“... the history of our planet has been in great part the history of the mixing of peoples.”

—Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.¹

Chapter Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

1. List and discuss the benefits of intercultural communication.
2. Recognize the increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. population.
3. Identify and discuss the eight dimensions of communication.
4. Assess your degree of communication apprehension.
5. Define and discuss the nature of culture.
6. Identify and discuss the five contexts of intercultural communication.
7. Discuss the relationship between intercultural communication, uncertainty, and anxiety.
8. Assess your degree of intercultural communication apprehension.
9. Identify and discuss the three fundamental assumptions of intercultural communication.
10. Assess your degree of ethnocentrism.
At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Marshall McLuhan’s vision of a global village is no longer considered an abstract idea but a virtual certainty. Technological and sociopolitical changes have made the world a smaller planet to inhabit. The technological feasibility of the mass media to bring events from across the globe into our homes, businesses, and schools dramatically reduces the distance between peoples of different cultures and societies. Telecommunication systems link the world via satellites and fiber optics. Supersonic jets carry people from one country to another faster than the speed of sound. Politically, the end of the cold war between the United States and the former Soviet Union has brought decades of partisan tensions to an end. Some countries that were once bitter enemies are now joining forces. Mass migrations force interaction between people of different races, nationalities, and ethnicities. Noted historian and Pulitzer Prize winner Arthur Schlesinger warns us that history tells an ugly story of what happens when people of diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic backgrounds converge in one place. Witness the war in the former Yugoslavia. As the stranglehold of ideological repression in Eastern Europe was released, ethnic groups that once lived peacefully within their geopolitical borders now clash and kill one another by the thousands in the name of nationalism and ethnic cleansing. The hostility of one group of people against another, different group of people is among the most instinctive of human drives. Schlesinger contends that unless a common goal binds diverse people together, tribal hostilities will drive them apart. By replacing the conflict of political ideologies that dominated in the twentieth century, ethnic and racial strife will usher in the new millennium as the explosive issue.2 Only through intercultural communication can such conflict be managed and reduced. Only by competently and peacefully interacting with others who are different from ourselves can our global village survive.

THE NEED FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

International tensions around the globe, the most noticeable to U.S. Americans in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and Eastern Europe, are striking examples of the need for effective and competent intercultural communication. Although political in origin, such conflicts are fueled by ethnic and religious differences. Indeed, national conflicts within our own borders, often ignited by racial and ethnic tensions, underscore the necessity for skillful intercultural communication. An international incident with potentially global consequences occurred between The People’s Republic of China and the United States, stressing the need for intercultural communication. The
The necessity of intercultural communication

incident began on April 1, 2001, when a U.S. Navy surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet in international airspace over the South China Sea. As a result of the collision, the U.S. plane, an EP-3 electronic warfare and surveillance aircraft, was damaged and nearly crashed. However, because of heroic efforts on the part of the crew, the plane landed safely at a Chinese air base. China reported that its plane was missing and its pilot was presumed dead. The 24-member crew of the U.S. plane was detained by the Chinese military. China and the United States disagreed as to the cause of the collision, each side blaming the other.

In the days and weeks following the incident contentious negotiations took place between Chinese and U.S. officials over the release of the U.S. crew. For their release, China demanded that the United States accept responsibility and apologize for the collision. The United States refused, arguing that the collision was the fault of the Chinese pilot. In the meantime, public pressure was mounting on President Bush to gain the release of the crew. On April 4, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed “regret” over the collision and the disappearance of the Chinese jet pilot. Although Chinese officials acknowledged Powell's statement as a move in the right direction, they insisted that the United States apologize for the incident. On April 8, Vice President Dick Cheney and Colin Powell rejected China’s demands for an apology but expressed “sorrow” about the disappearance of the Chinese pilot. They also drafted a letter of sympathy to the pilot's wife. The Chinese continued to demand an apology. On April 10, U.S. officials said that President Bush would be willing to offer, to the Chinese, a letter expressing regret over the incident, including a statement admitting that the U.S. aircraft landed in Chinese territory without seeking permission. The Chinese continued to demand an apology.

Finally, on April 11, the United States issued a letter to the Chinese Foreign Minister asking him to “convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss.” The letter continued, “We are very sorry the entering of China's airspace and the landing did not have verbal clearance.” To be sure, the word “apology” did not appear in the letter. But in their announcement of the letter to the Chinese people, Chinese officials chose to translate the double “very sorry” as “shenbiao qianyi,” which, in Chinese, means a deep expression of apology or regret, and is an expression not used unless one is admitting wrongdoing and accepting responsibility for it. Based on that letter and the subsequent translation, China agreed to release the 24-member crew. John Pomfret, of the Washington Post Foreign Service, asserted, “In the end, it was a matter of what the United States chose to say and what China chose to hear.” Apparently, such delicacies in communication are common during U.S.-China
negotiations. According to Bates Gill, director of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution, U.S. negotiators often use words such as “acknowledge” that, when translated into Chinese, mean “admit” or “recognize” so that the Chinese can interpret such wordings as an admission of U.S. guilt.4

Benefits of Intercultural Communication

Although the challenges of an increasingly diverse world are great, the benefits are even greater. Communicating and establishing relationships with people from different cultures can lead to a whole host of benefits, including healthier communities; increased international, national, and local commerce; reduced conflict; and personal growth through increased tolerance (see Table 1.1).

Joan England argues that genuine community is a condition of togetherness in which people have lowered their defenses and learn to accept and celebrate their differences. England contends that we can no longer define equality as “sameness,” but instead must value our differences with others whether they be about race, gender, ethnicity, lifestyle, or even occupation or professional discipline.5 Healthy communities are made up of individuals working collectively for the benefit of everyone, not just their own group. Through open and honest intercultural communication people can work together to achieve goals that benefit everyone, regardless of group or cultural orientation. According to M. Scott Peck the overall mission of human communication is (or should be) reconciliation. He argues that effective communication can ultimately lower or remove walls and barriers of misunderstanding that separate human beings from one another. Peck states that the rules for community building are the same rules for effective communication. Communication is the foundation of all human relationships. Moreover, argues Peck, the principles of community are applicable to any situation in which two people are gathered together,

Table 1.1 Benefits of Intercultural Communication

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<th>Benefits of Intercultural Communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Healthier Communities</td>
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<td>Increased Commerce</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Reduced Conflict</td>
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<td>Personal Growth through Tolerance</td>
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including the global community, in the home, business, or neighborhood. Healthy communities support all community members and strive to understand, appreciate, and acknowledge each member.6

Our ability to interact with persons from different cultures both from within and outside our borders has immense economic benefits. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the markets that hold the greatest potential for dramatic increases in U.S. exports are Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, and ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which includes Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). India, for example, offers immense prospects for growth and earning potential in practically all areas of business, especially for small and medium-sized businesses. Only through successful intercultural communication can such business potentials be realized.7

Conflict is inevitable; we will never be able to erase it. We can, however, through cooperative intercultural communication, reduce and manage conflict. Often, conflict stems from our inability to see another person’s point of view, especially if that person is from a different culture. We develop blatant generalizations about them (which are often incorrect) and mistrust them (see Table 1.2). Such feelings lead to defensive behavior, which fosters conflict. If we can learn to think and act cooperatively by engaging in assertive (not aggressive) and responsive intercultural communication, we can effectively manage and reduce conflict with others.

