

# sample interview paper: intercultural communication essay sample

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A collectivistic culture, such as Ecuador, can be defined as a culture that places “ emphasis on the group’s wants, needs, and desires. People of Ecuadorian culture are defined by their relationships and are connected to others” (Keaten). Although the men are given distinct individual privileges and do not always consider the opinions of others, the whole culture of Ecuador embraces more of a collective approach. One specific example is that the children often times do not go to school so that they can help out the family either by working around the house and in the yard, or by getting a job to provide a little extra income. This may seem as more of an economic issue, but it is the belief system associated with the situation that illustrates a collectivistic approach. Children understand that it is an honor to attend school and would love to do so, but they are ultimately concerned with the benefits of the entire family, not just themselves. Therefore, knowing that it will help the family makes it relatively easy to give up the opportunity to further their education. While collectivistic values are very apparent in Ecuador, there are also illustrators of a very individualistic view.

As mentioned above, the males in Ecuador are a prime example of individualism. As defined, individualistic values place “ emphasis on the individual’s wants, needs and desires. A person is defined by their personality and is separate from others” (Keaten). Men in Ecuador are given, and grow to expect a much greater deal of respect. They do not have to check in with anyone, and are free to make decisions based on their individual feelings and beliefs (even if the decision affects a number of people besides themselves). When the men come home from work they do not help out with the family or around the home either. It is not unusual to

find men out late at night “unwinding” after a long day, illustrating how they deliberately take care of themselves first.

Discussing the male’s dominant role in the family also illustrates vertical cultural values. Not only is this applied to men, but also to elders. They make decisions without consulting others and no one questions their authority. One specific example of vertical power can be found in the fact that women are legally obligated to practice total obedience towards their husbands. If respect is not given to a certain individual, domestic violence is a common response and is not considered a criminal code (Gauderman). Also illustrating vertical values, students view the school system and their education as an opportunity not to be taken advantage of. Therefore, they give up-most respect to their teachers and do not misbehave in class (talking out of turn, being late or disrespectful, rough-housing etc). The premium is placed on memorization and lecture with very large class sizes. This means that students are not given one on one attention, and instead have a ‘nodding acquaintance’ with their teacher. The primary goal of secondary education is the development of economic and social mobility so youth are prepared and able to assume positions of leadership in society (showing importance of rank).

Also, in order to qualify for one of the nine institutions students need to score high on the admissions test, thus ranking students with their peers and promoting a competitive atmosphere (Wilson). Specifically looking at the classroom conduct that children are taught to obey, it is also easy to detect a restrained cultural value. As seen in the classroom and also in the

definition of restraint, “ people are expected to learn to control their emotions, which is a sign of maturity” (Keaten). Speaking up against the teacher is absolutely unheard of and results in very careful use of language and analysis by the students. The students are not the only ones who practice restraint though. The teachers deliver a class session full of facts, theories, and reflections, leaving little to no time for discussions or most forms of expression. The classroom is calm and controlled, leaving little room for the unexpected, or unwanted. Restraint does not stop in the school system, but extends to various aspects of life. For example, if a woman chooses an occupation in the business field she must take extra precaution and find an appropriate balance between appearing ‘ pushy’ and professional.

During the initial greeting, both men and women will refrain from contact and will reserve kissing (once on each cheek) for the elderly and the young. Typically, men will greet with a firm handshake and women will greet with a soft hand-touch (once again showing that women must refrain from a ‘ powerful’ appearance). Also, when having a discussion with someone, it is common knowledge to refrain from talking about politics (specifically the government and possible difficulties with their neighboring countries). These practices show that people are expected to hold off on emotional expression and instead show self-control to appear ‘ professional’ (Foster). As discussed above, there is an obvious cultural value in the area of gender differences.

An emphasis is placed on unambiguous sex-roles and women/men are viewed different physically, psychologically, and socially. Men work outside the home and are the initial providers for the family, contributing the main

income and making the family decisions. Women very rarely work outside of the home and are expected to be capable of working in areas such as weaving, cooking, cleaning, child care and yard work (preparation and harvest).

