Culture in Relationships

How does culture affect our approach to different relationships?
When we encounter those of a different people group, we can start developing relationships...

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Relationships are grounded in culture. How can our courses help you learn to observe these patterns?
The world is shrinking. The use of communication technology has bridged gaps that seemed insurmountable in the past. Travel has become simple enough that unfamiliar cultures are readily available. Because of these new technologies, cross-cultural relationships are possible in this rapidly globalizing world. Yet, when people of one culture group reach out to another people group, they still encounter cultural barriers that inhibit the development of healthy relationships.

As a university professor, I have the privilege of teaching multicultural groups of students, particularly between American students and Chinese students from our sister university. One semester I remember observing that the Chinese students started the term off happy to be in America with the opportunities that were provided.
After two to three weeks, however, complaints arose from many of the Chinese students. Differences arose between roommates in study patterns and even nighttime routines, causing frustration, friction and sleeplessness for many Chinese students. In turn, American students seemed confused for the sudden surliness aimed at them. These students were encountering Culture Stress; the unfamiliarity that was initially met with excitement had become grating. American students would often persist and seek to work through the relational challenges, but not always. Once the Culture Stress subsided a few weeks later, many of the international students actively sought out relationships with American students again. Upon this reopening of communication, both groups of students voiced the frustrations they had experienced. The Chinese complained that in order to get to know the Americans, one must get to know all of them individually. The American students complained that in order to get to know one Chinese student you must get to know all of them at the same time.

Often, group activities relieved the friction between the individualistic Americans and the collectivist Chinese. These relationships often started with small mixed groups getting together for dinner, games or movies. Common hobbies were the catalysts necessary to build the desired relationships. Although frivolous, shared interests were a commonality between students that allowed them to share their lives cross-culturally.

Finally, sharing meals tended to cement the developing relationships into something truly genuine. Twice in three years I witnessed the Chinese cohort of students invite American students into their houses for shared meals. This became a campus-wide event where international students invited American students to share a meal consisting of all their own foods. One Chinese student commented that making food together is how they made friends. Americans who participated in the meal preparation ordeal confirmed that it solidified their relationships with the Chinese.

The relationships of many of these students have been stunted due to travel restrictions and COVID lockdowns. However, the strength of the relationships built prior to COVID gives hope that many of these relationships will continue onward. What can we learn from these American/Chinese relationships that developed in a university setting? When we encounter those of a different people group, we can start developing relationships that will lead to a healthy interchange of cultural ideas and relationships.
The ways in which we go about relationships with others are reliant on culture. While we like to think our actions are purely the result of our own will, most of the time we choose to behave with others from a set of options presented to us by our cultural context.

An example: Americans tend to greet one another with a firm handshake, or a hug. Many Europeans greet one another with a kiss on both cheeks. You can see that we depend on social patterns such as these on a daily basis. They are culture-specific!
The truth about culture differences in relationship-building is that they are not better or worse from culture to culture, they are just different. No matter what culture we belong to or visit, an understanding of culture-specific norms is a tool we can use for cohesive interactions with others, in all sorts of relational dynamics.

Social habits learned throughout childhood prepare you for interactions with those closest to you, specifically with parents, siblings, and extended family. But there are so many different kinds of relationships to form besides those with your family! As we grow, we learn how to build other friendships, romantic attachments, and authority based relationships as well. Think about the ways in which your relationships with your coworkers are different than the ones you have with your parents. You will likely notice a stark contrast in the natures of the two relationships! Why does this contrast exist, and what purpose might it serve?

When we understand the ways that culture informs our relational patterns, we can start making more conscious choices about how we approach others, especially when their culture is different from ours. As creatures of habit, it takes extra effort to intentionally acknowledge when our patterns might prevent us from building genuine, resilient connections with others. We can use self-awareness to our advantage as we build relationships, especially in a post-Covid era where we have developed all kinds of new relational norms. Taking the time to understand the ways our culture tends to approach different kinds of relationships is key as we look to build strong connections with others.
The Health Benefits of Friendship

We all have experienced what it's like to have a friend. Whether you're going through a tough time or you just want to play a game, friendship is important in every stage of life. See some benefits of friendship below. https://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/social-ties-16/friendship-health-stats

**Happiness is Contagious**
When you hang out with friends, you make yourself and others happy!

**You Recover Quicker**
Science shows that having friends allows you to heal faster from any sickness.

**No Depression Here**
Having great relationships allows you to fight against depression naturally.

**Live Longer and Better**
Studies show that people who are social have a 50% chance of outliving loners.

**Sleep Comes Naturally**
When you build solid friendships, you will have higher quality sleep.

**Encourage Good Habits**
You are 36% more likely to quit smoking if people around you quit also.

**A Positive Inspiration**
When friends adopt healthy habits, you will too. You can work together!

**Stay Away from Disease**
Having support and friendship can lower your risk for heart disease.

**Keep Blood Pressure Low**
Having a social life keeps stress low, which will lower your blood pressure.

**Keep Your Mind Clear**
Studies show dementia is 1.54 times more common among lonely people.
Building relationships can be hard work. It can be even more difficult when those relationships occur across cultural barriers, such as nationality, language, or ethnicity. On top of it all, the pandemic has brought other roadblocks; many of us have felt the social losses of isolation and distance from others. Thankfully, none of us have to approach the process of relationship-building on our own. CultureBound’s training is built around this notion of relationship. We believe that God’s word spreads through our connections with others, and we exist to help prepare those who do this work cross-culturally.
In our week-long CultureCourse, students will learn how to identify fundamental principles of culture, become a more relational learner, and ask effective culture questions. Other topics include forming a culturally appropriate ministry, relational theology, attaining culture balance, and more! Classes combine video lessons, live training sessions with trainers and other students, and field trips to complete in your hometown. Our online cohort format allows students to connect with others all over the world, from the comfort of their own home.

For more information or to register, visit our website! www.culturebound.org

Usually, we price CultureCourse at $1050 for a full week of training. This next month, we are debuting CultureCourse fully in Spanish for a $25 beta fee. Join us from May 3-7 for this exclusive opportunity! Experience 30 hours of invaluable culture training with our seasoned training staff. Get in touch with us as soon as possible at info@culturebound.org to apply and register for this course. We are so excited to offer our signature training in Spanish and hope to expand into other languages as well! We hope to see you there.
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