As you communicate with people from different cultures you learn more about them and their way of life, including their values, history, and habits, and the substance of their personality. As your relationship develops you start to understand them better, perhaps even empathizing with them. One of the things you will learn (eventually) is that although your cultures

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**Table 1.2** Common Stereotypes

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<th>...about Blacks</th>
<th>...about Whites</th>
<th>...about Asians</th>
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<td>“They’re lazy.”</td>
<td>“They think they know everything.”</td>
<td>“They’re sneaky.”</td>
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<td>“They live on welfare.”</td>
<td>“They’re all arrogant.”</td>
<td>“They’re good at math.”</td>
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<td>“They like to dance.”</td>
<td>“They’re all rich.”</td>
<td>“I wouldn’t trust them.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“They smoke crack.”</td>
<td>“They’re materialistic.”</td>
<td>“They’re really shy.”</td>
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are different, you have much in common. As humans we all have the same basic desires and needs, we just have different ways of achieving them. As we learn that our way is not the only way, we develop a tolerance for difference. This can be accomplished only when we initiate relationships with people who are different from ourselves.

Diversity in the United States

One need not travel to faraway countries to understand the need for, and experience the benefits of, intercultural communication. Largely because of immigration trends, cultural and ethnic diversity in the United States is a fact of life. Immigrants, in record numbers, are crossing U.S. borders. Nearly 34 million persons living in the United States (i.e., 12 percent) were not U.S. citizens at birth. More than half of these people were born in Latin America.8

Every ten years, at the beginning of a new decade, the U.S. Department of Commerce conducts a census. The results of the 2000 census profile the remarkable racial and ethnic diversity that has been a hallmark of American society. From 1990 to 2000 the U.S. population growth of 33 million people was the largest census-to-census increase in American history. As of January 2005, there were approximately 295 million people in the United States. Of these people, nearly 70 percent were White non-Hispanics, 13 percent were Hispanic, 12 percent were Black non-Hispanic, 4 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1 percent were American Indian.9

Overall, from 2000 to 2004 the U.S. population grew 4.3 percent. But different racial and ethnic groups grow at different rates. For example, White non-Hispanics make up nearly 70 percent of the U.S. population today. But Census Bureau data suggest that by the year 2050 non-Hispanic Whites will comprise approximately 53 percent of the population (see Figures 1.1a and 1.1b).10

One of the most significant population trends in the United States is the growth of the Hispanic population. The federal government uses the terms Hispanic and Latino interchangeably and classifies Hispanics/Latinos as an ethnic group but not a racial group. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics are a heterogeneous group composed of Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, persons from Central and South America, and persons of other Hispanic origin. Nearly 80 percent of all Hispanics-Latinos live in the southern or western areas of the United States. In fact, half of all Hispanics in the United States live in two states, California and Texas. But that trend is likely to change in the next decade as the Hispanic population expands geographically. For example, from 1990 to 2000 the Hispanic population of Green Bay, Wisconsin, grew nearly 600 percent.11
Figure 1.1a  2010 US Population Estimates

Figure 1.1b  2050 US Population Estimates
African-Americans, now the second largest non-White group, make up just over 12 percent of the total population. Whereas the Hispanic population is projected to grow considerably in the next 25 years, the African-American population is projected to remain relatively stable and increase only 1 percentage point (to 13 percent of the population) by the year 2025. Over half of all Black people live in the South and over half of all Blacks live inside central metropolitan cities.

Persons of Asian descent make up about 4 percent of the population and include persons of Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and other Asian origins. American Indians and Alaskan Natives comprise just less than 1 percent of the total U.S. population.

In addition to the rapid growth of non-White populations in the United States, another trend is emerging: an increasing number of groups are revitalizing their ethnic traditions and promoting their cultural and ethnic uniqueness through language. Language is a vital part of maintaining one’s cultural heritage, and many people become very protective of their native language. For example, in July 2002, in Brown County, Wisconsin, a county with a sizable Hmong and Hispanic community, the county Board of Commissioners made English the official language of its government and called for more spending to promote English fluency. The all-White Brown County board voted 17–8 to approve the measure. “It’s saying this is our official language. This is what we believe in, and we should encourage English,” said Board Supervisor John Vander Leest. On the other hand, in August 2004, the Texas border town of El Cenizo, whose population is heavily Hispanic, adopted Spanish as its official language. Mayor Rafael Rodriguez said that he and most of the town’s residents speak only Spanish. According to Rodriguez, “In past administrations, the meetings were done in English and they did not explain anything.” The vote means that town business will be conducted in Spanish, which then will be translated into English for official documents to meet the requirements of Texas law. Rodriguez said the city council’s intent was not to usurp English or create divisions, but to make local government more accessible to the town’s residents. “What we are looking for is that the people of the community who attend the meetings and who only speak Spanish be able to voice their opinions,” Rodriguez said.

Nearly one in five people in the United States (i.e., 47 million) speak a language other than English at home. Of those 47 million, nearly 30 million speak Spanish at home. Ten percent speak an Indo-European language, and about 7 percent speak an Asian or Pacific Islander language. Interestingly, most of the people who speak a language other than English at home report that they speak English very well. When these people are combined with those who speak only English at home, more than 92 percent of the U.S. population has no difficulty speaking English.
Although the United States prides itself on being a nation of immigrants, there is a growing sense of uncertainty, fear, and distrust between different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups. These feelings create anxiety that can foster separatism rather than unity. Arthur Schlesinger alerts us that a cult of ethnicity has arisen both among non-Anglo whites and among nonwhite minorities to denounce the idea of a melting pot, to challenge the concept of “one people,” and to protect, promote, and perpetuate separate ethnic and racial communities.

Many Americans are frustrated, confused, and uncertain about these linguistic and definitional issues. Only through intercultural communication can such uncertainty be reduced. Only when diverse people come together and interact can they unify rather than separate. Unity is impossible without communication. Intercultural communication is a necessity.

**Human Communication**

Communication is everywhere. Everywhere, every day, people are communicating. Even when they are alone, people are bombarded with communication. Communication Professor Charles Larson estimates that Americans are exposed to more than 5000 persuasive messages every day. Most people would be miserable if they were not allowed to communicate with others. Indeed, solitary confinement is perhaps the worst form of punishment inflicted on humans. Human communication—that is, the ability to symbolize and use language—separates humans from animals. Communication with others is the essence of what it means to be human.

Communication has a profound effect on humans. Through communication people conduct their lives. People define themselves via their communication with others. Communication is the vehicle by which people initiate, maintain, and terminate their relationships with others. Communication is the means by which people influence and persuade others. Through communication, local, regional, national, and international conflicts are managed and resolved.

Ironically, however, communication, and particularly one’s *style* of communication, can be the source of many problems. Marriage counselors indicate that a breakdown in communication is the most frequently cited reason for relational dissolution in the United States. A specific kind of communication; that is, public speaking, is one of the most frequently cited fears people have, even more than they fear death.

This book is about the ubiquitous subject labeled communication. Specifically, this is a book about *intercultural* communication; that is,
communication between people of different cultures and ethnicities. Throughout the course of this book you will be introduced to a whole host of concepts and theories that explain the process of people of differing cultural backgrounds coming together and exchanging verbal and non-verbal messages. Chapter 1 is designed as an introductory chapter and is divided into three parts. The first part of the chapter outlines and discusses the nature of communication. This part of the chapter will examine communication variables that apply to everyone, regardless of cultural background. The second part outlines and discusses culture. Culture is seen as a paradox; that is, culture is simultaneously a very subtle and clearly defined influence on human thought processes and behavior. The last part of the chapter presents a model of intercultural communication that will serve as the organizing scheme of the rest of this book.

