heads" when making decisions. U.S. citizens frequently tell their friends to "stop being so emotional," as if being emotional implies some character flaw. Japanese children, on the other hand, are often taught to follow their intuition or to lead with their hearts. Condon and Yousef note that in the United States, happiness is viewed as a practical goal, even the primary goal—hence the popular song titled "Don't Worry, Be Happy." Moreover, the Declaration of Independence states that people "are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Other societies and cultures view happiness and sadness as inseparable, as in the yin–yang philosophy of many Asian cultures. A Chinese proverb reads, "If a man's face does not show a little sadness, his thoughts are not too deep." Another one reads, "One should not miss the flavor of being sick, nor miss the experience of being destitute."[64]

Nature

In the United States, high school students learn about the structure of nature in their biology, geography, and physics classes, among others. Students learn about things they may never actually see, such as the structure of DNA. The models they see are not literal reproductions but, rather, dramatic abstractions. Much of the education taught in the United States is based on abstract concepts and constructs. Condon and Yousef maintain that in other cultures, perhaps those with little formal education, what a person knows about nature is learned through direct experience. Many Western cultures view nature as mechanistic, meaning that nature is structured much like a machine or clock. The brain, for example, is explained using computer analogies. Models of DNA look like double helixes. The organic orientation likens nature to a plant, in that nature is seen as an organic whole that is interdependent with all other natural forces.[65]

The Supernatural

Condon and Yousef assert that a culture's perspective on the cosmos reflects its philosophy about its people's relationship with the supernatural and spiritual world. In many Western cultures, the supernatural is studied almost scientifically. Scientists study the structure of space and seek, through scientific means, to find the origins of the universe. We send out satellites equipped with printed messages and recordings in a (perhaps vain) attempt to communicate with extraterrestrials. Most Western cultures believe that the order of the cosmos is knowable. Conversely, other cultures view the cosmos with a great deal of fear and uncertainty. Condon and Yousef point to a farmer in Peru who relies on the phases of the moon and the cycles of the seasons to tell him when to plant or harvest his fields. The farmer thinks of the cosmos with a great deal of superstition and fear. To him, these mysteries are unexplainable.[66]

The value orientations presented here are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. They are representative of the kinds of values held by cultures and the differences in those values. They also serve as a starting point for researchers to compare and contrast the myriad cultures that cohabit the planet.

POWER DISTANCE

According to Geert Hofstede, while many cultures declare and even legislate equality for their members, all cultures must deal with the issue of human inequality. A fundamental tenet expressed in the beginning of the Declaration of Independence, the document on which the United States was founded, states that "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Although some cultures affirm equality for their members, some form of inequality exists in virtually every culture. Inequality can occur in areas such as prestige, wealth, power, human rights, and technology, among others. Issues of inequality fall within the rubric of what Hofstede calls "power distance." In his landmark survey research, Hofstede defined **power distance** as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally."[67] Power distance can be seen in families, in bureaucracies, and even in friendships. Inequality of power within organizations is inevitable and desirable in many cases for organizations to function effectively. For example, military organizations are defined by power distance.

> **power distance** The extent to which members of a culture expect and accept that power is unequally distributed.

Hofstede categorizes cultures as having either large or small power distance (see Figure 2.3). Cultures with a smaller power distance emphasize that inequalities among people should be minimized and that there should be interdependence between less powerful and more powerful people. In cultures with small power distance (e.g., the United States, Canada, Austria), family members are generally treated as equal, and familial decisions are reached democratically. According to Hofstede, in small power distance schools, teachers expect a certain amount of initiative and interaction with students. The overall educational process is student oriented. In class, students are expected to ask questions and perhaps even challenge their teachers. In organizations, decentralization is popular, and subordinates engage in participative decision-making. The organizational power hierarchy is mostly for convenience, since the persons who occupy powerful roles may change regularly. In fact, workers are expected to try to "climb the ladder of success" to more power and prestige. In this sense, persons in small power distance cultures may recognize "earned" power—that is, power people deserve by virtue of their drive, hard work, and motivation. Moreover, small power distance cultures tend to resent those whose power is decreed by birth or wealth (i.e., positional power).[68]

