



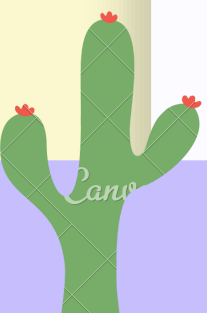
Cross Cultural Understanding

Chapter 10

Intercultural interpersonal relationships

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

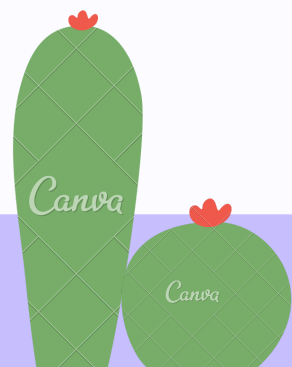
1. Define what is meant by an intercultural interpersonal relationship
2. Identify and describe ten categories of intercultural interpersonal relationships
3. Discuss how society influences intercultural interpersonal relationships
4. Identify the benefits of intercultural interpersonal relationships
5. Identify and describe three types of social networks
6. Describe cultural differences in the notion of friendship
7. Describe the contact hypothesis and its implications for intercultural interpersonal relationships
8. identify internal and external factors that facilitate or hinder intercultural interpersonal relationships (friendship, romance, marriage)
9. Identify constructive ways to nurture intercultural interpersonal relationships.



Introduction

Meaningful communication with other human beings is essential for our physical and mental health. No matter what part of the world we live in, forming intimate relationships is a vital element in life.

(Jackson, 2014)





**INTERPERSONAL
COMMUNICATION AND
INTERCULTURAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Interpersonal communication ‘a special form of human communication that occurs when two people interact simultaneously and attempt to mutually influence each other, usually for the purpose of managing relationships’.

(Beebe et al., 2010: 174, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

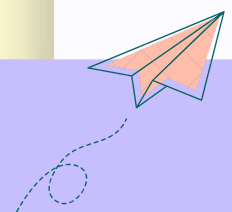


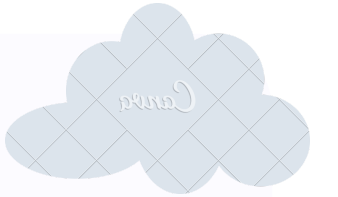
Interpersonal communication skills, that is, communication strategies and techniques that can be improved through knowledge, practice, feedback and reflection.

(Trenholm & Jensen 2011; Wood 2013 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

An interpersonal relationship refers to the connection or affiliation between two or more people, which fulfils physical, social or emotional needs. This association may vary in many ways, including duration and intensity. **Short-term relationships** consist of interpersonal connections that are very brief (e.g. lasting a few weeks or months), whereas **long-term relationships** are characterized by an intimate interpersonal affiliation that lasts many years and perhaps throughout one's lifetime.

(Jackson, 2014)





Compared with previous decades, **intercultural interpersonal** relationships such as friendships, dating, co-habitation, marriages involving people with different cultural or religious backgrounds have become much more commonplace and accepted in many parts of the world. **Intracultural relationships** (interpersonal bonds that form between individuals who share the same linguistic and cultural background) or intraracial relationships (interpersonal relationships between individuals from the same socially-constructed racial group).

(Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING
BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCUTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

People may develop affiliations with individuals from different ethnic, linguistic, national, racial and religious backgrounds or form bonds with those who differ in terms of such dimensions as age, ability, gender, social class and sexual orientation (Sorrells 2013; Vela-McConnell 2011).

(Jackson, 2014)

Interracial Intercultural Relationships

Race ‘a largely social – yet powerful construction of human difference that has been used to classify human beings into separate value-based categories.

(Orbe and Harris, 2008: 8, Jackson, 2014)

Interracial communication refers to ‘interactions between two individuals in a situational context where racial difference is a salient issue’. Bonds between people from different racial groups are referred to as **interracial intercultural relationships**.

(Orbe & Harris 2008: 268 as cited in Jackson)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCUTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Interethnic intercultural relationships

Ethnicity ‘a cultural marker that indicates shared traditions, heritage, and ancestral origins’.

(Orbe and Harris (2008: 8) as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Relationships between individuals affiliated with different ethnic groups are referred to as **interethnic relationships**.

Friendship between a French Canadian and a Canadian with Irish–Scottish heritage or a romance between a Malaysian Singaporean and a Chinese Singaporean would be deemed interethnic.

(Gaines et al. 2006 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

International intercultural relationships

Relationships that develop between people that bridge 'national cultural and citizenship lines' are referred to as **international relationships**.

