

Foreword

This volume is of interest and value on several levels. First, for individuals beginning their exploration of the complex, interlocking issues entailed by cross-cultural communication online, the essays collected here both serve as a helpful introduction *and* provide important new insights and inspiration for further research. Second, for researchers and practitioners already working in these domains, several chapters (e.g., Chapters IV, X, and XI) expand on significant contributions in these fields. In particular, as these and additional essays (e.g., Chapter VIII) explicitly connect the research and insight gathered here with the larger literatures of intercultural communication and of online discourse, they provide helpful context and orientation to understanding culture and communication online (see also Macfadyen, Roche, & Doff, 2004; Sudweeks, Hrachovec, & Ess, 2006).

Most importantly, the volume provides crucial insight for a much broader audience—namely, anyone who uses the Internet and the World Wide Web to communicate across cultures. As several chapters in this volume exemplify, much extant research in these domains has focused on the very practical work of cross-cultural collaboration for the sake of business, research, and distance learning. The contributions of such research to more effective cross-cultural communication online are critically important, of course—and not simply to a relatively small number of academics and professionals collaborating in virtual teams, but to anyone who undertakes such communication. Simply put, this increasingly means a sizable majority of Internet users *per se*. That is, as the Internet continues its dramatic expansion across the globe—so as to include, at the time of this writing, nearly one-sixth of the world’s population—more of us will inevitably communicate across multiple cultures. Of course, the great danger here, especially for those with no previous experience in cross-cultural communication, is the naïve presumption that “everyone else is just like me,” an ethnocentrism whose consequences only begin with communication *failures*, because we fail to understand and respect “the Other”—first of all, as we fail to understand the critical *differences* at work in cross-cultural communication, much less take these differences into account in our own communicative efforts (a failure I have called “computer-mediated colonization”). At worst, such naïve ethnocentrism ends in cultural and political imperialism. Hence in a *communicative* world increasingly interconnected across multiple cultures by the Internet and World Wide Web, what is desperately needed is a guide for effective cross-cultural communication online. Such a text, to my knowledge, remains to be written; but the chapters and insights collected here constitute much needed and significant contributions towards developing a resource of this sort. This text will thus be of interest and value to researchers in particular and to anyone more broadly who desires to communicate more effectively in cross-cultural exchanges that take place online.

REFERENCES

Macfadyen, L. P., Roche, J., & Doff, S. (2004). *Communicating across cultures in cyberspace: A bibliographical review of online intercultural communication*. Hamburg, Germany: Lit-Verlag.

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