FIGURE 2.3 ■ Small and Large Power Distance

Small Power Distance ◄─────────────────────► Large Power Distance

Hofstede maintains that in cultures with a larger power distance, inequalities among people are both expected and desired. Less powerful people should depend on more powerful people. In larger power distance cultures (e.g., the Philippines, Mexico, India), children are expected to be obedient. In many such cultures, there is a strict hierarchy among family members in which typically the father rules authoritatively, followed by the eldest son and moving down the ladder by age and sex. In educational settings, teachers, especially older teachers, are treated as parents—with respect and honor. Students who disobey may be punished severely. In the workplace, power is usually centralized,

TABLE 2.5 ■ Small and Large Power Distance Cultures	
Small Power Distance Cultures	**Large Power Distance Cultures**
Austria	Malaysia
Denmark	Guatemala
New Zealand	Panama
Ireland	Philippines
Sweden	Mexico
Norway	Venezuela
Finland	Ecuador
Switzerland	Indonesia
Great Britain	India
Germany	Brazil

and workers and bosses are treated unequally. In many large power distance cultures, Hofstede observed, workers are generally uneducated and superiors are entitled to special privileges and status—in some cultures, by law.[69]

There appears to be a direct link between power distance and the latitude of the country. In a study conducted at 40 universities in the United States, Peter A. Andersen and his colleagues found a strong correlation between latitude and authoritarianism. Residents in the northern U.S. states were less authoritarian than those in the southern states. The population of a country may be another predictor of power distance. Generally, larger cultures tend to have larger power distance (see Table 2.5). As the size of any group increases, it becomes unwieldy and difficult to manage informally.[70]

Cultures with large and small power distance may value different types of power. Large power distance cultures tend to emphasize positional power. Positional power is based on formal authority (e.g., family rank). Persons with positional power have control over rewards, punishments, and information. Small power distance cultures recognize and respect earned power. Earned power is based on an individual's accomplishments, hard work, and effort.

Measuring Power Distance

If we know the position of a culture on the power distance scale relative to our own culture, then we have a starting point from which to proceed in our understanding of that culture. In large power distance cultures, subordinates are extremely submissive, whereas in small power distance cultures, subordinates are confrontational. Power distance tells us about dependence relationships in a given culture. In those countries where a small power distance is observed (e.g., Austria, Norway), dependence is limited. Workers in these cultures prefer managers who consult with them in decision-making. Subordinates are generally comfortable approaching and interacting with their superiors. In cultures

PHOTOS 2.2A, B In many cultures, there is a strict hierarchy among family members.

with large power distances (e.g., Malaysia, Mexico, India), subordinates are considerably dependent on superiors.

Communication and Power Distance

Power distance affects the verbal and nonverbal behavior of a culture. Several studies have investigated power distance and communication during conflict. In their research, Tyler, Lind, and Huo found that power distance influences the way people react to third-party authorities in conflict situations. Specifically, they found that when making evaluations of authorities, persons in small power distance cultures placed more value on the quality of their treatment by authorities. In contrast, those with larger power distance values focused more strongly on the favorability of their outcomes. Tyler, Lind, and Huo suggest that the degree to which authorities can gain acceptance for themselves and their decisions through providing dignified, respectful treatment is influenced by the cultural values of the disputants. Specifically, they found that dispute resolution methods, such as mediation, are more likely to be effective among those who have small power distance values.[71]

In another study, Smith, Dugan, Peterson, and Leung examined how managers handled disagreement with their subordinates. Their results showed that the larger the power distance, the more frequent the reports of out-group disagreements; the smaller the power distance, the more likely managers were to ask peers to handle disagreements and to use subordinates to handle disagreements. The authors conclude that in small power distance cultures, managers minimize status differences during conflict and rely on peers and subordinates to assist in mediating conflict.[72]