The Nature of Human Communication

Because of its ubiquitous nature communication is very difficult to define. Thirty-five years ago, Frank Dance compiled a list of 98 different definitions of communication. A few years later, Dance and Carl Larson presented a listing of over 125 definitions of communication. If you were to go to your university library and select ten different introductory communication texts, the probability is that each will offer a different definition of communication. Although there are many definitions of communication, these definitions are important because the way people define communication influences how they think and theorize about communication.

Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition of communication, there are certain properties of communication upon which most communication scholars agree describe its nature. Outlined below are eight of these properties along with eight definitions of communication (see also Table 1.3). These definitions come from a variety of scholars with diverse backgrounds in the communication field.

Dimension 1: Process. Almost all communication scholars concur that communication is a process. A process is anything that is ongoing, ever-changing, and continuous. A process does not have a specific beginning or ending point. A process is not static or at rest; it is always moving. The human body is a process; it is always aging. Communication is always developing; it is never still or motionless. There is no exact beginning or ending point of a communication exchange. Although individual verbal messages have definite beginning and ending points, the overall process of communication does not. For example, Jose and Juan meet in the hallway and greet each other. Jose says, “What’s up, Juan?” and Juan says, “Not much, man.” Both Jose’s and Juan’s verbal messages have exact beginning and ending
points. But to determine exactly when and where their nonverbal communication begins and ends is virtually impossible. They may not be verbally communicating with each other, but they are still communicating nonverbally. Even if they walk away from each other they are communicating that they are no longer talking with each other. A process is something that continues to develop and change; it does not stop, nor can it reverse itself. Because communication is irreversible, it affects future communication. How Jose and Juan interact with each other today is very much influenced by how they interacted yesterday, last week, or even years ago. Think about your own relationships with your friends and how what you have said to each other in the past influences what you say today. Imagine the last time you had an argument with your boy/girlfriend, for example. You may have said some things you now regret. Such interaction influences your relationships and how you interact today.

**Dimension 2: Dynamic.** Inextricably bound to the notion that communication is a process is that communication is dynamic. The terms

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<th>Table 1.3</th>
<th>Eight Properties and Definitions of Communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Process</td>
<td>“Communication theory reflects a process point of view... you cannot talk about the beginning or the end of communication.” (Berlo)¹⁹</td>
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<td>2. Dynamic</td>
<td>“Communication is a transaction among symbol users in which meanings are dynamic, changing as a function of earlier usages and of changes in perceptions and metaperceptions. Common to both meanings is the notion that communication is timebound and irreversible.” (Bowers &amp; Bradac)²⁰</td>
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<td>3. Interactive-Transactive</td>
<td>“Communication occurs when two or more people interact through the exchange of messages.” (Goss)²¹</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Symbolic</td>
<td>“All the symbols of the mind, together with the means of conveying them through space and preserving then in time.” (Cooley)²²</td>
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<td>5. Intentional</td>
<td>“Communication has as its central interest those behavioral situations in which a source transmits a message to a receiver(s) with conscious intent to affect the latter’s behavior.” (Miller)²³</td>
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<td>6. Contextual</td>
<td>“Communication always and inevitably occurs within some context.” (Fisher)²⁴</td>
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<td>7. Ubiquitous</td>
<td>“Communication is the discriminatory response of an organism to a stimulus.” (Stevens)²⁵</td>
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<td>8. Cultural</td>
<td>“Culture is communication... communication is culture.” (Hall)²⁶</td>
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process and dynamic are closely related. Part of what makes communication a process is its dynamic nature. Something that is dynamic is considered active and/or forceful. Unfortunately, communication is typically discussed as if it were some physical entity or thing that people can hold or touch. Because communication is a dynamic process, it is impossible to capture its essence in a written definition or graphic model. This problem is not unlike the problem faced by a photographer who tries to capture the dynamic essence of a running horse with a photograph. Certainly the photograph can be very informative about the horse, but the camera cannot make a complete reproduction of the object photographed. The relationship between the fore and hind legs, the beautiful “dynamic” muscular motions cannot be truly represented in a photograph. Hence, any discussion of communication as a dynamic process is subject to the same kind of limitations as the photographer.27 To fully appreciate the process one must be a part of it or witness it in motion. As a dynamic process communication is flexible, adaptive, and fluid. Communication is a dynamic process and hence is impossible to identically replicate in a picture, drawing, or model.

Dimension 3: Interactive-Transactive. Communication is interactive and transactive because it occurs between people. While some might argue that people can communicate with themselves (what is called intrapersonal communication), most scholars believe that interaction between people is a fundamental dimension of communication. Communication requires the active participation of two people sending and receiving messages. Active participation means that people are consciously directing their messages to someone else.28 This means that communication is a two-way process, or interactive. Likewise, to say that communication is transactional means that while Jose is sending messages to Juan, Juan is simultaneously sending messages to Jose. Juan’s eye contact, facial expression, and body language are nonverbal messages to Jose informing him how his message is being received. Each person in an interactional setting simultaneously sends (encodes) and receives (decodes) messages. For example, when you listen to your friends talk about the great party they went to last night, it is obvious to you that they are sending you messages. At the same time they describe the party to you, you are sending messages to them, too. Your eye contact, smiles, and other nonverbal reactions are communicating to them your interest in their story. Hence, both you and your friends are sending and receiving messages at the same time.

Dimension 4: Symbolic. That communication is symbolic is another fundamental assumption guiding most communication scholars. A symbol is an arbitrarily selected and learned stimulus that represents something else. Symbols can be verbal or nonverbal. Symbols are the vehicle by which
the thoughts and ideas of one person can be communicated to another person. Messages are constructed with verbal and nonverbal symbols. Through symbols meanings are transferred between people. Symbols (i.e., words) have no natural relationship with what they represent (they are arbitrarily selected and learned). For example, the verbal symbols “C.A.T.” have no natural connection with cute, fuzzy animals that purr and like to be scratched. The symbols “C.A.T.” have no meaning in other languages (see Figure 1.2).

Nonverbal symbols are arbitrary as well. Showing someone your upright middle finger may not communicate much in some cultures. Verbal and nonverbal symbols are only meaningful to people who have learned to associate them with what they represent. People can allow just about any symbols they want to represent just about anything they want. For example, you and your friends probably communicate with each other using private symbols that no one else understands. You have your own secret code. You have words, phrases, gestures, and handshakes that only you and your friends know, understand, and use. This allows you to communicate with each other with your own “foreign” language. Drug dealers and users, for example, have an elaborate and highly rule-governed language that allows them to communicate about their illegal activities. In drug language, the phrase “blow a splif” is symbolic code for “smoke a marijuana cigarette.”

Any verbal language (e.g., English, Chinese, Russian) is a code made up of symbols. The letters of the English alphabet (e.g., “A, B, C . . .”) are a set of symbols that represent sounds. When we combine the individual symbols (e.g., “C + A + T”) they become meaningful. By using symbols, people can represent their thoughts and ideas through writing or speaking. Once
an idea has been encoded with symbols, it becomes a message. During communication, people encode their thoughts and send them to someone else. The other person listens to the message and translates it; that is, decodes it. When Jose saw Juan he encoded a greeting. Juan decoded (i.e., translated) the message and encoded a response. Interaction, then, is the process of encoding and decoding messages. People who speak different languages are simply using different codes.

