Interpersonal Communication in a Changing World
*Culture and Social Networking*

After studying the material in this chapter . . .

You should understand:

1. The prevalence and importance of intercultural and co-cultural communication in today's world.
2. The role of perception in intercultural communication.
3. Five key values that help shape a culture's communication norms.
4. The factors that shape a culture's verbal codes, nonverbal codes, and decoding of messages.
5. The attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for intercultural communication competence.
6. How social media differ from face-to-face interaction.
7. The advantages and drawbacks of mediated relationships.

You should be able to:

1. Identify the range and significance of intercultural and co-cultural contacts you are likely to experience.
2. Describe a set of cultural values, norms, and codes different from yours that could result in different cultural communication patterns.
3. Develop a strategy for interacting with people of cultural backgrounds different from your own by applying guidelines for intercultural competence.
4. Choose the approach—mediated channel or face-to-face—that has the best chance for success in a given situation.
5. Evaluate the optimal balance of face-to-face communication and social media in your important relationships and, as necessary, develop a plan for achieving that balance.
6. Use feedback from people familiar with your communication patterns to assess how competently you follow guidelines for competent online communication.
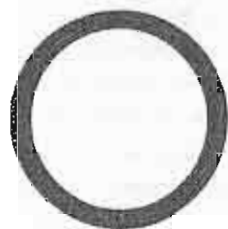
Over a half-century ago, Marshall McLuhan (1962) coined the metaphor of the world as a "global village" where members of every nation are connected by communication technology. Just like members of a traditional village, McLuhan suggested, the affairs and fates of the occupants of planet Earth are connected—for better or worse. This analysis has proven to be increasingly true in the years since McLuhan introduced it.

Thanks to the growth in communication technology, even stay-at-homes have access to virtually the entire world, and commerce has changed in ways that would have been unimaginable just a generation ago. International telephone service is affordable and efficient. The Internet allows users around the world to share information with one another instantaneously, at a cost no greater than exchanging computer messages with someone in the same town. Organizations span the globe, and their members form virtual teams that "meet" in cyberspace.

In this chapter we will explore how communication operates in a networked world where members of different cultures interact.

Interpersonal Communication in a Diverse World

When people from different backgrounds interact, they face a set of challenges different from those that arise when members of the same culture communicate (Stier & Kjellin, 2010; Williams & Johnson, 2011). With understanding and effort, those challenges can be managed and even leveraged to make communication richer and more rewarding.

FUNDAMENTALS OF CULTURE

Before going any further, we need to clarify two important concepts: *culture* and *intercultural communication*. We also need to look at what distinguishes intercultural communication from interpersonal communication.

Culture and Co-Culture Defining culture isn't an easy task. A survey of scholarly literature conducted over 60 years ago revealed 500 definitions, phrasings, and uses of the concept (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). For our purposes, Larry Samovar and his colleagues (2007) offer a clear and comprehensive definition of *culture:* "the language, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs people share and learn."

This definition shows that culture is, to a great extent, a matter of *perception* and *definition.* When you identify yourself as a member of a culture, you must not only share certain characteristics, but you must also recognize yourself and others like you as possessing these features and see others who don't possess them as members of different categories. For example, eye color doesn't seem like a significant factor in distinguishing "us" from "them," while skin color plays a more important role, at least in some cases. It's not hard to imagine a society where the opposite were true. Social scientists use the label **in-groups** to describe groups with which we identify and **out-groups** to label those that we view as different (Frings & Abrams, 2010; Quist & Jørgensen, 2010). Cultural membership contributes to every person's **social identity**—the part of the self-concept that is based on membership in groups. Your answer to the question "Who are you?" would probably include social categories such as your ethnicity and nationality.

Social scientists use the term **co-culture** to describe the perception of membership in a group that is part of an encompassing culture (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). Co-cultures in North American society include categories based on

- age (e.g., teens, senior citizens)
- race/ethnicity (e.g., African American, Latino)
- sexual orientation (e.g., homosexual, transsexual)
- nationality (e.g., immigrants from a particular country, expatriates)
- geographic region (e.g., Southerners, Midwesterners)
- physical disability (e.g., wheelchair users, persons who are deaf)
- religion (e.g., Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Muslim)
- activity (e.g., biker, gamer)

Members of co-cultures often develop unique patterns of communication. For example, gangs fit the definition of a co-culture: Members have a well-defined identity, both among themselves and in the outside world. This sense of belonging is often reflected in distinctive language and nonverbal markers, such as clothing, tattoos, and hand signals (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, 2007; U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). Other co-cultures also have distinctive communication patterns. True to an enduring stereotype, people from New York City are typically more assertive than those from the Upper Midwest (Sigler et al., 2008). And many

F⊕CUS ON RESEARCH

Fitting In: People with Disabilities and Organizational Cultures

People with physical disabilities represent about 15 percent of the U.S. population. Researchers Marsha Cohen and Susan Avanzino investigated how members of this co-culture manage the challenges of integrating into organizational cultures where they are in the minority. They interviewed 24 people with a variety of physical disabilities and job positions, asking about their experiences with employers and coworkers.

