

## Chapter 1

# Culture and Identity



"They're identical twins. They share all their jeans."

## Genes and Jeans



Until recently I've always thought of Jamie as my best friend, even though he is my brother. We're identical twins and grew up sharing everything. When we were kids we loved wearing matching Levis and striped shirts. We used to play practical jokes on our teachers or even relatives, pretending to be each other, or finishing each other's sentences. 5

Even our friends had trouble telling us apart. When we were 16, a girl that Jamie had met at the beach one day stopped me on the street, thinking I was him. I talked to her and we went to play video games together, but she never knew I wasn't Jamie. It was almost easier than explaining that I was actually his brother. I got her phone number for him and they ended up going on a 10 few dates—but she never found out the truth.

Jamie and I started having trouble last year when he went to France for a study abroad program. Last month he came back after a year in Paris, but he

had changed. Now he talks about France and has this negative attitude about America. He says he simply had his eyes opened to the outside world. He talks about how American food is too greasy, and how Hollywood movies are childish. He dresses differently—says he never knew what style was before.  
 5 He learned about wine, and talks about how children in France drink it with dinner and what an art it is to make it. I think that's fine for people in France, but he is in Indiana now.

I know that Hollywood has its faults and I'm sure French wine is great, but somehow his attitude bothers me. He seems to be a different person.  
 10 Maybe I'm jealous. Or maybe I'm sad because we always shared everything and I've unconsciously counted on him in ways I didn't realize.

It's made me think about who I am, and how my background has shaped me. I'm Jamie's brother because of biology, but I'm American because I was raised here. Even though we share our genes, we now have different experi-  
 15 ences, and so we may not always share our jeans.

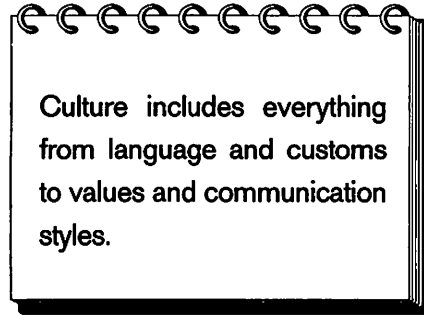


1-3 This story is about trouble in Jamie's relationship with his brother. The cause is Jamie's experience in France and how that has changed him. The subject of this book is similar—how to improve our relationships and our communication with people who  
 20 are different from us.

This first chapter looks at the connection between culture and identity. Our relationships and communication style with others depend not only on personality, but also on our culture. Jamie and his brother had trouble because of what Jamie learned in France.  
 25 There was a conflict between two cultures.

Many people think of culture as things like Kabuki or Ikebana. This book looks at **culture** more broadly as the things that members of a group share in common. Using this definition, culture includes everything from language and customs to values and  
 30 communication styles. We can talk about Japanese values or communication style and compare them with Chinese or Turkish val-

ues and communication styles, for example. Or, we can talk about comparing Kansai culture with Kanto culture, or look at male-female communication differences. 5



Intercultural communication focuses on the things that members of a group share, like values and communication styles. Of course there is individual difference, but it exists within a shared framework of expectations and ideas about how to act and get along. 10 The actions and attitudes of people from other cultures are often misinterpreted if their cultural point of view is not understood and respected. This contributes to national and international conflict: wars, trade friction, discrimination against certain members of society, ethnic rivalry, etc. On the personal level it can create negative 15 stereotypes, cause an international marriage to fail, make a home-stay student miserable, or cause a manager abroad to do his job poorly.

The purpose of studying intercultural communication is to help students be ready for the challenges of dealing with a wide range of people. The first step in doing this is to look at how our culture cre- 20 ates and shapes our identity. As we understand more clearly what it means to say "I am Japanese" (if one is Japanese), it becomes easier to appreciate someone who is different.

Most importantly, our **cultural identity** is learned. Japanese bow, take off shoes before entering a building, eat with chopsticks, 25 value cooperation and use honorific language because they learn to. Returnees who have trouble adjusting to Japanese society remind us how much identity is related to what we learn from our experiences.

The process of gaining our identity from our culture is called 30

**socialization.** This involves learning how to look at the world and get along with others. American children learn to be American by how they are raised, with emphasis on things like the importance of independence. For example, American children sleep separately  
 5 from their parents at a very young age. Japanese children learn Japanese culture in the same way. For example, when a child is told "*Hito ga miteru kara yamenasai!*" she or he learns the importance of paying close attention to the people around one. In a similar way children all over the world learn to honor their elders, say,

The process of gaining our identity from our culture is called **socialization.**

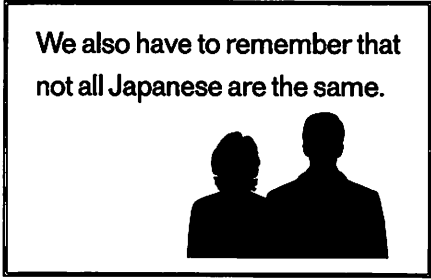
10 or eat with their fingers, cross on the green light, use money, avoid certain plants, and so on.