STUDENT VOICES ACROSS CULTURES
POWER DISTANCE

Ahmed I. Alshaya

Saudi Arabia is a large power distance country for reasons concerned with favorability of outcomes. The culture focuses on the outcomes that do not disturb the harmony of the people. Power distance in Saudi Arabia is defined by age and sex. There is a hierarchical structure in almost all families. In a typical Saudi family, because of this hierarchical structure the father is the head of the house. He is the one in charge of the house in all aspects. The father has some responsibilities to his house. For example, the

(Continued)

(Continued)

father is responsible for teaching his offspring moral traits. That is, the family must obey the father and treat him with respect and honor. The role then goes to the elder son if the father is unavailable. There is, of course, dependence on the one in charge, and usually the family looks to him in making decisions

Moving to a larger scale, society plays a big role in shaping the people of Saudi Arabia. The elderly are always seen as being wise and capable of leading the community to prosperity. Usually, people are expected to treat the elderly with respect. For example, at a time of conflict, the elderly will always step in to resolve a problem, and all the parties involved will have to acknowledge the issue and show some respect for the decision made. The "self-face"

and the "other-face" are concerns for the people involved. The "face" is a concern because, if not properly maintained, it will bring disgrace to the family. The face is recognized in many ways. For example, it is present during all social gatherings; the elderly are always treated with respect because the host and his sons must save their self-face by making the elderly feel comfortable.

In the workplace, Saudi Arabia is considered to be power distance oriented, especially in the relationship between subordinates and their employees. There is a strong hierarchical structure. Employers must be treated with respect because they have authority in the organization. Different organizations have different approaches, but most commonly, employees do not participate in the decision-making role.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 2.4
POWER DISTANCE SCALE

Directions: The following are 10 statements regarding issues we face at work, in the classroom, and at home. Indicate in the blank to the left of each statement the degree to which you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are unsure, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree with the statement. For example, if you strongly agree with the first statement, place a *1* in the blank. Work quickly and record your initial response.

_____ 1. Within an organization, employees should feel comfortable expressing disagreements to their managers.

_____ 2. Within a classroom, students should be allowed to express their points of view toward a subject without being punished by the teacher or professor.

_____ 3. At home, children should be allowed to openly disagree with their parents.

_____ 4. The primary purpose of a manager is to monitor the work of the employees to make sure they are doing their jobs appropriately.

_____ 5. Authority is essential for the efficient running of an organization, classroom, or home.

_____ 6. At work, people are more productive when they are closely supervised by those in charge.

_____ 7. In problem-solving situations within organizations, input from employees is important.

_____ 8. Generally, employees, students, and children should be seen and not heard.

_____ 9. Obedience to managers, teachers, and parents is good.

_____ 10. Managers, teachers, and parents should be considered equal to their workers, students, and children.

Scoring: For Items 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9, reverse your responses. That is, if your original response was a 1, reverse it to a 5. If your original response was a 2, reverse it to a 4, and so on. Once you have reversed your responses for these items, sum your 10 responses. This sum is your power distance score. Lower scores equal smaller power distance.

Stella Ting-Toomey has examined power distance and the concepts of _face_ and _face-work_ in conflict situations. Ting-Toomey and others argue that persons in all cultures have face concerns. Face represents an individual's sense of positive self-image in the context of communication. According to Ting-Toomey, everyone, in all cultures, has face concerns during conflict. _Self-face_ is the concern for one's own image, _other-face_ is concern for another's image, and _mutual-face_ is concern for both parties. Facework is used to manage these face concerns during conflict. Ting-Toomey's research has shown that small power distance cultures have a greater self-face concern, have lesser other- and mutual-face concerns, use more dominating facework, and use less avoiding facework.[73]

Other research has investigated how power distance affects reactions to messages about alcohol warnings. Anna Perea and Michael D. Slater examined the responses of Mexican American and Anglo young adults to four televised drinking-and-driving warnings. The messages were manipulated into large and small power distance appeals by attributing or not attributing them to the surgeon general—that is, an authority with power. Anglos (small power distance) rated the warnings without the surgeon general as more believable than warnings with the surgeon general; the opposite was true for Latinos (large power distance).[74]