The participants described several strategies for integrating into the culture of their organizations. One is *assimilation*—adapting and conforming to the dominant (nondisabled) group. This involves deemphasizing differences and in some cases staying quiet about disabilities (one participant said, "The less you tell about your disability, the better off you are"). A second strategy, *accommodation*, takes a different approach. It involves acknowledging one's disability and asking for ways that it be accommodated. It can also include educating others about disabilities and actively dispelling misperceptions. A few opted for *separation*, distancing themselves from nondisabled people and banding together with people from their co-culture. The latter approach was the least common and viewed as least productive.

The participants in this study did not all use the same strategies. Some were more comfortable with accommodation; others with assimilation. But one value they all share is that they don't want to be defined by their disabilities. The authors provide this summary (p. 300):

> With many voices and different backgrounds and experiences, the participants in this study are stating: "We are people first."

Cohen, M., & Avanzino, S. (2010). We are people first: Framing organizational assimilation experiences of the physically disabled using co-cultural theory. *Communication Studies, 61,* 272-303.

first-generation college students have characteristics of a co-culture, as they censor their speech with classmates and professors to avoid calling attention to their status, and with family members to avoid threatening and alienating them (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004).

Membership in co-cultures can be a source of enrichment and pride. But when the group is stigmatized by others, being connected with a co-culture isn't always so fulfilling. For instance, Patrice Buzzanell (1999) describes how members of underrepresented groups are disadvantaged in employment interviews, where the rules are established by the dominant culture. Studies of Jamaican children (Ferguson & Cramer, 2007) and Latino children (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008) indicate that skin color influences self-identification and self-esteem. In other cases, co-cultures voluntarily embrace the chance to distinguish themselves from society at large—such as teens creating slang that is understood only by members of their in-group. Some scholars (e.g., Kimmel, 2008; Tannen, 2003; Wood, 2009) and writers in the popular press (e.g., Gray, 2008) have even characterized men and women as belonging to different co-cultures because their communication styles are so different. As you read this chapter, you will notice that many of the communication challenges that arise between members of different cultures also operate when people from different co-cultures interact.

Intercultural Communication Having defined culture, we can go on to define intercultural communication as the process that occurs when members of two or more cultures or co-cultures exchange messages in a manner that is influenced by their different cultural perceptions and symbol systems, both verbal and nonverbal (Samovar et al., 2007).

Since all of us belong to many groups (ethnic, economic, interest-based, age, etc.), you might be asking yourself whether there is any communication that *isn't* intercultural or at least co-cultural. The answer to this question is "yes," for two reasons. First, even in an increasingly diverse world, there are still plenty of relationships in which people share a basically common background. The Irish marchers in a St. Patrick's Day parade, the suburban-bred group of men who play poker every other Friday night, and the members of a college sorority or fraternity are likely to share fundamentally similar personal histories and, therefore, have similar norms, customs, and values.

Second, even when people with different cultural backgrounds communicate, those differences may not be important. David may be a Jewish male whose ancestors came from Eastern Europe while Lisa is a third-generation Japanese person whose parents are practicing Christians, but they have created a life together that usually is more significant than their differences, and that leaves them able to deal comfortably with those differences when they do arise.

Rather than classifying some exchanges as intercultural and others as free from cultural influences, it's more accurate to talk about *degrees* of cultural significance (Lustig & Koester, 2005). Encounters can fit along a spectrum of "interculturalness." At the "most intercultural" end are situations where differences between the backgrounds and beliefs of communicators are high. A traveler visiting a new country for the first time with little knowledge of local society would be an obvious example. At the "least intercultural" end of the spectrum fall exchanges where cultural differences make little difference. A student from Los Angeles who attends a small liberal arts college in the Midwest might find life somewhat different, but the adjustment would be far less difficult than that for the international traveler. In between these extremes falls a whole range of encounters in which culture plays varying roles.