(Sorrells 2013: 152 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Interreligious intercultural relationships

Interreligious intercultural relationships refer to interpersonal connections between people with different religious orientations such as ties between Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews or other faiths (or non-believers). **Interfaith or interreligious friendship** is characterized as an interpersonal relationship or friendship bond between individuals who are affiliated with a different religion.

(Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Social class differences in intercultural relationships

Social class ‘a social grouping of people based on common economic and other characteristics determined by society and reflecting a social hierarchy’.

(Goodman et al., 2012: 252, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Social markers or indicators of class are still present and evolving. These context-dependent markers may include one’s cultural background, accent, proficiency in another language (bilingualism, fluency in an international, prestigious language), wealth and income (e.g. ‘new’ versus ‘old’ money), material possessions (e.g. a fancy car, a large house), level and source of education, the prestige of one’s occupation, racial or ethnic origin, the reputation of one’s neighbourhood and so on.

(Block 2013; Meyerhoff 2010; Wardaugh 2010 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

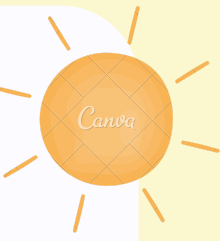
**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCUTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Language differences in intercultural relationships

In interpersonal situations, whether we realize it or not, our speech and nonverbal behaviours can convey information about our social status, personality, temperament, group affiliations and so on.

(Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

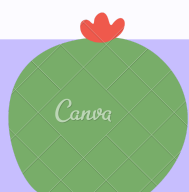


The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) posits that individuals may adjust their language use or patterns (such as choice of accents or dialects, style of communication) to bring them closer to or further apart from their interlocutors.

Convergence refers to the ways in which individuals adapt their communicative behaviours in order to reduce social differences between themselves and their conversation partners.

Divergence refers to the distancing of oneself from one's interlocutors by accentuating differences in one's speech (e.g. accent, communication style) or nonverbal behaviours (e.g. gestures, personal distance)

(Gallois et al. 2005; Giles et al. 2012 as cited in Jackson, 2014)



English is the **lingua franca**, that is, the medium of communication between people who do not have the same first language. As English is the most dominant language of international communication in both face-to-face interactions and online, in many intercultural encounters, one or more of the communication partners are apt to be using this language.

(Jenkins 2007, 2013; Mackenzie 2013; McKay & Bokhorst Hong 2008 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Age differences in intercultural relationships

The degree of acceptance or non-acceptance of the age difference may depend on the nature of the bond (e.g. friendship, romance) and the gender(s) involved, as well as other dimensions (e.g. social, cultural, economic, political, historical).

(Cupach & Spitzberg 2011; Lehmiller & Agnew 2011, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

In Asia, as well as in Western nations, it is not unusual for older, white males to marry considerably younger Asian women; it is rare, however, for young white males to marry older Asian women.

(Constable 2005; Nemoto 2009; Waters 2005; Yancey & Lewis 2009, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCUTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Ability differences in intercultural relationships

The way society views people with disabilities such as physical handicaps, cognitive impairment, and mental illness influences the interpersonal relationships that disabled individuals form with members of the community who are not disabled.

(Jackson, 2014)

Social inclusion

Social exclusion

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Gender differences in intercultural relationships

Relationships between males and females in intracultural relationships are complicated and in intercultural or interracial unions even more so as the partners have been socialized in different linguistic and cultural environments.

(Renalds 2011; Smith & Hattery 2009; Vela-McConnell 2011 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Sexual orientation and intercultural relationships

Sexual orientation' is a term frequently used to describe a person's romantic, emotional or sexual attraction to another person. A person attracted to another person of the same sex is said to have a **homosexual orientation** and may be called **gay** (both men and women) or lesbian. Individuals attracted to persons of the other sex are said to have a **heterosexual orientation**. Sexual orientation falls along a continuum and individuals who are attracted to both men and women are said to be **bisexual**.

(American Psychiatric Association, n.d., Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCUTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Multiplex intercultural interpersonal relationships

Intercultural interpersonal relationships often involve multiple cultural differences and the crossing of more than one socially- and historically-constructed boundary such as age, class, language, ethnic, national, racial, regional, religious and sexual orientation. In England, for example, a wealthy, middle-aged Muslim businessman from Pakistan may meet and develop a romantic relationship with an ethnic Chinese immigrant, a 30-year old Christian woman from a lower middle-class family in Malaysia.

