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Gary Althen in the article “ American values and assumptions” defines culture as a collection of values and assumptions, which together influence life perception of a group of people (Althen, Doran, and Szmania). This definition implies that people, who belong to the same culture often share similar values and assumptions. People, who come from different cultural backgrounds, however, tend to have different views on life and share other values. These differences often becomes the foundation for intercultural conflicts and misunderstandings. Althen, Davis, and Levine in their works describe cultural differences from diverse perspectives, however, they manage to capture the particular cultural traits, which are seldom considered in intercultural discussions, but they may play a significant in cultural misunderstanding and tension.

Lisa Davis in her article “ Where do we stand?” describes the difference in the attitude to personal space in different cultures. Unawareness or inability to respect the unfamiliar attitude to personal space may impede socialization, thus becoming a trigger for cultural misunderstanding and conflicts. Robert Levine discusses the notion of time in different cultures. While for some it is a valuable resource, for the others it is the source of enjoyment. Indeed, people who hold these opposing viewpoints do not understand each other and disapprove of wasting time on the one side and constant rush on the other. Gary Althen summarizes several points, indicating the peculiarities of American values and assumptions, which are often misunderstood by the other cultures and hamper effective communication.

Cultural differences are an integral part of our society and therefore they

cannot be eliminated or ignored. Often different is perceived as abnormal in our society, however, it is impossible to set unique behavioural standards and completely eliminate cultural impact on our actions and attitudes. It is important, however, to keep an open mind, to respect the views of the others and to appreciate the cultural diversity around us. Only in this way we can reduce cultural tensions and create an environment, where everyone can feel comfortable and secure.

What values and traits revealed in Althen's article, "american values and assumption" are reflected in examples provided by Davis in "Where do we stand?"

In his article "American values and assumptions" Althen discusses important traits of the American culture - privacy, equality, assertiveness and informality. Americans do not tolerate those, who try to violate their privacy and become cold and even hostile. This cultural peculiarity is reflected in the article "Where do we stand?", where the author demonstrates how Americans try to keep an arm's length distance when having a conversation. In case people from other cultures try to come closer, Americans back up in order to defend their personal space. Moreover, the sense of equality dictates the way Americans greet their counterparts and converse with them. Davis describes the situations, where smiling in the elevator, bowing or avoiding eye contact were regarded abnormal and odd by people from America. On the other hand Americans try to treat everyone equally and be relatively informal, denying the need to show hierarchical status by additional display of respect. Instead, they try to show assertiveness in their speech and behaviour with a certain degree of informality. These character

and cultural traits often create a negative impression about American people; however, together they form a unique mix that we can call American culture.

References

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