Note that intercultural communication (at least as we'll use the term here) doesn't always occur when people from different cultures interact. The cultural backgrounds, perceptions, and symbol systems of the participants must have a significant impact on the exchange before we
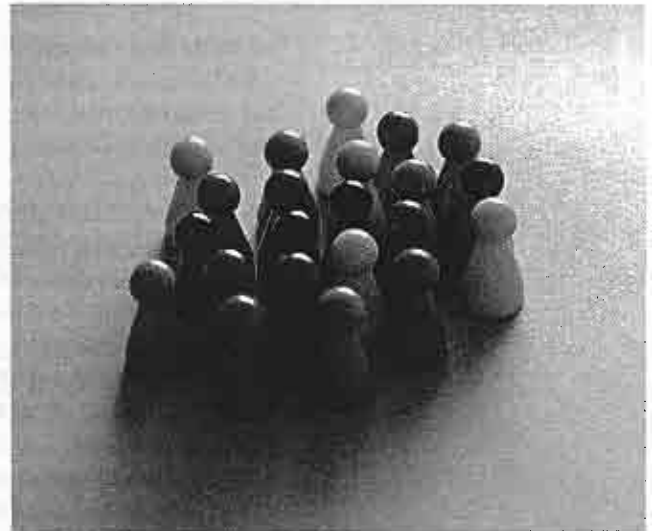
can say that culture has made a difference. Social scientists use the term **salience** to describe how much weight we attach to a particular person or phenomenon. Consider a few examples where culture has little or no salience:

- A group of preschool children is playing together in a park. These 3-year-olds don't recognize the fact that their parents may come from different countries, or even that they don't speak the same language. At this point we wouldn't say that intercultural communication is taking place. Only when cultural factors become salient (diet, sharing, or parental discipline, for example) do the children begin to think of one another as different.

- Members of a school basketball team—some Asian, some black, some Latino, and some white—are intent on winning the league championship. During a game, cultural distinctions aren't salient. There's plenty of communication, but it isn't fundamentally intercultural. Away from their games, they might notice some fundamental differences in the way members of each group communicate.

- A husband and wife were raised in homes with different religious traditions. Most of the time their religious heritage makes little difference, and the partners view themselves as a unified couple. Every so often, however—perhaps during the holidays or when meeting members of each other's family—the different backgrounds are more salient. At those times we can imagine the partners feeling quite different from each other— thinking of themselves as members of separate cultures.

Interpersonal and Intercultural Communication What is the relationship between intercultural communication and interpersonal relationships? William Gudykunst and Young Kim (2002) suggest that interpersonal and intercultural factors combine to form a two-by-two matrix in which the importance of interpersonal communication forms one dimension and intercultural significance forms the second one (Figure 2.1). This model shows that some interpersonal transactions (for example, a conversation between two siblings who have been raised in the same household) have virtually no intercultural elements. Other encounters (such as a traveler from Senegal trying to get directions from a Ukrainian taxi driver in New York City) are almost exclusively intercultural, without the personal dimensions that we have discussed throughout this book.

Still other exchanges—the most interesting ones for our purposes— contain elements of both intercultural and interpersonal communication. This range of encounters is broad in the global village: Business people from different backgrounds try to wrap up a deal; U.S. born and immigrant
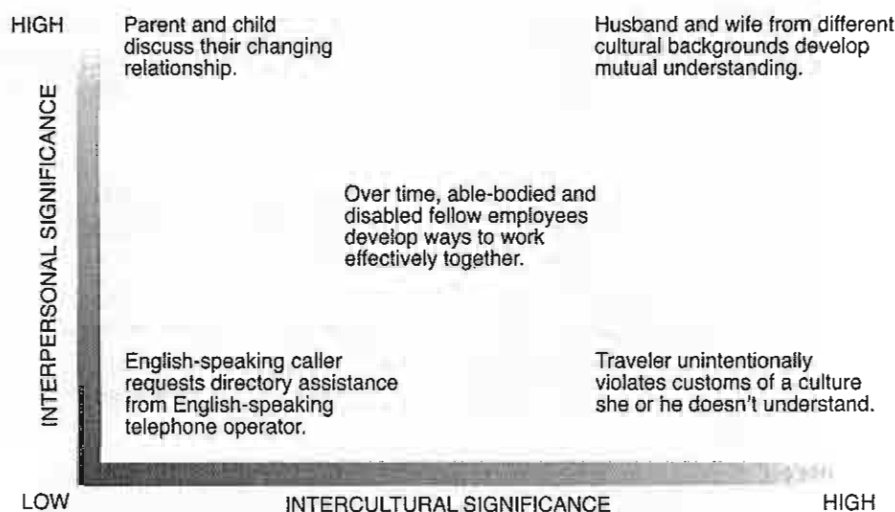
HIGH   Parent and child   Husband and wife from different
        discuss their changing   cultural backgrounds develop
        relationship.   mutual understanding.