(Jackson, 2014)

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Developing connections with individuals who are different from oneself in terms of age, language, gender, ethnicity, race, ability, sexual orientation, religion, social class and nationality can enrich one's life in multiple and often unexpected ways. Potential benefits include, but are not limited to: heightened self-awareness, more understanding of other 'ways of being', the breaking-down of stereotypes, more sensitivity towards identity issues, the acquisition of new skills and pursuits, the refinement of one's intercultural interpersonal communication skills and more appreciation of diversity.

(Jackson, 2014)

BENEFITS OF INTERCULTURAL INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Heightened self-awareness

Intercultural relationships can raise awareness of the many ways in which the socialization process has shaped your life such as attitudes, values and beliefs and self-identities. It can also enhance your awareness of your language use and communication style (verbal and nonverbal).

(Jackson, 2014)

**BENEFITS OF
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

More understanding of different ways of being

When you develop a personal connection with someone from another linguistic and cultural background you are apt to gain exposure to new ways of thinking, acting and communicating such as unfamiliar worldviews, daily practices, linguistic expressions and communication styles.

(Jackson, 2014)

**BENEFITS OF
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

The breaking-down of stereotypes

Intercultural interpersonal relationships may compel you to critically reflect on how your home environment and personal experiences have influenced your perceptions and attitudes towards people who are different.

(Jackson, 2014)

**BENEFITS OF
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

More sensitivity towards identity issues

Through sustained intercultural interactions, you may discover which facets of your identities become salient in different contexts.

(Jackson, 2014)

**BENEFITS OF
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

The acquisition of new skills and pursuits

Interpersonal intercultural relationships can introduce you to clubs, organizations and a range of activities that might otherwise be unknown to you.

(Jackson, 2014)

**BENEFITS OF
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

The refinement of intercultural interpersonal communication skills

Communication competence, that is, ‘the ability to achieve one’s goals in a manner that is personally acceptable and, ideally, acceptable to others’

(Adler et al. 2013: G-2, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

**BENEFITS OF
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Enhanced appreciation of diversity

More exposure to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, it is possible to gain more understanding and genuine appreciation of diversity, which is very significant as our world is becoming more interconnected.

(Jackson, 2014)

**BENEFITS OF
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

Intercultural friendship is a personal connection or affiliation forged between people who have a different cultural background.

(Jackson, 2014)

A social network refers to ‘the multiple web of relationships an individual contracts in a society with other people who he or she is bound to directly or indirectly by ties of friendship, kinship or other social relationships’.

(Trudgill 2003:121–22 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

**INTERCULTURAL
FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIAL
NETWORKS**

Cultural perceptions of friendship

- A life without a friend is a life without a sun. (**German proverb**)
- It is better to be in chains with friends than to be in a garden with strangers. (**Persian proverb**)
- Life without a friend is like death without a witness. (**Spanish proverb**)
- It is better in times of need to have a friend rather than money. (**Greek proverb**)
- Life without friends is not worth living. (**Turkish proverb**)

(**Jackson, 2014**)

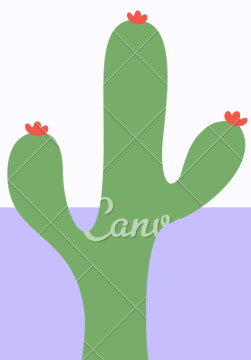
**INTERCULTURAL
FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIAL
NETWORKS**

Through friendship we gain practical and emotional support, and an important contribution to our personal identities. Friendship also helps to integrate us into the public realm and “act as a resource for managing some of the mundane and exceptional events” that confront us in our lives.

(Allan 1989: 114, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

A **casual friend** or acquaintance refers to someone you have been introduced to but do not know very well. In contrast, a **close friend** refers to someone you can rely on to provide emotional support and perhaps lend a hand when needed. Within this sub-category, U.S. Americans may also designate one or more individuals as their **best friends** to indicate that they are especially close to them

(Jackson, 2014)



Language and intercultural cyber friendship

Communication that is facilitated by computer technologies such as the use of two or more networked computers are referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC).

(Jackson, 2014)

Communication that is facilitated by computer technologies (e.g. the use of two or more networked computers) is referred to as **computer-mediated communication (CMC)**

‘**synchronous** or **asynchronous** electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in text messages that are relayed from senders’ computers as receivers’.

(Walther, 1992: 52, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

**INTERCULTURAL
FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIAL
NETWORKS**

Netizens, that is, individuals who actively engage in online interactions.
(Jackson, 2014)

The emergence of social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, twitter, MySpace, and LinkedIn, is making it possible to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships online, instead of relying solely on face-to-face communication or phone calls, as in years gone by.