Student–teacher relationships exist in virtually every culture. Generally, teachers have more legitimate and expert power than do their students. In an interesting examination of student–teacher relationships in cultures with small (i.e., Britain) and large (i.e., China) power distance, Helen Spencer-Oatey found that Chinese students reported a larger power differential between themselves and their Chinese teachers than did the British students with their British teachers. Yet the Chinese reported their relationships with their teachers to be interpersonally closer than did the British. Moreover, the Chinese students reported that the power differential between them and their teachers was acceptable. Consistent with their value of filial piety, one Chinese student commented that one should "treat teachers as you would treat your elders." On the other hand, the British students were significantly less accepting of the power differential between them and their teachers, even though that differential was small. One British student reported that teachers "certainly have these powers, but shouldn't have."[75]

PHOTOS 2.3A, B In many cultures (especially those with large power distance), teachers may hold more power over students than do parents.

In another interesting study, Bond and his colleagues found that persons in large power distance cultures respond differently to verbal insults than do persons in small power distance cultures. In their comparison of Chinese and U.S. students, they found that the Chinese were less critical of an insulter as long as the insulter had higher status than the in-group. U.S. citizens, on the other hand, made no distinction as a function of the insulter's status.[76]

Power distance also affects the nonverbal behavior of a culture. In many large power distance cultures, persons of lower status are taught not to give direct eye contact to a person of higher status. Indirect eye contact from a subordinate signals to the superior that the subordinate recognizes his or her lower status. In large power distance cultures, when a person of high status hands something to a person of lower status (e.g., a book), the lower-status person will often use both hands to receive the item, again recognizing his or her lower status. Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, and Smallwood have observed that many large power distance cultures prohibit interclass dating, marriage, and contact. They also suggest that persons of lower power must become skilled at decoding nonverbal behavior and that persons of lower status must show only positive emotions to those of higher status. Moreover, in large power distance cultures, persons of lower status smile more in an effort to appease those of higher status.[77]

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION

LARGE AND SMALL POWER DISTANCE CULTURES

Different power distance orientations manifest themselves in interaction. In the dialogue that follows, Jim Neuman is a U.S. high school exchange student in Guatemala. Coming from a smaller power distance culture, Jim is accustomed to interacting with his teachers. Raising one's hand in a U.S. classroom is not only acceptable but encouraged. In Guatemala, a

larger power distance culture, the classroom is teacher centered. In Mr. Gutierrez's classroom, there is to be strict order, with Mr. Gutierrez initiating all communication. Teachers are to be treated with deference.

Mr. Gutierrez:	This morning, I will be discussing some points about Guatemala's geography. Guatemala is the northernmost country of Central America. (Jim Neuman raises his hand.) To the north, it borders the countries of El Salvador and Honduras. To the west, its natural border is the Pacific Ocean. In the east is another natural border, the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the country of Belize.
Jim Neuman:	(Raising his hand and waving it slightly.) Mr. Gutierrez?
Mr. Gutierrez:	Guatemala is called the "Land of the Eternal Spring." It has all the same kinds of natural land forms as Mexico, but they are— (Jim Neuman interrupts).
Jim Neuman:	Mr. Gutierrez, I have a question.
Mr. Gutierrez:	Jim, stop interrupting, please.
Jim Neuman:	May I ask a question?
Mr. Gutierrez:	No! If you continue to disobey, I will punish you! Be quiet!

In this dialogue, Jim does not understand Mr. Gutierrez's harsh reprimand. Coming from a small power distance culture, Jim recognizes that teachers have more power than students but does not see their power as absolute. Jim sees himself as an active participant in the class. After all, for most of his life Jim's teachers have encouraged him to speak up in class. Mr. Gutierrez, on the other hand, sees the classroom as his domain, one he rules absolutely. By raising his hand, Jim demonstrates his insolence toward Mr. Gutierrez. To some extent, a certain degree of power distance is essential if cultures are to survive. Legitimate power is a necessity of civil life. Yet independence from power, liberation, and freedom of choice are politically attractive alternatives. Perhaps the ideal situation is one in which individual families operate with internally driven, large power distances, while the wider cultural milieu restricts overbearing, omnipotent, and intimidating governments.