                        Over time, able-bodied and
                        disabled fellow employees
                        develop ways to work
                        effectively together.

        English-speaking caller   Traveler unintentionally
        requests directory assistance   violates customs of a culture
        from English-speaking   she or he doesn't understand.
        telephone operator.

LOW   INTERCULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE   HIGH

(vertical axis label: INTERPERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE)

FIGURE 2.1 Some Possible Interactions among Interpersonal and
Intercultural Dimensions of Person-to-Person Communication

children learn to get along in school; health care educators seek effective
ways to serve patients from around the world; neighbors from different
racial or ethnic backgrounds look for ways to make their streets safer and
cleaner; suburban-bred teachers seek common ground with inner-city
students—the list seems almost endless.

Cultural Differences as Generalizations The following pages spell out a
variety of ways communication varies from one culture to another. While
these variations can sometimes be significant, it's important to remember
that cultural practices aren't *totally* different: People from varied back-
grounds often share enough common ground to make relationships work.
When all the physical and social attributes of human beings are added up,
there are far more similarities than differences among the people of the
world.

Moreover, there are sometimes greater differences *within* cultures than
between them. Consider the matter of formality as an example: By most
measures, U.S. culture is far more casual than many others. But Figure 2.2
shows that there may be more common ground between a formal Ameri-
can and a casual member of a formal culture than there is between two
Americans with vastly differing levels of formality. Furthermore, within ev-
ery culture, members display a wide range of communication styles. For in-
stance, while most Asian cultures tend to be collectivistic, many members of
those cultures would identify themselves as individualists. For these reasons,
it's important to remember that generalizations—even when accurate and
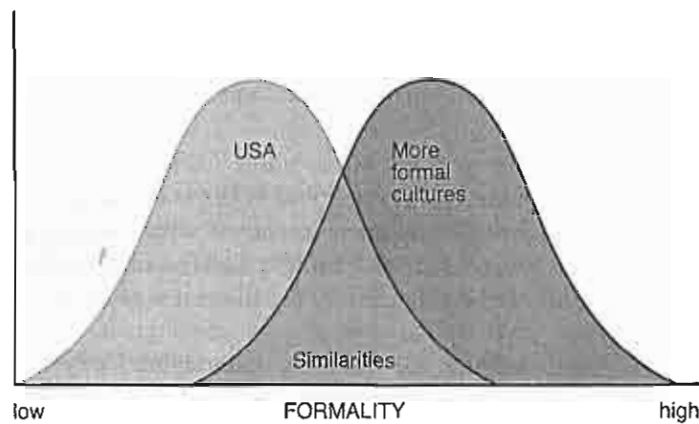helpful—don't apply to every member of a group.

FIGURE 2.2 Differences and Similarities within and between cultures
Adapted from Trompenaars, F. (1994). *Riding the waves of culture.* New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, p. 28.

CULTURAL VALUES AND NORMS

Some cultural influences on communication are obvious. However, some far less visible values and norms can shape how members of cultures think and act (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). In this section we look at five of these subtle yet vitally important values and norms that shape the way members of a culture communicate. Unless communicators are aware of these differences, they may see people from other cultures as unusual—or even offensive—without realizing that their apparently odd behavior comes from following a different set of beliefs and unwritten rules about the "proper" way to communicate.

High versus Low Context Anthropologist Edward Hall (1959) identified two distinct ways that members of various cultures deliver messages. A **low-context culture** uses language primarily to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas as directly as possible. To low-context communicators, the meaning of a statement lies in the words spoken. By contrast, a **high-context culture** relies heavily on subtle, often nonverbal cues to maintain social harmony. Rather than upsetting others by speaking directly, communicators in these societies learn to discover meaning from the context in which a message is delivered: the nonverbal behaviors of the speaker, the history of the relationship, and the general social rules that govern interaction between people.