(Jackson, 2014)



Building intercultural friendships and social networks

A wide range of elements play a role in determining the potential for these interpersonal relationships, including: proximity, social networks, similarity-attraction, personality, willingness to communicate (WTC), empathy, identity recognition and validation, uncertainty reduction/anxiety management, disclosure and relational intimacy, shared identity and relational maintenance, intercultural communication competence and social acceptance.

(Jackson, 2014)

**INTERCULTURAL
FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIAL
NETWORKS**

Proximity

All intercultural interpersonal relationships are affected by the affordances and constraints in one's environment.

(Jackson, 2014)

Social networks.

The degree of diversity in one's social networks also influences one's opportunity to meet and interact with diverse individuals.

(Jackson, 2014)

Similarity–Attraction

The Similarity–Attraction Hypothesis posits that we are drawn to people we perceive to be similar to us such as those who share our first language, race, ethnicity, beliefs, values, religion, worldview and group affiliations.

(Adler et al. 2013; Byrne 1969 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Greater perceived similarity facilitates a communicative relationship; interactions, once started, may lead to perception of greater similarity or convergence of partners' behavior, or both.

(Chen (2002: 244) as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Personality

Intercultural friendship formation has also been linked to certain personality traits such as extroversion, desire to help others and open-mindedness.

(Gareis 2000, 2012; Peng 2011 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Willingness to communicate (WTC)

WTC is believed to develop as we mature, bringing about a ‘global, personality-based orientation toward talking’.

(MacIntyre et al. 2003: 591 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Empathy

Empathy, the ability to understand another person's feelings and point of view.

(Cornes 2004; Krajewski 2011 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

The cognitive aspect of empathy entails an ability to effectively comprehend a distressing situation and to recognize another's emotions and assume that person's perspective.

The affective aspect of empathy requires an individual to experience a vicarious emotional response to others' expressed emotions.

(Knafo et al. 2008: 737 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Identity recognition and validation

Understanding the personal meaning of one's self identities and recognizing the preferred identities of one's communication partners are crucial elements in the formation of mutually satisfying intercultural friendships

(Jackson, 2014)

Uncertainty reduction/anxiety management

The uncertainty reduction theory (URT) posits that the greater our ability to predict and explain our communication partners' behaviour, the greater the chance that our relationships will become more intimate such as progress from stranger or acquaintance to close friend.

(Berger & Calabrese 1975 as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Disclosure and relational intimacy

Self-disclosure refers to ‘the process of deliberately revealing information about oneself that is significant and that would not normally be known by others’ (Adler et al. 2013: G-11, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Shared identity and relational maintenance

Relational identity is defined as ‘a privately transacted system of understandings that coordinate attitudes, actions, and identities of participants in a relationship’.

Relational maintenance, ‘communication aimed at keeping relationships operating smoothly and satisfactorily’ (Adler et al. 2013: 287, as cited in Jackson, 2014),

Intercultural communication competence.

An individual's degree of 'other-orientation, sensitivity, and the ability to provide positive feelings predict success in initiating and managing intercultural friendships'.

(Chen, 1992, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Social acceptance

The attitudes towards intercultural interpersonal relationships in one's social networks and community can impact our willingness to initiate interactions with people who are culturally different.

(Jackson, 2014)

Barriers to intercultural friendships

Researchers have identified a number of internal and external factors that can hamper the development of satisfying intercultural friendships (*limited contact opportunities; differing motives; unmet expectations; anxiety and uncertainty; differences in communication styles; differing values, worldviews and perceptions; stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination; language barrier; miscommunication*).

(Jackson, 2014)

**INTERCULTURAL
FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIAL
NETWORKS**

Limited contact opportunities & Contact frequency, duration, and quality

Demographic variables play an important role in the formation of intercultural friendships.

Contact frequency, duration, and quality

As well as having sufficient opportunities for intercultural interactions, there must be adequate, quality time together to grow the relationship.

(Jackson, 2014)

Unmet expectations

For example, differing conceptions of friendship can result in confusion and hurt feelings between international students and their U.S. American hosts.

(DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004 and Gareis, 2000, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Disparate motives and degree of investment

The most important aspect in life is relationships, and my friends have been ripped away from me at every turn. It takes so much energy and effort to maintain hope in new friendships, when you keep losing them all the time ... Sometimes I don't see the potential of making a new friend; I see the work involved in getting to know them and quickly analyse whether it's worth it or not. This has been ingrained into my mentality from the routine of making and breaking friends so frequently. I am aware that it is a gamble, since you can miss out on a lot of friendships ...

