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.

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

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

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

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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’.
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

Dapjeongneodapjeongneo

(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.