There are many examples of how context and culture affect communication. People in high-context India tend to disclose less private information in online discussions than low-context Germans; they also use more emoticons, reflecting the higher importance of nonverbal communication in their culture (Pflug, 2011). A study in which expressions of appreciation were examined found that in the low-context culture of the United States, people rely about evenly on verbal and nonverbal methods of expressing

themselves, while people in the high-context culture of China favor non-verbal over verbal ones (Bello et al., 2010). Table 2.1 summarizes some key differences in how people from low- and high-context cultures use language.

Mainstream culture in the United States, Canada, Northern Europe, and Israel falls toward the low-context end of the scale. Longtime residents generally value straight-talk and grow impatient with "beating around the bush." By contrast, most Asian and Middle Eastern cultures fit the high-context pattern and can be offended by the bluntness of low-context communication styles.

In many Asian societies, for example, maintaining harmony is important, so communicators avoid speaking directly if that threatens another person's "face," or dignity. For this reason, communicators raised in Japanese or Korean cultures are less likely than Americans to offer a clear "no" to an undesirable request.

To members of high-context cultures, communicators with a low-context style can appear overly talkative, lacking in subtlety, and redundant. On the other hand, to people from low-context backgrounds, high-context communicators often seem unexpressive, or even dishonest. It is easy to see how the clash between directness and indirectness can aggravate problems between straight-talking, low-context Israelis and their Arab neighbors, whose high-context culture stresses smooth interaction. Israelis might view their Arab counterparts as evasive, while the Arabs might perceive the Israelis as insensitive and blunt.

TABLE 2.1 High-Context and Low-Context Communication Styles

LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES (e.g., Germany, Scandinavia, most English-speaking countries)	HIGH CONTEXT (e.g., most Southern European, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Latin American countries)
Majority of information is carried in explicit verbal messages, with less focus on the situational context.	Important information carried in contextual cues, such as time, place, relationship, situation. Less reliance on explicit verbal messages.
Self-expression is valued. Communicators state opinions and desires directly and strive to persuade others to accept their own viewpoint.	Relational harmony is valued and maintained by the indirect expression of options. Communicators abstain from saying "no" directly.
Clear, eloquent speech is considered praiseworthy. Verbal fluency is admired.	Communicators talk "around" the point, allowing the others to fill in the missing pieces. Ambiguity and use of silence is admired.

Adapted from Adler, R. B., & Elmhorst, J. (2008). *Communicating at work: Principles and practices for business and the professions* (9th ed., p. 31). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Individualism versus Collectivism Some cultures value the individual, while others place greater emphasis on the group. Members of an **individualistic culture** view their primary responsibility as helping themselves, whereas communicators in **collectivistic cultures** feel loyalties and obligations to an in-group: one's extended family, community, or even the organization one works for (Triandis, 1995). Individualistic cultures also are characterized by self-reliance and competition, whereas members of a collectivistic culture are more attentive to and concerned with the opinions of significant others. The consequences of a culture's individualistic–collectivistic orientation are so powerful that some scholars (e.g., Kim & Chu, 2011; Merkin & Ramadan, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2010) have labeled it as the most fundamental dimension of cultural differences. Table 2.2 summarizes some differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Members of individualistic cultures tend to view themselves in terms of what they *do*, while people in collectivistic cultures are more likely to define themselves in terms of group membership. For instance, members of several cultures were asked to answer the question "Who am I?" 20 times (DeAngelis, 1992). North Americans were likely to answer by giving individual factors ("I am athletic"; "I am short"). By contrast, members of more collectivistic societies—Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, and some South Americans, for example—responded in terms of their relationships with others ("I am a father"; "I am an employee of XYZ Corporation").

TABLE 2.2   The Self in Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures

INDIVIDUALISTIC CULTURES (e.g., USA, Canada, UK)	COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURES (e.g., Pakistan, Indonesia, Ecuador)
Self is separate, unique individual; should be independent, self-sufficient.	People belong to extended families or in-groups; "we" or group orientation.
Individual should take care of himself or herself and immediate family.	Person should take care of extended family before self.
Many flexible group memberships; friendships based on shared interests and activities.	Emphasis is on belonging to a very few permanent in-groups, which have a strong influence over the person.
Reward is for individual achievement and initiative; individual decision making is encouraged; individual credit and blame are assigned.	Reward is for contribution to group goals and well-being; cooperation with in-group members; group decision making is valued; credit and blame are shared.
High value on autonomy, change, youth, individual security, equality.	High value on duty, order, tradition, age, group security, status, and hierarchy.

