In intercultural conversations, we make a big distinction between stereotypes and generalizations. The two concepts are often confused because they both involve making broad statements about a group of people. This is where the similarity ends.

**Generalizations** are based on the tendency of a majority of people in a cultural group to hold certain values and beliefs, and to engage in certain patterns of behavior. A generalization is most appropriately based on research, held lightly as a hypothesis, and carefully tested by observing the individual from another culture non-judgmentally.

To **stereotype** is to apply a generalization to every person in a cultural group, or to generalize from only a few people in a group. Stereotypes are frequently based on limited experience, unreliable sources, hearsay, or media. It is the rigid adherence to simplified perceptions of others, sometime called ‘hardening of categories’.

Generalizations can be helpful because they are constantly modified by new input; stereotypes can be harmful because they are often used reactively, are fixed and seek to be simple.

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**Culture A**

Individualism is displayed as the dominant cultural value of Culture A. The midpoint of the bell-curve demonstrates that, on average, individualism is the dominant cultural value. However, the curve also shows that some people from Culture A are much closer to the collectivist value of Culture B.

**Culture B**

Collectivism is the dominant cultural value in Culture B, but some people from Culture B can be found on the individualist side. The intersecting area between the two curves shows that certain people from opposite cultures may be more like each other than they are like the average person in their own culture.

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**WORD OF THE WEEK**

**Manabamate**

(Rapa Nui noun) When we fall in love, we don’t notice the little things that we sacrifice, like sleep, patience, and appetite. The Rapa Nui people of Easter Island have a word for it!

Manabamate is roughly translated to ‘the lack of appetite you suffer when falling in love’.

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**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENERALIZATIONS AND STEREOTYPES?**

*Source: Janet M. Bennett, Ph.D. 2016*

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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION WEEKLY

HOW TO SAY NO IN JAPAN

That would be very hard to do
I will consider it
- silence -
We will write you an email
It would be a good idea provided that...

It is very difficult
We shall make efforts
- changing the topic -
I am sorry
Do we really need to ask this question now?

SAVING FACE FOR SELF AND OTHERS:
SAY NO WITHOUT EVER SAYING NO

Source: Keiko Ueda, 'Sixteen Ways to Avoid Saying No in Japan'

Harmony can be found everywhere in Japan. Whether it’s the clean lines of Japanese architecture or the orderly manner in which a Japanese meal is arranged on a plate, the concept of ‘wa’ or ‘harmony’ is at the heart of Japanese culture.

As a guiding principal in all interactions, whether in a family, social or business environment, wa stresses interdependence over independence, cooperation over dissent, and patience over resistance. It’s why Japan is often considered a culture of conflict-avoidance.

If disagreement is necessary, to preserve group harmony and not hurt anyone’s feelings, the word ‘no’ will be avoided. Instead, the speaker may change the subject, pose a counter-question (such as, ‘Why do you ask me about that?’) or apologize. The listener is expected to understand by inference.

In cultures which take words at face value and pay little attention to implicit messaging, this can become problematic. Attending to judgment and increasing cultural self-awareness can help prevent biased attributions and expectations in intercultural conflicts.

WORD OF THE WEEK

Dapjeongneo  답정너

(Korean noun) a situation where one must answer someone with what they want and expect to hear, ‘you only need to say the determined answer’.

Has anyone’s questions ever made you feel dapjeongneo? Think of it the next time someone asks you, ‘Do I look good in this outfit’?
In cultures where individuals take precedence over groups and the ties between people are loose, individualism is usually the priority, such that each person is expected to look after themselves (or their immediate family).

By contrast, in collectivist cultures, where the group takes precedence over individuals and social systems are tighter, people are guided from birth to be an active, contributing part of clearly defined ingroups; variations of collectivism influence people to consider how their mutual sacrifices, loyalty, or shared efforts contribute to the protection, maintenance, well-being, or advancement of the group.

Thus, in collectivist cultures, social norms, obligations, and duties play a more important role than individual attitudes or goals in guiding people’s behavior. In individualist cultures, attitudes and personal needs and rights tend to be more important than norms and duties in guiding people’s behavior.
Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist, described national cultures in relation to gendered traits and the extent to which gender roles are rigid or fluid.

Cultures with rigid gender roles valorize masculinity and with it achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success. Rigid societies at large are more competitive. People ‘strive to be the best they can be’ and are proud of their successes and achievements in life.

By contrast, where gender roles are more fluid, people of all genders are expected to be nurturing and focused on people and quality of life. Keeping the life/work balance and ensuring societal solidarity are considered most important.

For example, Japan is considered one of the most gender-rigid societies in the world, in which the drive for excellence and perfection is evident in every aspect of life, from material production to gift wrapping and food presentation.

France, by contrast, falls on the opposite side of the scale due to its famous welfare system (sécurité sociale), the 35-hour working week, five weeks of holidays per year and its focus on the quality of life.

**FLUID VS. RIGID GENDER ROLES: A NATIONAL COMPARISON**

**Fluid Gender Roles**
Preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented.

**Rigid Gender Roles**
Preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success. Society at large is more competitive.

**WORD OF THE WEEK**

Lagom
Swedish adverb used to describe an amount or a state which is just right - not too much and not too little. It’s an amount so perfect that it creates a sense of harmony and serenity.

Lagom encapsulates the entire Swedish socially democratic philosophy on life: everyone should have enough but not too much.