**Dimension 5: Intentional.** Perhaps one of the most debated issues regarding the communication process centers around intentionality. On one side of the debate are those who argue that communication is intentional. On the other side are those who insist that communication can occur unintentionally. Intentional communication exists whenever two or more people consciously engage in interaction with some purpose. For example, if Kyoko says to Akira, “Hey, do you want to go out to eat tonight?” and Akira responds by saying, “Yeah, that sounds like a good idea!” intentional communication has surely taken place.

Unintentional communication may exist, however. For example, at a party, Kyoko thinks that Akira is consciously ignoring her because he interacts with several other people. Kyoko senses that Akira is consciously sending her a message when, in fact, Akira’s intention is simply to talk with new friends. Akira is not intentionally ignoring Kyoko but she thinks that he is indeed sending her a message (i.e., a nonverbal message). Since a response has been elicited in Kyoko, some communication scholars argue that communication has occurred.

Three interpretations can be drawn from the above discussion. To many communication scholars intentionality is a central property of the communication process. Others insist that any message interpreted by a person qualifies as communication whether or not the message was intentionally sent. Still others insist that all behavior, intentional or not, is informative and meaningful, and thus is communicative. Thus, whenever a person (e.g., Kyoko in the above example) responds to some stimulus (e.g., Akira talking with other people) communication has occurred. In this book, the type of communication that will be discussed is intentional communication. This book takes the position that intentional communication, either verbal or nonverbal, is more informative than unintentional communication.

**Dimension 6: Contextual.** Communication is dependent on the context in which it occurs. The effects and outcomes, styles and fashions, and the resulting meaning are all dependent on the context in which the communication occurs. In this book, a context is the cultural, physical, relational, and perceptual environment in which communication occurs. In many ways the context defines the meaning of any messages. For example,
the context of the classroom defines the kind of communication that will occur. Most students sit quietly while the professor psychologically stimulates them with a brilliant lecture.

There are essentially four different kinds of context that influence the process of communication: (a) the cultural and microcultural environment, (b) the physical environment, (c) the socio-relational environment, and (d) the perceptual environment. The cultural context includes all of the factors and influences that make up one’s culture. This context will be discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter. The physiological context is the actual geographical space or territory in which the communication takes place. For example, communication between Juan and Jose will be different when they are interacting on a busy street in a big city compared to when they are in their university library. The socio-relational environment refers to social roles and group memberships (e.g., demographics). Sex, age, religious affiliation, education level, and economic status affect how one communicates and relates with others. Finally, the perceptual context includes all of the motivations, intentions, and personality traits people bring to the communication event. When you are interacting with your professor about an examination that you just failed, you have a very different set of motivations and intentions from when you are asking someone out on a date.

**Dimension 7: Ubiquitous.** That communication is ubiquitous simply means that communication is everywhere, done by everyone, all of the time. Humans are constantly bombarded with verbal and nonverbal messages. Wherever one goes there is some communication happening. In fact some scholars in the field of communication argue that it is impossible to not communicate. Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson have argued that one cannot not communicate. The logic of their argument is that (a) behavior has no opposite; one cannot not behave; (b) in an interactional setting, all behavior has informational value and/or message value; it is informative; (c) since behavior is informative, it is communicative; and (d) if behavior is communicative, and one cannot not behave, then one cannot not communicate.³⁰

**Dimension 8: Cultural.** Culture shapes communication and communication is culture bound. People from different cultures communicate differently. The verbal and nonverbal symbols we use to communicate with our friends and families are strongly influenced by our culture. Perhaps the most obvious verbal communication difference between two cultures is language. Even cultures speaking the same language have different meanings for different symbols, however. For example, although English is the dominant language spoken in the United States and England, many words and phrases have different meanings between these two cultures. In England, to “bomb”
an examination is to have performed very well. To have “intercourse” with someone is simply to talk with them. When in London, do not bother to ask for directions to the nearest bathroom or restroom. In England, it is called the “water closet” or the “WC.” Australians also speak English, but have a variety of colloquialisms not well understood by persons from the United States (see Table 1.4).

Culture also has a dramatic effect on nonverbal communication. Nonverbal symbols, gestures, and perceptions of personal space and time vary significantly from culture to culture. In the United States, for example, people generally stand about two-and-a-half feet, or an arm’s length, away from others when communicating. In many Middle Eastern cultures people stand very close to one another when interacting, especially men (see Figure 1.3). They do this in order to smell each other’s breath. In Saudi Arabia, two men walking together are likely to be holding hands as a sign of trust.

Communication, then, is the dynamic process of encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal messages within a defined cultural, physiological, socio-relational, and perceptual environment. Although many of our messages are sent intentionally, many others, perhaps our nonverbal messages, can unintentionally influence others.

Human Communication Apprehension

Although communication is difficult to define, we know that people begin to communicate at birth and continue communicating throughout their lives. We also know that many people experience fear and anxiety when communicating with others, particularly in situations such as public speaking, class presentations, a first date, or during a job interview. The fear or anxiety people experience when communicating with others is called communication
In the past thirty-five years a substantial body of research has accumulated regarding the nature and prevalence of communication apprehension. Jim McCroskey, considered the father of the communication apprehension concept, argues that nearly everyone experiences some kind of communication apprehension sometimes, but roughly 1 in 5 adults in the United States suffers from communication apprehension virtually whenever they communicate with others. McCroskey argues that experiencing communication apprehension is normal; that is, all of us experience it occasionally, but it can be a problem for us. McCroskey argues that there are four types of communication apprehension: traitlike, context-based, audience-based, and situational. Traitlike communication apprehension is an enduring general personality predisposition where an individual experiences communication apprehension most of the time across most communication situations. Twenty percent of adults in the United States experience traitlike communication apprehension. Context-based communication apprehension is restricted to a certain generalized context, such as public speaking, group meetings, or job
interviews. Persons with context-based communication apprehension experienced anxiety only in certain contexts and not others. Audience-based communication apprehension is triggered not by the specific context, but by the specific person or audience with whom one is communicating. Hence, persons with audience-based communication apprehension experience anxiety when communicating with strangers, or their superiors. College students with audience-based communication apprehension may experience anxiety when communicating with professors, but not when communicating with other students. Finally, situational-based communication apprehension, experienced by virtually everyone, occurs with the combination of a specific context and a specific audience. For example, students may feel anxious interacting with professors only when they are alone with the professor in the professor’s office. At other times, perhaps in the hallways or in the classroom, interacting with the professor may not be a problem. To repeat, virtually everyone experiences communication apprehension at some time. To experience communication apprehension does not mean you are abnormal or sick. What follows is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24), a scale designed to measure your degree of communication apprehension. Take a few moments and complete the scale.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.1

Directions: This instrument is composed of twenty-four statements concerning your feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Are Undecided, (4) Disagree, or (5) Strongly Disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Many of the statements are similar to other statements. Do not be concerned about this. Work quickly; just record your first impressions.

1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
5. Engaging in group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in group discussions.
8. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings.
9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
17. When conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
18. I am afraid to speak up in conversations.
19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Scoring: The PRCA-24 allows you to compute a total score and four subscores. The total score represents your degree of traitlike CA. Total scores may range from 24 to 120. McCroskey argues that any score above 72 indicates general CA. Scores above 80 indicate a very high level of CA. Scores below 59 indicate a very low level of CA.

Total PRCA Score:

Step 1. Add what you marked for scale items 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, and 24.
Step 2. Add what you marked for scale items 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, and 23.