(Sand-Hart, 2010: 136, as cited in Jackson, 2014))

Anxiety and uncertainty & Cultural differences in communication styles

Mandy, a bright Taiwanese university student, wished to join an international exchange programme in Dublin wrote:

"Because I'll be in a foreign country for such a long time, there'll be lots of problems. I really want to make friends with people from other cultures but I'm worried that I won't be able to get along well with the local students. I don't know what we can talk about and I've never used English much outside of class. Differences in communication styles can also impede the development of intercultural friendships and lead to misunderstandings".

(as cited Jackson, 2014)

Cultural differences in communication styles

Differences in communication styles can also impede the development of intercultural friendships and lead to misunderstandings.

Differing values, perceptions, and worldviews.

When individuals cross cultural boundaries, they are exposed to differing values, perceptions and worldviews.

Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination

Ethnocentrism can lead to negative perceptions and attitudes towards individuals and groups who are different.

(Jackson, 2014)

Contested identities/identity misalignments

In intercultural interactions one's preferred identity may be misunderstood and contested or challenged.

Language and culture barrier & Humour and emotional display

Intercultural friendships, however, often involve the use of a second language.

Expectancy violations

Insufficient cultural knowledge such as lack of familiarity with linguistic and cultural norms in other cultures can hamper intercultural relationships.

Humour and emotional display

The ability to recognize and create humour is vital in the development and maintenance of meaningful intercultural interpersonal relationships

(Jackson, 2014)

Emotional displa

Cultural variations in the display of feelings and emotions can also be a barrier to the development of satisfying intercultural friendships (Matsumoto & Hwang 2012; Safdar et al. 2009, as cited in Jackson, 2014).

Limited emotional intelligence and sensitivity

‘the ability to understand and manage one’s own emotions and to be sensitive to others’ feelings’.

Adler et al. (2013: 246, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

Facework and conflict management

When people from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds interact, misunderstandings and conflicts are bound to occur from time to time.

Social sanctions

the norm can certainly inhibit the formation and maintenance of intercultural friendships.

(Jackson, 2014)

Factors that facilitate or hinder intercultural romantic relationships

Factors or characteristics that **contribute to successful marriages** between people who have different cultural backgrounds: commitment to the relationship, ability to communicate, sensitivity to each other's needs, a liking for the other's culture, flexibility, positive self-image, love as the main marital motive, common goals, spirit of adventure and sense of humour.

(Romano, 2008, as cited in Jackson, 2014)

A number of **other obstacles**: a language barrier, conflicting ideas about premarital sex, differing expectations and perceptions of roles and responsibilities, differing ideas about acceptable displays of affection in public and private domains, conflict management differences, a power imbalance, family pressures and social constraints, differing perceptions of child rearing and unfamiliar beliefs and traditions

**ENHANCING
INTERCULTURAL
INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

There are those individuals from diverse backgrounds who have created a world, at least within their own private lives, that is not broken by the socially constructed boundaries of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and age; people who have established deep, lasting relationships with others from very different backgrounds.

(Vela-McConnell 2011: 3 as cited in Jackson, 2014))

- If you do not have any intercultural interpersonal relationships, reflect on the reasons why this is the case. Are your fears or attitudes (or those of your family/social networks) keeping you from making intercultural connections? If yes, challenge yourself to leave your comfort zone and initiate a relationship with someone from a different linguistic and cultural background, whether face-to-face or online. Bear in mind that intercultural connections must be genuine and respectful if they are to be meaningful.
- Perceptions of relationships differ across cultures. Consider your own views and expectations and how these ideas formed. How might these understandings differ from those of your intercultural partners?
- Do not assume that you or your intercultural friend or partner is an ambassador for a particular linguistic or cultural group. When you get to know someone from another linguistic or cultural background, you are developing an interpersonal relationship with an individual.

- Be attentive to differences in disclosure norms, values, verbal and nonverbal behaviours, and make an effort to develop relational intimacy.
- Work to eliminate any personal biases and prejudices that you may have that could negatively impact on your intercultural interpersonal relationships.
- Recognize the importance of respect and genuine concern in intercultural friendships and romances. Are you attentive to the needs of your communication partners or overly focused on your own interests?
- Assess your level of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication apprehension. Based on what you have learned in this book and elsewhere consider constructive ways to overcome impediments to the development of healthy intercultural interpersonal relationships.
- Make a personal commitment to devote the time necessary to enhance your interpersonal intercultural communication skills to develop meaningful relationships (face-to-face and online).

(Jackson, 2014)

References

Jackson, J. (2014). Introducing language and intercultural communication. Routledge.