In Japan, the feeling that Japanese are very similar to each other and very different from non-Japanese  
 15 is quite strong. This idea is partly true and partly false. Most cultures interact with and are influenced by other cultures. Japan's culture shares important common roots with Korea and China, and has recently been greatly influenced by western culture, especially that of the U.S. Also, there are many qualities that all cultures  
 20 share in common.

There is no way to say any culture is more unique than any other. We can only compare one culture relative to another. Many North Americans may have trouble understanding the Japanese values of *mentsu* or *giri*, for example, but for Koreans or Chinese it  
 25 is easier. We also have to remember that not all Japanese are the same. Different regions and social groups within Japan also have their own distinct cultures. Appreciating this is also part of the study of intercultural communication. There are many important social issues related to understanding these cultures within a cul-  
 30 ture. They include the status of ethnic Koreans in Japan, integrat-

ing the disabled into society, and the recognition of the cultural traditions of the Ainu and Okinawa.

Relating well to people from other cultures requires a balance between the knowledge that all humans share certain qualities, and the understanding that differences between cultures are very important and need to be understood and respected. That can be difficult, as Jamie's brother is finding out, but can also be extremely rewarding as we get a fresh perspective on life, and maybe even learn about the art of making wine.



**Did you know?**

Japan is often described as a collectivist, or group-oriented culture, but many other cultures are too. Below is a ranking of 40 different countries, from most group-oriented—Venezuela—to most individualistic—the United States.

- |                 |                   |                   |                           |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 - Venezuela   | 11 - Portugal     | 21 - Spain        | 31 - Sweden               |
| 2 - Colombia    | 12 - Mexico       | 22 - Israel       | 32 - Denmark              |
| 3 - Pakistan    | 13 - Philippines  | 23 - Austria      | 33 - Belgium              |
| 4 - Peru        | 14 - Greece       | 24 - Finland      | 34 - Italy                |
| 5 - Taiwan      | 15 - Turkey       | 25 - South Africa | 35 - New Zealand          |
| 6 - Thailand    | 16 - Brazil       | 26 - Germany      | 36 - Netherlands          |
| 7 - Singapore   | 17 - Iran         | 27 - Switzerland  | 37 - Canada               |
| 8 - Chile       | 18 - Argentina    | 28 - Norway       | 38 - Great Britain        |
| 9 - Hong Kong   | <b>19 - Japan</b> | 29 - Ireland      | 39 - Australia            |
| 10 - Yugoslavia | 20 - India        | 30 - France       | <b>40 - United States</b> |

(source - *Communication Between Cultures*, Samovar and Porter, 2nd edition, Wadsworth)

 **Focus on Content**

1. Relate the story of Jamie and his brother with the reading passage which follows the story. The title of the story “Genes and Jeans” refers to:
  - a. how biology shapes our identity.
  - b. how experience shapes us regardless of biology.
  - c. how culture is determined by genes.
  - d. how humans are similar in spite of shared differences.
  
2. Based on what you read, what do you think it means to have a “cultural experience”? (This is only hinted at in the text.)
  - a. Going to a foreign country.
  - b. Changing your lifestyle after discovering a better way to do things.
  - c. Being influenced by contact with groups that are different than oneself.
  - d. Finding out that your values come from your culture.
  
3. According to the text, socialization:
  - a. teaches children manners.
  - b. teaches children how to look at the world.
  - c. teaches children values.
  - d. all of the above.
  
4. According to the text:
  - a. all cultures are basically the same.
  - b. Japanese culture is unrelated to any other culture.
  - c. cultures can only be compared with each other.
  - d. some cultures are not unique.
  
5. According to the text, to relate well to people from other cultures, it’s important to remember that:
  - a. similarities and differences between cultures are both important.
  - b. people are basically the same.
  - c. all cultures are very different.
  - d. Japanese culture is unique.

## **Culture Quiz**

Based on what is written in the text, do you think the following are considered cultural groups?

- |                           |     |    |
|---------------------------|-----|----|
| 1. women                  | yes | no |
| 2. people with black skin | yes | no |
| 3. short people           | yes | no |
| 4. deaf people            | yes | no |
| 5. people from India      | yes | no |
| 6. people from Osaka      | yes | no |

## **Activities**

1. In order to better understand how our identity affects our communication style, with a partner:

★**Act out a scene** at the breakfast table, taking the role of mother and father to compare the communication styles of men and women. Also, try a scene of parent and child. Male students should try playing female roles and vice versa. Can you play the role of someone from a different part of the country, or of a foreigner?

★**Evaluate your partners** on how well they were able to make their communication style fit the role they were playing. **Make a list** of the differences you found between the different roles.

2. **Make a cultural profile of yourself:**

★**Make a list** of the groups that you belong to. For example: male, young person, student, city person, Japanese, etc.

★**Choose three** that are most important to your identity. Imagine being told that you are the opposite of each item. For example, if you are a boy, imagine being told “You seem like a girl”; if “young person” is on your list, imagine being told that you act like an old person, etc. If you dislike being told a certain thing, then that item is important to your identity.

★**Compare** your list with someone else and **discuss** whether your particular cultural profile influences your communication style. For example, maybe someone for whom being young is very important doesn’t enjoy chatting with older people and uses a lot of popular slang words.