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

William Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim state that communicating with someone from an unknown culture can be uncomfortable because such situations are replete with uncertainty and unpredictability. When uncertainty is high, anxiety is usually high, and communication can be difficult and awkward. This may account for why some people avoid interacting with people from other cultures. By reducing uncertainty, however, anxiety can be reduced, which, in turn, facilitates effective and successful communication. Although uncertainty is probably a universal feature of initial intercultural communication, one's level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity varies across cultures (see Figure 2.4). In addition, argue Gudykunst and Kim, the communicative strategies for reducing uncertainty also vary across cultures. Persons in high-context cultures, for example, look to the environmental, sociorelational, and perceptual contexts for information to

FIGURE 2.4 ■ Uncertainty- and Certainty-Oriented Cultures

Uncertainty-Oriented ◄────────────────► Certainty-Oriented

reduce uncertainty. People in low-context cultures tend to rely on verbal information-seeking strategies, usually by asking lots of questions.[78]

Hofstede asserts that although the extent to which an individual experiences uncertainty and the subsequent strategies for reducing it may be unique to that person, a general orientation toward uncertainty can be shared culturally. According to Hofstede, tolerance for uncertainty is learned through cultural socialization. Hofstede notes that a culture's technology, system of laws, and religion are markers for how that culture addresses and attempts to avoid or reduce uncertainty. For example, some kinds of technology help a culture manage natural uncertainty (e.g., weather), systems of law are designed to prevent and account for behavioral uncertainties (e.g., crime), and religion can help a culture cope with supernatural uncertainty (e.g., death). A culture's technology, law, and religion are ingrained in the individual through socialization, education, and occupation. Hence, they lead to collective patterns of tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.[79]

uncertainty avoidance The degree to which members of a particular culture feel threatened by unpredictable, uncertain, or unknown situations.

Uncertainty avoidance is the degree to which the members of a particular culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. Hofstede contends that this feeling is expressed through nervous stress and as a felt need for predictability and for written and unwritten rules. Cultures have either a weak or strong uncertainty avoidance orientation. In cultures with a weak uncertainty avoidance orientation, uncertainty is seen as a normal part of life, in which each day is accepted as it comes. The people are comfortable with ambiguity and are guided by a belief that what is different is curious. In school settings, students are comfortable with open-ended learning situations and enjoy classroom discussion. In the workplace, time is needed only as a guide, not as a master. Precision and punctuality are learned because they do not come naturally. Workers are motivated by their achievements and personal esteem or belongingness. There is also a high tolerance for innovative ideas that may conflict with the norm.[80]

Conversely, cultures with a strong uncertainty avoidance orientation sense that uncertainty in life is a continuous threat that must be fought. Life can be stressful, where a sense of urgency and high anxiety are typical. Hofstede maintains that strong uncertainty-avoidant cultures are guided by the belief that what is different is dangerous. Uncertainty-avoidant cultures evade ambiguity in most situations and look for structure in their business organizations, home life, and relationships. At school, students are most comfortable in structured environments. The teachers are supposed to have all the right answers. On the job, time is money; punctuality and precision are expected. There is generally resistance to innovative ideas, and workers are motivated by job security.[81]

A Theory of Uncertainty Orientation

Related to Hofstede's concept of uncertainty avoidance is the theory of uncertainty orientation. According to this variation of Hofstede's ideas, some individuals are considered uncertainty oriented and others certainty oriented. Uncertainty-oriented individuals have a weak uncertainty avoidance tendency, while certainty-oriented individuals have

a strong uncertainty avoidance tendency. Uncertainty-oriented persons' preferred method of handling uncertainty is to seek out information and engage in activity that will directly resolve the uncertainty. These people try to understand and discover aspects of the self and the environment about which they are uncertain.