Step 3. Subtract the score from step 1 from 84 (i.e., 84 minus the score of step 1). Then add the score of step 2 to that total. The sum is your PRCA score.

The subscores indicate your degree of CA across four common contexts: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. For these scales, a score above 18 is high and a score above 23 is very high.

**Subscores for Contexts:**

**Group Subscore:** 18 + scores for items 2, 4, and 6, minus scores for items 1, 3, and 5.

**Meeting Subscore:** 18 + scores for items 8, 9, and 10, minus scores for items 7, 10, and 11.

**Interpersonal Subscore:** 18 + scores for items 14, 16, and 17, minus scores for items 13, 15, and 18.

**Public Speaking Subscore:** 18 + scores for items 19, 21, and 23, minus scores for items 20, 22, and 24.

Source: Copyright James C. McCroskey. Scale used with permission of James C. McCroskey.

**The Nature of Culture**

Like communication, culture is ubiquitous and has a profound effect on humans. Culture is simultaneously invisible yet pervasive. As we go about our daily lives, we are not overtly conscious of our culture’s influence on us. How often have you sat in your dorm room or classroom, for example, and consciously thought about what it means to be an American? As you stand in the lunch line do you say to yourself, “I am acting like an American”? As you sit in your classroom do you say to yourself, “The professor is really acting like an American”? Yet most of your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are culturally driven. One need only step into a culture different from one’s own to feel the immense impact of culture.

Culture has a direct influence on the physical, relational, and perceptual environment. For example, the next time you enter your communication classroom, consider how the room is arranged *physically*, including where you sit and where the professor teaches, the location of the chalkboard, windows, etc. Does the professor lecture from behind a podium? Do the students sit facing the professor? Is the chalkboard used? Next, think about
your relationship with the professor and the other students in your class. Is the relationship formal or informal? Do you interact with the professor and students about topics other than class material? Would you consider the relationship personal or impersonal? Finally, think about your perceptual disposition; that is, your attitudes, motivations, and emotions about the class. Are you happy to be in the class? Do you enjoy attending? Are you nervous when the instructor asks you a question? To a great extent, the answers to these questions are contingent on your culture. The physical arrangement of classrooms, the social relationship between students and teachers, and the perceptual profiles of the students and teachers vary significantly from culture to culture.

Like communication, culture is difficult to define. Australian anthropologist Roger Keesing argues that

culture does not have some true and sacred and eternal meaning we are trying to discover, but that like other symbols, it means whatever we use it to mean; and that as with other analytical concepts, human users must carve out—and try to partly agree on—a class of natural phenomena it can most strategically label.32

Just about everyone has his or her own definition of culture. To be sure, over 40 years ago two well-known anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, found and examined 300 definitions of culture, none of which was the same.33

Perhaps too often people think of culture only in terms of the fine arts, geography, or history. Small towns or rural communities are often accused of having no culture. Yet culture exists everywhere. There is as much culture in Gallup City, New Mexico (population 52), as there is in New York City, New York (population 8,008,278). The two cultures are simply different. Simply put, culture is people.34

Although there may not be a universally accepted definition of culture, there are a number of properties of culture upon which most people agree describe its essence. In this book, culture is defined as “an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors, shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems.”

Accumulated Pattern of Values, Beliefs, and Behaviors. Cultures can be defined by their value and belief systems and by the actions of their members. People who exist in the same culture generally share similar values and beliefs (see Table 1.5). In the United States, for example, individuality is highly valued. An individual’s self-interest takes precedence over group interests.
Americans believe that people are unique. Moreover, Americans value personal independence. Conversely, in Japan, a collectivistic and homogeneous culture, a sense of groupness and group harmony is valued. Most Japanese see themselves as members of a group first, as individuals second. Where Americans value independence, Japanese value interdependence. Norwegians value conformity. Norwegian children are taught to put the needs of society above their own. Cultural aspects of conformity are embodied in what Norwegians call Janteloven, which denotes the fear of individuality and the tendency to stand out in a crowd. Although the Norwegian literacy rate is among the highest in the world, Norwegian schools do not have accelerated programs for gifted and talented students. Norwegians believe that to divide students on intellectual ability would disrupt the social cohesion.

The values of a particular culture lead to a set of expectations and rules prescribing how people should behave in that culture. Although many Americans prefer to think of themselves as unique individuals, most Americans behave in similar ways. Observe the students around you in your classes. Although you may prefer to think that you are very different from your peers, you are really quite similar to them. Most of your peers follow a very similar behavioral pattern to your own. For example, on a day-to-day basis, most of your peers attend classes, take examinations, go to lunch, study, party, and write papers.

Americans share a similar behavioral profile. Most Americans work an average of 40 hours a week, receive some form of payment for their work, and pay some of their earnings in taxes. Most Americans spend their money on homes and cars. Almost every home in the United States has a television. Although Americans view themselves as unique individuals, most of them have very similar behavioral patterns.
An Identifiable Group of People With a Common History. Because the members of a particular culture share similar values, beliefs, and behaviors, they are identifiable as a distinct group. In addition to their shared values, beliefs, and behaviors, the members of a particular culture share a common history. Any culture’s past inextricably binds it to the present and guides its future. At the core of any culture are traditions that are passed on to future generations. In many cultures, history is a major component of the formal and informal education systems. To learn a culture’s history is to learn that culture’s values. One way that children in the United States develop their sense of independence, for example, is by learning about the Declaration of Independence, one of this country’s most sacred documents. Elementary school children in Iran, for example, learn of the historical significance regarding the political and religious revolution that took place in their culture in the 1970s and 1980s. Russian children are taught about the arts in Russian history. Russian children are taught about famous Russian composers, including Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Stravinsky. The art of the past helps Russians remember their culture and history as they face disruptive social and political crises. Such historical lessons are the glue that binds people.36

Verbal and Nonverbal Symbol Systems. One of the most important elements of any culture is its communication system. The verbal and nonverbal symbols with which the members of a culture communicate are culture bound. To see the difference between the verbal codes of any two cultures is easy. The dominant verbal code in the United States is English, whereas the dominant verbal code in Mexico is Spanish. But although two cultures may share the same verbal code, they may have dramatically different verbal styles. Most White Americans, for example, use a very direct, instrumental, personal style when speaking English. Many Native Americans who also speak English use an indirect, impersonal style and may prefer the use of silence as opposed to words.37

Nonverbal code systems vary significantly across cultures as well. Nonverbal communication includes the use of body language, gestures, facial expressions, voice, smell, personal and geographical space, time, and artifacts (see Figure 1.4). Body language can communicate a great deal about one’s culture. When adults interact with young children in the United States, for example, it is not uncommon for the adult to pat the head of the child. This nonverbal gesture is often seen as a form of endearment and is culturally acceptable. In Thailand, however, where the head is considered the seat of the soul, such a gesture is unacceptable. Belching during or after a meal is viewed by most Americans as rude and impolite, perhaps even disgusting. But in parts of Korea and the Middle East, belching after a meal might be interpreted as a compliment to the cook.38
People communicate nonverbally through smell also. Americans, in particular, seem obsessed with the smell of the human body and home environment. Think of all of the products you used this morning before you left for class that were designed to mask the natural scent of your body, including soap, toothpaste, mouthwash, deodorant, and cologne and/or perfume. Persons from other cultures often complain that Americans tend to smell antiseptic.