Even children are raised with specific gender-based chores and early occupations. While young, little boys will often complete their duties outdoors through labor projects or working the fields while girls will help inside the house with the cooking, sewing, and cleaning. For extracurricular activities boys are allowed to learn music and play instruments while girls are only allowed to sing and dance along with the provided music. As they grow older, boys will often find a job around age 12 (usually labor based) to help support the family financially, while girls will often enter the sexual union (have children and take care of their husband) by age 12-13 (Beirne). The cultural values of Ecuador do display a degree of structure between individuals of varying 'status,' but values of flexibility are also very prevalent in day to day life. During casual or leisure time the notion of 'time' is not always viewed as a necessity.

Lunch dates and evening get-togethers are set around flexible times and it is not considered 'rude' to show up late (15-20 minutes). Lateness in Ecuador however, has become such a problem that the government has been forced to get involved. In a recent interview with President Lucio Gutierrez he stated "We have to be on time for the sake of God, the country, our people and our consciences!" ("Don't Be Late.."). This 'problem' is being dealt with, but remains as a prime example of their flexible lifestyle. Flexibility is a value

that is also tied directly to family life. Families and individuals need to remain flexible when determining how to earn their income. Many families are not extensively wealthy and live off of their crops or products sold at the market. However, there is always the chance that the crops will not turn out, or the products will not be sold and so families are often times willing and open to finding additional sources of income.

The children understand and are accustomed to these situations, and therefore remain very flexible with any of their future plans. While helping around the house they may not have set chores, but instead help out with whatever is necessary at that moment. As they grow, some might have the opportunity to attend school, while others may have to stay at home. Even if they are granted the chance to go to school, children understand that they need to be flexible in case their family needs them at home, resulting in withdraw from their classes. Clearly, the idea of flexibility is taught from an early age and carried out though adulthood.

#### Intercultural Comparison:

Matt was a key person to interview. Not only did he grow up in Ecuador and embrace the culture and values, but he has also experienced a considerable amount of his life in America. Through the interview he gave very qualified information about the people, customs and traditions of Ecuador. Then, following the interview we discussed some of the similarities and differences that are apparent between Ecuadorian culture and American culture.

It seems through resources and Matt's personal experience that both Ecuadorian and American cultures have a wide variety of situational communication "dos and don'ts." Both cultures have casual and professional styles of communication, both appropriate for different events. The greatest differences between the two cultures and their forms of communication are the use of expressive communication (greetings in particular) and the expectations based on status differences. In American culture, people rely a great deal on the use of expression, specifically during a greeting. If you were to ask a random American citizen to greet another person (someone they have previously met) without the use of their body or exaggerated facial features, it would most likely be very difficult or nearly impossible. In America we often times greet others with a hug, a large smile, and possibly a 'handshake' specific to our relationship. The American culture values expression within our communication from beginning to end, an aspect that differs with that of the Ecuadorian culture. In Ecuador, people are fairly restrained with the use of actions and expressions, producing a more subtle greeting. Even people who are very excited and happy to see one another will be more formal and calm, most often extending just a friendly handshake.

In Ecuador it has been clearly stated that there is a strong vertical structure throughout not only the home but through the community. This differs greatly from America, the 'land of equality.' If a woman in Ecuador was to be told she can't do something because of her gender (especially if told from her husband) she would most likely accept this as an understandable explanation. However, if an American woman was told that something was

being withheld from her simply because of her gender she would most likely sue the company or individual for discrimination. This difference is also very apparent in the school systems. Children in America give a degree of respect towards their teachers, but as they advance the respect seems to dwindle until student/teacher relationships become so casual that they are completing their own 'handshake' upon greeting, and comparing plans for the upcoming weekend. In Ecuador, respect is expected - even more so as you advance. Students give total reverence to their teachers and would not even consider crossing any questionable behavioral or communication boundaries.

Clearly, Ecuador and America have some clear cultural differences, but those differences are what make each country unique. The differences between the two cultures do not have to serve as a boundary, but rather a bridge if researched and dealt with properly. All human beings are alike. As Matt explained, one of the greatest misunderstandings is the quality of life (materially) in both countries. Both countries have people who are rich, and people who are poor. In both countries people relate to their families, work to support themselves and loved ones, and most importantly, people in both countries all need some source of communication to survive. The key is broadening our knowledge base about what communication is-not only in our own culture, but around the world. Coming to understand and appreciate the various values found in other cultures will not disconnect us from one another, but will make world-wide communication stronger and more effective.



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