Certainty-oriented people, on the other hand, develop a self-regulatory style that circumvents uncertainty. Given the choice, persons who are certainty oriented will undertake activity that maintains clarity; when confronted with uncertainty, they will tend to rely on others or on heuristic devices rather than more direct methods of resolving uncertainty (see Figure 2.5).

FIGURE 2.5 ■ Uncertainty and Certainty Orientations
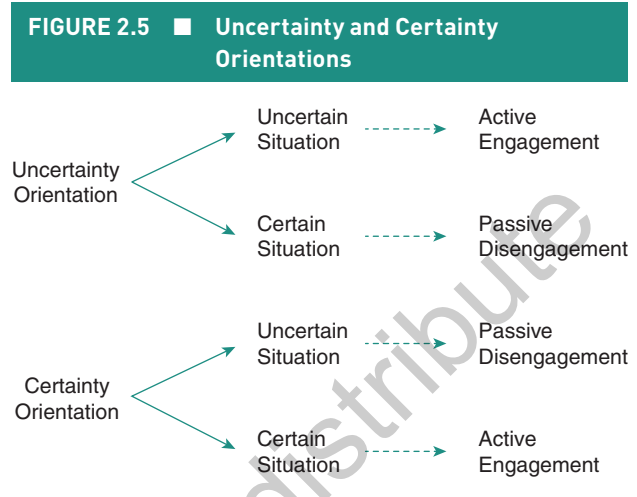
Generally, Eastern cultures have a preference for certainty, whereas Western cultures are uncertainty oriented (see Table 2.6). The tendency to be individualistic or self-oriented in Western populations exists because uncertainty-oriented people like to find out new information about the self. The more personally relevant or uncertain the situation, the more uncertainty-oriented persons will be actively engaged in it. Certainty-oriented people, however, are more group oriented, as the group provides a clear standard for norms and behavior, a standard that can be embraced by the certainty oriented. Western societies tend to be more uncertainty oriented because of their self-oriented and individualistic approaches to life, compared with people in Eastern societies, who, in turn, should be more certainty oriented as a function of their heavy reliance on groups.[82] In the Intercultural Conversation dialogue that follows, Keiko is confused by Kelly's easygoing attitude toward the evening's plans. Coming from a strong uncertainty-avoidant culture, Keiko would prefer to plan ahead to avoid uncertainty and prepare her script for the evening. Kelly, on the other hand, is perfectly comfortable making plans based on how the evening progresses. Without a plan, how will Keiko know how to act? Although the feelings associated with uncertainty are personal and subjective, they can be shared by whole cultures. Although anxiety creates the same physiological responses in humans, what triggers anxiety and one's level of tolerance for it is learned. A culture's orientation toward uncertainty can be found in its families, schools, and institutions. But uncertainty avoidance ultimately manifests in human interaction.

TABLE 2.6 ■ Certainty- and Uncertainty-Oriented Cultures

Certainty-Oriented Cultures	Uncertainty-Oriented Cultures
Japan	United States
Guatemala	Canada
Portugal	New Zealand
Peru	Sweden
El Salvador	Ireland
Panama	Great Britain
Chile	Denmark
Spain	South Africa
Uruguay	Norway

AN INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION
WEAK AND STRONG UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

One's uncertainty avoidance orientation may manifest itself in interaction in any number of ways. In the following dialogue, Kelly and Keiko are discussing a dinner invitation. Kelly, from the United States, has a relatively weak uncertainty avoidance index, while Keiko, from Japan, comes from a culture with a relatively strong uncertainty avoidance index.

Keiko: Hey, Kelly, let's do something tonight.

Kelly: All right.

Keiko: Please come over to my house, and I'll cook dinner for you.

Kelly: I have invited some friends over to my house for dinner tonight, but I don't know if they're coming.

Keiko: Well, as soon as you know if they're coming, let me know.