**Microcultural Groups.** Within most cultures, groups of people, or microcultures, coexist within the mainstream society. Microcultures exist within the broader rules and guidelines of the dominant cultural milieu but are distinct in some way, perhaps racially; linguistically; or via their sexual orientation, age, or even occupation. In some ways, everyone is a member of some microcultural group. Microcultures often may have histories that differ from the dominant cultural group. In many cases microcultural groups are subordinate in some way, perhaps politically or economically. In the United States, Native American tribes might be considered
microcultures. For example, in addition to their formal education provided by the larger culture, Navaho children informally learn their microculture's history by hearing the traditions of their people.39

The Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, can be considered a microcultural group. Although the Amish are subject to most of the same laws as any other group of citizens, they have unique values and communication systems that differentiate them from mainstream American life. For example, Amish children are exempt from compulsory attendance in public schools after eighth grade. Although almost all Amish speak English, when they interact amongst themselves they speak German. During church services, a form of High German is used. Hence, most Amish of Lancaster County speak three languages.40

**A Contextual Model of Intercultural Communication**

Intercultural communication occurs whenever a minimum of two persons from different cultures or microcultures come together and exchange verbal and nonverbal symbols. A central theme throughout this book is that intercultural communication is contextual. A contextual model of intercultural communication is presented in Figure 1.5.

According to the model, intercultural communication occurs within a variety of contexts, including a cultural, microcultural, environmental,
perceptual, and socio-relational context. A context is a complex combination of a variety of factors, including the setting, situation, circumstances, background, and overall framework within which communication occurs. The largest, outer circle of the model represents the cultural context. This is the largest circle because the dominant culture permeates every aspect of the communicative exchange, even the physical geography. All communicative exchanges between persons occur within some culture. In this textbook, the cultural context is the focus of Chapter 2.

The next largest circle in the model is the microcultural context. As mentioned earlier, within most cultures, separate groups of people co-exist. These groups, called microcultures, are in some way different from the larger cultural milieu. Sometimes the difference is ethnicity, race, or language. Often, microcultures are treated differently by the members of the larger culture. Microcultures are the focus of Chapter 3.

The next largest circle in the model is the environmental context. This circle represents the physical geographical location of the interaction. While culture prescribes the overall rules for communication, the physical location indicates when and where the specific rules apply. For example, in the United States there are rules about yelling. Depending on the physical location, yelling can be prohibited or encouraged. In a church, yelling is generally prohibited, whereas at a football game yelling is the preferred method of communicating. The physical environment includes the physical geography, architecture, landscape design, and even the climate of a particular culture. All of these environmental factors play a key role in how people communicate. In this book, the environmental context is discussed in Chapter 4.

The two circles in the model within the socio-relational context represent the perceptual contexts of the individuals interacting. The perceptual context refers to the individual characteristics of the interactants, including their cognitions, attitudes, dispositions, and motivations. How an individual perceives the environment and how he or she gathers, stores, and retrieves information is uniquely human but also culturally influenced. How an individual develops attitudes about others, including stereotypes, changes somewhat from culture to culture. The perceptual context of the individual is the emphasis of Chapter 5.

The circle encompassing the perceptual contexts in the model is the socio-relational context. This refers to the relationship between the interactants. Whenever two people come together and interact they establish a relationship. Within this relationship each person assumes a role. Right now, you are assuming the role of student. The person teaching your communication class is assuming the role of teacher. Roles prescribe how people should behave. Most of the people with whom you interact are related to
you via your role as student. The reason you interact with so many professors is because you are a student. What you interact about, that is, the topic of your interaction, is also defined by your role as student. You and your professors interact about courses. How you interact with your professor, that is, the style of talk (e.g., polite language), is also prescribed by your role as student. The language and style of your talk with your professor is probably very different from the language and style of talk you use when you go back to your dorm room and interact with your friends. Probably the last ten people with whom you interacted were directly related to you via your role as student. When you go back to your hometown during semester break and step into the role of son/daughter or brother/sister, you are assuming a different role and your interaction changes accordingly. Your interaction varies as a function of what role you are assuming.

Roles vary from culture to culture. Although in just about every culture there are student and teacher role relationships, how those roles are defined vary significantly. What it means to be a student in the United States is very different from what it means to be a student in Japan. In Japan, for example, students go to school six days a week. Japanese teachers are highly respected and play a very influential role in the Japanese student’s life. What it means to be a mother or father varies considerably from one culture to another. In the Masai culture of Kenya, a woman is defined by her fertility. To be defined as a mother in Masai culture, a woman must endure circumcision (i.e., clitoridectomy), an arranged marriage, and wife-beating. One’s roles prescribe the types of verbal and nonverbal symbols that are exchanged. In this book, the socio-relational context and role relationships are the focus of Chapter 6.

In the model, the socio-relational context is graphically represented by two circles labeled nonverbal and verbal messages. The nonverbal circle is the larger of the two and is represented by a continuous line. The verbal circle is smaller and is represented as a series of dashes in the shape of a circle. The nonverbal message circle is larger than the verbal message circle because the majority of our communicative behavior is nonverbal. Whether we are using words or not, we are communicating nonverbally through eye contact, body stance, and space. In addition, our nonverbal behavior is ongoing; we cannot not behave. The verbal message circle is a series of dashes in the shape of a circle to represent the digital quality of verbal communication. By digital, we mean that, unlike our nonverbal communication, our verbal communication is made up of words that have recognizable and discrete beginning and ending points. A word is like a digit. We can start and stop talking with words. Our nonverbal behavior goes on continuously, however. Chapter 7 concentrates on verbal communication codes and Chapter 8 centers on nonverbal codes.
The general theme of this book, as represented in the model, is that intercultural communication is defined by the interdependence of these various contexts. The perceptual contexts combine to create the socio-relational context, which is defined by the verbal and nonverbal messages sent. The socio-relational context is influenced by the environmental context and defined by the microcultural and cultural contexts. These contexts combine in a complex formula to create the phenomenon of intercultural communication.

**Intercultural Communication and Uncertainty**

When we interact with someone from a different culture we are faced with a lot of uncertainty. We may not know anything about the person’s culture, values, habits, behavior, dress, and so on. We may not know what to say or do in such circumstances. This uncertainty about the other person may make us feel nervous and anxious. Communication theorist Charles Berger contends that the task of interacting with someone from a different culture who may look, act, and communicate differently presents the intercultural communicator with some very complex predictive and explanatory problems. To some extent, to effectively interact with someone from a different culture we must be able to predict how our interaction partner is likely to behave and, based on those predictions, select our appropriate verbal and nonverbal messages.43

Berger theorizes that whenever we come together and interact with a stranger, our primary concern is to reduce uncertainty, especially when the other person is someone who we will meet again, provides rewards for us, or behaves in some deviant way. Often, when we are faced with high levels of uncertainty we experience anxiety. In high-uncertainty situations our primary goal is to reduce uncertainty and to increase the predictability about the other. This can be accomplished via specific verbal and nonverbal communication strategies such as question asking and appropriate nonverbal expressiveness.44

Some types of communication situations may be more or less anxiety producing than others. For example, Buss argues that situations that are novel, unfamiliar, and/or dissimilar lead to increased anxiety. Those situations containing new, atypical, and/or conspicuously different stimuli are likely to increase our sense of anxiety. Based on this criteria, initial interaction with someone, or interacting with someone from a different culture, may produce heightened anxiety.45