Kelly: I won't know until tonight.

Keiko: What time?

Kelly: I won't know until they call me. They'll probably call later this afternoon.

Keiko: How will you know whether or not to cook enough for everyone?

Kelly: Oh, I'll make up something on the spot. I like to cook. I'll whip up something fast.

Keiko: But what if they don't come? Won't they call and let you know?

Kelly: No, if they don't come, I'll know that something else came up. I'll let you know as soon as I can.

Keiko: Maybe we should plan my dinner for some other night.

LONG TERM–SHORT TERM ORIENTATION

The final dimension of cultural variability to be discussed is long term–short term orientation. Much of this dimension of cultural variability is based on the work of Geert Hofstede whose research has been mentioned frequently throughout this chapter. According to Hofstede and his colleagues, long term–short term orientation refers to how cultures maintain their historical past while managing the cultural challenges of the present and future.[83]

Hofstede notes that in long-term-oriented cultures individuals value long-standing values and time-honored traditions. Long-term-oriented cultures often look to societal change with suspicion. They are oriented toward future gains, perseverance, social hierarchy, and a sense of shame. Short-term-oriented cultures prefer to focus on gains in the present and past, with respect for tradition and social obligations but an emphasis on quick results.[84] Social hierarchies are not of central importance (see Table 2.7).[85]

Cultures with a long-term orientation include Japan, South Korea, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Brazil. Cultures scoring low on long-term orientation (i.e., short-term orientation) include the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, Germany, and Australia.[86]

Research on long-term and short-term orientation has revealed fascinating results. For example, researchers with the National Bureau of Economic Research studied the cultural influence of long-term orientation on the education of immigrant students living in the United States. They found that immigrant students from cultures with long-term orientation performed better than students from short-term orientation cultures. The students performed better in reading and math tests, had better test score gains over time, had fewer absences and disciplinary incidents, were less likely to repeat grades,

TABLE 2.7 ■ Long-Term and Short-Term Cultural Orientations	
Long-Term Orientation	**Short-Term Orientation**
Persistence	Quick results
Social hierarchies	Equality
Adaptability	Stability
Leisure time not important	Leisure time important
Save/thrift	Spend
Invest in real estate	Invest in mutual funds
No absolute good and evil	Absolute good and evil
Relationships and market important	Bottom line important
Education and training	Self-actualization

and were more likely to graduate from high school in four years. Also, they were more likely to enroll in advanced high school courses, especially in scientific subjects. They also found that parents from long-term-orientation cultures were more likely to secure better educational opportunities for their children.[87]

In their recent study, Bukowski and Rudnicki found that cultural long-term orientation is a positive and significant predictor of national (cultural) innovation intensity. They argue that innovation is imperative for the growth and survival of any culture's economy and industry. Billions of dollars are spent by governments promoting innovation. But the researchers argue that cultural factors, such as long-term orientation, should also be taken into account if the differences in innovation rates across multiple countries are to be explained. They present empirical evidence that cultural influences, specifically long-term orientation, improves innovation production and adoption.[88]

Researchers in China recently studied the effects of long-term orientation on prosocial behavior (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping a stranger). They found a significant negative association between long-term-orientation prosocial behaviors. Based on their findings the researchers argued that in short-term-oriented cultures service to others is an important goal, while in long-term-oriented cultures thrift and perseverance are important. Hence, in long-term-oriented cultures people are more likely to engage in planned behaviors and are less likely to spontaneously help others. Moreover, in long-term-oriented cultures people are more likely to invest in long-term social networks and less likely to interact with strangers.[89]

Chapter Summary

In the contextual model of intercultural communication, culture is the largest context, surrounding all other contexts. This chapter has presented the paradox of culture. On one hand, culture is amorphous; it is shapeless, vague, and nebulous. Most of us are not aware of its influence on our daily behaviors. On the other hand, culture is arguably the strongest influence on an individual's cognitive, affective, and behavioral choices.