Intercultural communication experts William Gudykunst and Young Kim argue that when we interact with people from different cultures, we tend to view them as strangers. Strangers are unknown people who are members of
different groups. Anyone entering a relatively unknown or unfamiliar environment falls under the rubric of stranger. Interaction with people from different cultures tends to involve the highest degree of “strangerness” and the lowest degree of familiarity. Thus, there is greater uncertainty in initial interaction with strangers than with people with whom we are familiar. According to Gudykunst and Kim, actual or anticipated interaction with members of different groups (e.g., cultures or ethnic groups different from our own) leads to anxiety.46

If we are too anxious about interacting with strangers, we tend to avoid them. Neuliep and McCroskey state that this type of communication anxiety can be labeled intercultural communication apprehension; that is, the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people from different groups, especially different cultural or ethnic groups.47

**Intercultural Communication Apprehension**

Successfully interacting with someone from a different culture requires a degree of communication competence. According to Brian Spitzberg, most models of communication competence include a cognitive, affective, and behavioral component. The cognitive component refers to how much one knows about communication. The affective component includes one’s motivation to approach or avoid communication. The behavioral component refers to the skills one has to interact competently. An interculturally competent communicator is *motivated* to communicate, *knowledgeable* about how to communicate, and *skilled* in communicating. In addition, an interculturally competent communicator is *sensitive* to the expectations of the context in which communication occurs. Competent communicators interact effectively by adapting messages appropriately to the context. Competent communicators understand the rules, norms, and expectations of the relationship and do not significantly violate them. Communicators are effective to the degree that their goals are accomplished successfully.48

According to Neuliep and McCroskey, a person’s affective orientation toward intercultural communication involves the individual’s degree of motivation to approach or avoid a given intercultural context or person. Communication studies indicate that at least 20 percent of the United States adult population experiences high levels of fear or anxiety even when communicating with members of their own culture. Other studies indicates that 99% of Americans experience communication apprehension at some time in their lives, perhaps during a job interview, a first date, etc. One outcome of communication apprehension is to avoid communication. When people feel anxious about communicating with others they tend to avoid such situations.
Given that intercultural communication may be more anxiety producing than other forms of communication, the number of people suffering from intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) may be considerable. Identifying such individuals may be the first step toward more effective and successful intercultural communication.49

In Box 1.2 is an instrument called the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA). This scale was developed by communication researchers Neuliep and McCroskey. The PRICA is very similar to the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) that you completed earlier in this chapter. The difference between these two scales is that the PRICA assesses your degree of apprehension about communicating with someone from a culture different from yours. After completing each scale you can compare your scores. The PRICA instrument is composed of 14 statements concerning your feelings about communication with people from other cultures. Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are undecided, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers and many of the statements are designed to be similar to other statements. Do not be concerned about this. Work quickly and record your first impressions. That you respond to these statements as honestly as possible is very important or else your score will not be valid.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.2

**Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension**

(1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are undecided, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree

- [ ] 1. Generally, I am comfortable interacting with a group of people from different cultures.
- [ ] 2. I am tense and nervous while interacting in group discussions with people from different cultures.
- [ ] 3. I like to get involved in group discussions with others who are from different cultures.
- [ ] 4. Engaging in a group discussion with people from different cultures makes me tense and nervous.
The Necessity of Intercultural Communication

To score the instrument, reverse your original response for items # 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 14. For example, for each of these items 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, and 5 = 1. If your original score for Item #2 was 1, change it to a 5. If your original score for Item #4 was a 2, change it to a 4, etc. After reversing the score for these seven items, then sum all 14 items. Scores cannot be higher than 70 or lower than 14. Higher scores (e.g., 50–70) indicate high intercultural communication apprehension. Low scores (e.g., 14–28) indicate low intercultural communication apprehension.

To the degree to which you answered the items honestly, your score is a fairly reliable and valid assessment of your motivation to approach or avoid intercultural communication. Spitzberg argues that as your motivation increases so does your confidence. As confidence increases, intercultural communication competence also is likely to increase. People who are nervous and tense about interacting with people from different cultures are less likely to approach intercultural communication situations and probably are not confident about encountering new people from different cultures.50
Another key component to intercultural competence is knowledge. Communication knowledge refers to the ability to perceive situational variables that influence one’s communicative choices and to select behaviors adaptive to those situational variables. Communication knowledge also involves understanding the consequences of enacting behaviors. Knowledgeable communicators have a relatively large repertoire of behavioral strategies for communicating. They are able to perceive how others are responding to their behaviors and refine and adapt their behaviors accordingly. To be interculturally competent communicators need knowledge of other cultures. Hopefully, this book will provide a foundation from which to build your communication knowledge about people from other cultures.

Intercultural communication competence also involves skill; that is, the ability to enact the desired and appropriate behavioral options. Because any given behavior might be judged competent in one culture and incompetent in another, skillful communicators are sensitive to the context in which communication occurs. They choose from their behavioral repertoires the kinds of verbal and nonverbal actions most appropriate for the culture and situation. Empathy, respect, interest in the particular culture, flexibility, and tolerance play key roles in intercultural sensitivity. Skillful intercultural communicators must be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for people of other cultures.51

FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS
ABOUT INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

A central premise of this book is that intercultural communication is a complex combination of the cultural, microcultural, environmental, perceptual, and socio-relational contexts between two people who are encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal messages. Because of the complexity of this process, a fundamental assumption about intercultural communication is that, during intercultural communication, the message sent is usually not the message received.

Assumption #1: During intercultural communication, the message sent is usually not the message received.

Whenever people from different cultures come together and exchange messages, they bring with them a whole host of thoughts, values, emotions, and behaviors that were planted and cultivated by culture. As we have said, intercultural communication is a symbolic activity where the thoughts and ideas of one are encoded into a verbal and/or nonverbal message format, then transmitted through some channel to another person who must decode
it, interpret it, and respond to it. This process of encoding, decoding, and interpreting is filled with cultural noise. Noted intercultural communication scholar William Gudykunst has noted that during intercultural communication, culture acts as a filter through which all messages, both verbal and nonverbal, must pass. To this extent, all intercultural exchanges are necessarily, to a greater or lesser extent, charged with ethnocentrism. Hence, during intercultural communication, the message sent is not the message received.52

Ethnocentrism refers to the idea that one’s own culture is the center of everything, and all other groups (or cultures) are scaled and rated with reference to it. Sociologist W. Sumner argued that ethnocentrism nourishes a group’s pride and vanity while looking on outsiders, or outgroups, with contempt.53 Although culture may mediate the extent to which we experience it, ethnocentrism is thought to be universal. One of the effects of ethnocentrism is that it clouds our perception of others. We have a tendency to judge others, and their communication, based on the standards set by our own culture. Neuliep and McCroskey have argued that the concept of ethnocentrism is essentially descriptive, and not necessarily pejorative. Ethnocentrism may serve a very valuable function when one’s ingroup is under attack or threatened. Moreover, ethnocentrism forms the basis for patriotism, group loyalty, and the willingness to sacrifice for one’s own group. To be sure, however, ethnocentrism can be problematic. In not looking past their own culture, people see little importance in understanding other cultures. At high levels, ethnocentrism is an obstacle to effective intercultural communication.54

Neuliep and McCroskey have developed the GENE scale, which is designed to measure ethnocentrism. The GENE scale and the directions for completing it are presented below.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.3

The GENE scale is composed of 22 statements concerning your feelings about your culture and other cultures. In the space provided to the left of each item indicate the degree to which the statement applies to you by marking whether you (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) are neutral, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree with the statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Some of the statements are similar. Remember, everyone experiences some degree of ethnocentrism. Fortunately, as we will see in Chapter 5, ethnocentrism can be managed and reduced. Be honest! Work quickly and record your first response.

1. _____ Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture.
2. _____ My culture should be the role model for other cultures.
3. _____ People from other cultures act strange when they come into my culture.
4. _____ Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture.
5. _____ Other cultures should try to be more like my culture.
6. _____ I’m not interested in the values and customs of other cultures.
7. _____ People in my culture could learn a lot from people of other cultures.
8. _____ Most people from other cultures just don’t know what’s good for them.
9. _____ I respect the values and customs of other cultures.
10. _____ Other cultures are smart to look up to our culture.
11. _____ Most people would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.
12. _____ I have many friends from other cultures.
13. _____ People in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere.
14. _____ Lifestyles in other cultures are not as valid as those in my culture.
15. _____ I’m very interested in the values and customs of other cultures.
16. _____ I apply my values when judging people who are different.
17. _____ I see people who are similar to me as virtuous.
18. _____ I do not cooperate with people who are different.
19. _____ Most people in my culture just don’t know what is good for them.
20. _____ I do not trust people who are different.
21. _____ I dislike interacting with people from different cultures.
22. _____ I have little respect for the values and customs of other cultures.

To determine your ethnocentrism score, complete the following steps:

Step 1: Add your responses to scale items 4, 7, and 9.
Step 2: Add your responses to scale items 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 20, 21, and 22.
Step 3: Subtract the sum from Step 1 from 18 (i.e., 18 minus Step 1 sum).
Step 4: Add the results of Step 2 and Step 3. This sum is your generalized ethnocentrism score (note that not all items are used in scoring). Higher scores indicate higher ethnocentrism. Scores above 55 are considered high ethnocentrism.
Assumption #2: Intercultural communication is primarily a nonverbal act between people.

Some foreign language teachers might have us believe that competency in a foreign language is tantamount to effective and successful intercultural communication in the culture that speaks that language. To be sure, proficiency in a foreign language expedites the intercultural communication experience. But intercultural communication is primarily and fundamentally a nonverbal process. The expression of intimacy, power, and status among communicators is typically accomplished nonverbally through paralinguistic cues, proxemics, haptics, oculesics, and olfacts. In Korea, for example, one’s hierarchical position is displayed via vocal tone and pitch. When a subordinate takes receipt of an important piece of paper, such as a graded exam from a respected professor, the student grasps it with both hands (not just one), accompanied with a slight nod of the head, and indirect eye contact—all nonverbal signs of deference.

The well-known anthropologist Edward Hall has argued that people from different cultures live in different sensory worlds. Hall claims that people from different cultures engage in a selective screening of sensory information that ultimately leads to different perceptions of experience. Regarding olfacts (smell), most cultures establish norms for acceptable and unacceptable scents associated with the human body. When people fail to fit into the realm of olfactic cultural acceptability, their odor signals others that something is wrong with their physical, emotional, or mental health. In the United States, we are obsessed with masking certain smells, especially those of the human body. In Western and Westernized cultures, body odor is regarded as unpleasant and distasteful, and great efforts are expended in its removal. Many Muslims believe that cleanliness of the body and purity of the soul are related. Muslim women are told to purify themselves after menstruation. Cleanliness is prescribed before and after meals. As we will see in Chapter 8, our nonverbal messages complement, augment, accent, substitute for, and repeat our verbal messages.

Assumption #3: Intercultural communication necessarily involves a clash of communicator style.

In the United States, talk is a highly valued commodity. People are routinely evaluated by their speech. Yet silence—that is, knowing when not to speak—is a fundamental prerequisite for linguistic and cultural competence. The use and interpretation of silence varies dramatically across cultures. In many collectivistic cultures, such as Japan and Korea, silence can carry more meaning than words, especially in the maintenance
of intimate relationships. In fact, the Japanese, and some Native American tribes in the United States, believe that the expression of relational intimacy is best accomplished nonverbally. They believe that having to put one’s thoughts and emotions into words somehow cheapens and discounts them.

In the United States we value, and employ, a very direct and personal style of verbal communication. Personal pronouns are an essential ingredient to the composition of just about any utterance. Our motto is “Get to the point,” “Don’t beat around the bush,” “Tell it like it is,” “Speak your mind.” Many cultures, however, prefer an indirect and impersonal communication style. In these cultures, there is no need to articulate every message. True understanding is implicit, coming not from words but from actions in the environment where speakers provide only hints or insinuations. The Chinese say, “One should use the eyes and ears, not the mouth,” and “Disaster emanates from careless talk.” The Chinese consider the wisest and most trustworthy person as the one who talks the least but the one who listens, watches, and restricts his or her verbal communication.57

Assumption #4: Intercultural communication is a group phenomenon experienced by individuals.

Whenever we interact with a person from a different culture we carry with us assumptions and impressions of that other person. The specific verbal and nonverbal messages that we exchange are usually tailored for the person based on those assumptions and impressions. Often, such assumptions and impressions are based on characteristics of the other person by virtue of his or her membership in groups such as his or her culture, race, sex, age, and occupation group. In other words, we have a tendency to see others not as individuals with unique thoughts, ideas, and goals, but rather as an “Asian,” or a “woman,” or an “old person,” or “a cab driver.” In other words, we do not see the person, we see the groups to which the person belongs. The problem with this is that group data may not be a reliable source upon which to construct our messages. Because someone belongs to a specific racial, ethnic, sex, or age group does not necessarily mean that he or she takes on the thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes associated with such groups. Thus, the potential for miscommunication is great. During intercultural communication, we have to be mindful that while the person with whom we are interacting is from a different cultural group, he or she is also an individual. Only through intercultural communication can we ever get to know the person as an individual.
Assumption #5: Intercultural communication is a cycle of stress and adaptation.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when we come together with a person from a different culture, we may feel uncertain, apprehensive, and anxious. Such feelings are stressful. Hence, sometimes intercultural communication can be stressful. The good news is that we can learn and adapt to such stress and eventually grow. During intercultural communication we have to be mindful that the communication strategies we use with persons with whom we are familiar may not be effective with persons from other cultures. Thus, we have to learn to adapt and adjust our communication style. We have to recognize that we will make mistakes, learn from them, adapt, and move on. A good beginning point is to recognize that people from different cultures are different—not better or worse, but simply different. Once we are able to do this, we can adjust and adapt our verbal and nonverbal messages accordingly and become competent interactants.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to emphasize the necessity of intercultural communication and to define and clarify the terms communication and culture. The first part of this chapter argued that recent technological, political, and sociological advancements have created a global village only dreamed about twenty years ago. While the dream of a global village holds great promise, the reality is that diverse people have diverse opinions, values, and beliefs that clash and too often result in violence. Only through intercultural communication can such conflict be managed and reduced.

The second part of this chapter offered some definitions of communication and culture. Both terms are difficult to define. Communication involves the simultaneous encoding and decoding of verbal and nonverbal messages with someone else within some context. Culture, in part, can be defined as an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol system. Intercultural communication is essentially contextual. The cultural, microcultural, and environmental contexts surround the communicators, whose socio-relational context is defined by the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages that are encoded and decoded within each interactant’s perceptual context. The final part of this chapter lets you discover something about yourself; in this case, your intercultural communication apprehension. Competent intercultural communicators are willing to approach intercultural situations and are sensitive to the differences in them.