Over the past few decades, anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists have isolated several dimensions of cultural variability by which cultures can be compared. This chapter has focused on six of these dimensions, including the extent to which we place individual goals over those of the group (i.e., individualism) or the degree to which we see ourselves as members of a group first, then as individuals (i.e., collectivism).

Another dimension is high–low context, which refers to the extent to which we gather information from the physical, social, and psychological context (i.e., high context) or the extent to which we gather information from the verbal code (i.e., low context).

One of the most influential features of our lives is our value orientation. A culture's values guide its decisions as to what is right or wrong, decent or indecent, moral or immoral. Cultures also differ regarding the extent to which people accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (i.e., large power distance) or believe that people are inherently equal (i.e., small power distance).

Cultures differ in the extent to which people accept and tolerate uncertainty and unpredictability in their lives (i.e., weak uncertainty avoidance) or the extent to which uncertainty should be fought and conquered (i.e., strong uncertainty avoidance). These dimensions provide a starting point for our future examination of intercultural communication.

And finally, long term–short term orientation comes into play. In long-term-oriented cultures individuals value long-standing values and time-honored traditions. Short-term-oriented cultures prefer to focus on gains in the present and past, with respect for tradition and social obligations but an emphasis on quick results.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you feel that you belong to an individualistic or collectivistic culture? Why? What are the signs?

2. What are some of the ways you use high-context communication? What are some of the ways you use low-context communication? Which do you prefer?

3. Is your relationship with your professors indicative of large or small power distance?

4. Is your relationship with your parents indicative of large or small power distance?

5. If you have no plans for the upcoming weekend, does that make you feel anxious, or are you comfortable with not knowing? Depending on your answer, are you certainty or uncertainty oriented?

Ethical Considerations Within the Cultural Context

If you were born and raised in the United States, you probably are relatively individualistic, exhibit low context and small power distance, and have a weak uncertainty avoidance tendency. Seeing the various dimensions of cultural variability discussed in this chapter, consider the following situations and how you might address them.

1. A Saudi working in the United States wakes up ill. He sends his younger brother to work for him that day. The U.S. employer sends the brother home. What happened?

2. The Saudi has not yet learned that in the United States, relatives usually cannot substitute for each other. Perhaps in other cultures, it is acceptable to have one's siblings or even friends fill in on the job. If the job is done, what difference does it make? What would you do? How would you handle the situation?

3. You are at a social gathering and meet Dr. Dinesh Mammen, a local physician from India who has been living and practicing medicine in the United States for many years. You meet his wife, who has her bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in chemistry. You ask about her career and what she does for a living. Dr. Mammen pauses, smiles, and asserts that she stays home and takes care of his needs. How do you react? Do you think Mrs. Mammen should be following a career path related to her college degrees?

Developing Intercultural Communication Competence

The major dimensions of cultural variability discussed in this chapter, including individualism–collectivism, high–low context, large–small power distance, value orientations, and weak–strong uncertainty avoidance, represent the language of intercultural communication. Understanding and applying these concepts is at the core of developing intercultural communication competence.

1. Your college or university probably has student groups that represent a variety of different cultures (e.g., international exchange student groups). Attend one of their meetings and observe how the various dimensions of cultural variability are evident throughout the meeting.

2. As mentioned in Chapter 1, be mindful of your own communicative behaviors. Pay attention and note how your communicative behavior is driven by your level of individualism–collectivism. For example, how do you feel when your roommates and friends are unusually quiet? You may even ask them what's wrong. Notice that silence seems wrong to you. That's your low context manifesting itself.

3. Observe how cultural groups different from yours are portrayed in the media, both in the news and in dramas, comedies, and so on. Are they portrayed accurately? Are they stereotyped?

4. Go to YouTube and type in one of the dimensions of cultural variability. Watch a video or two of how it is presented.

Key Terms

collectivism 45	individualism 44	vertical collectivism 51
high context 57	low context 57	vertical individualism 51
horizontal collectivism 51	power distance 71	
horizontal individualism 51	uncertainty avoidance 78	

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