Adapted by Sandra Sudweeks from Triandis, H. C. (1990). Cross-cultural studies of individualism and collectivism. In J. Berman (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation* (pp. 41–133), Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; and Hall, E. T. (1959). *Beyond culture*. New York: Doubleday

The difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures also shows up in the level of comfort or anxiety their respective members feel when communicating. In societies where the need to conform is great, there is a higher degree of communication apprehension. For example, as a group, residents of China, Korea, and Japan exhibit a significantly higher degree of anxiety about speaking out in public than do members of individualistic cultures such as the United States and Australia (Berry, 2007; Klopf, 1984). It's important to realize that different levels of communication apprehension don't mean that shyness is a "problem" in some cultures. In fact, just the opposite is true: In these societies reticence is valued. When the goal is to avoid being "the nail that sticks out," it's logical to feel nervous when you make yourself appear different by calling attention your way. A self-concept that includes "assertive" might make a Westerner feel proud, but in much of Asia it would more likely be cause for shame.

Power Distance For members of democratic societies, the principle embodied in the U.S. Declaration of Independence that "all men [and women] are created equal" is so fundamental that we accept it without question. However, not all cultures share this belief. Some operate on the assumption that certain groups of people (an aristocracy or an economic class, for example) and some institutions (such as a church or the government) have the right to control the lives of individuals. Geert Hofstede (1984) coined the term **power distance** to describe the degree to which members of a society accept an unequal distribution of power.

Cultures with low power difference believe in minimizing distinctions between various social classes. Rich and poor, educated and uneducated groups may still exist, but there is a pervasive belief in low power difference cultures that one person is as good as another regardless of his or her station in life. Low power difference cultures also support the notion that challenging authority is acceptable—even desirable. Members aren't necessarily punished for raising questions about the status quo. According to Hofstede's research, U.S. and Canadian societies have relatively low power distance, though not the lowest in the world. Austria, Denmark, Israel, and New Zealand proved to be the most egalitarian countries. At the other end

of the spectrum are countries with a high degree of power distance: Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, India, and Singapore.

The degree of power distance in a culture is reflected in key relationships (Lustig & Koester, 1999; Santilli & Miller, 2011). Children who are raised in cultures with high power difference are expected to obey their parents and other authority figures to a degree that would astonish most children raised in the United States or Canada. Power automatically comes with age in many countries. For example, the Korean language has separate terms for *older brother, oldest brother, younger sister, youngest sister,* and so on. Parents in cultures with low power distance don't expect the same degree of unquestioning obedience. They are not surprised when children ask "Why?" when presented with a request or demand.

On-the-job communication is different in low- and high-power-distance societies (A. Cohen, 2007). In countries with higher degrees of power distance, employees have much less input into the way they perform their work. In fact, workers from these cultures are likely to feel uncomfortable when given freedom to make their own decisions or when a more egalitarian boss asks for their opinion: They prefer to view their bosses as benevolent decision makers. The reverse is true when management from a culture with an egalitarian tradition tries to do business in a country whose workers are used to high power distance. They can be surprised to find that employees do not expect much say in decisions and do not feel unappreciated when they aren't consulted. They may regard dutiful, submissive, respectful employees as lacking initiative and creativity—traits that helped them gain promotions back home. Given these differences, it's easy to understand why multinational companies need to consider fundamental differences in communication values and behavior when they set up shop in a new country.

Uncertainty Avoidance The desire to resolve uncertainty seems to be a trait shared by people around the world (Berger, 1988). While uncertainty may be universal, cultures have different ways of coping with an unpredictable future. Hofstede (2003; Merkin, 2006) uses the term **uncertainty avoidance** to reflect the degree to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous situations and how much they try to avoid them. He developed an uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) to measure differing degrees of uncertainty avoidance around the world. Residents of some countries (including Singapore, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, and the United States) proved to be relatively unthreatened by change, while others (such as natives of Belgium, Greece, Japan, and Portugal) found new or ambiguous situations discomfiting.

A culture's degree of uncertainty avoidance is reflected in the way its members communicate. In countries that avoid uncertainty, deviant people and ideas are considered dangerous, and intolerance is high (Samovar & Porter, 2004). People in these cultures are especially concerned with security, so they have a strong need for clearly defined rules and regulations. By

contrast, people in a culture that is less threatened by the new and unexpected are more likely to tolerate—or even welcome—people who don't fit the norm.

When a mainstream North American who is relatively comfortable with change and novelty spends time with someone from a high UAI culture such as Japan, both communicators may find the other behaving in disconcerting ways. The North American is likely to view the Japanese as rigid and overly controlled, while the Japanese would probably regard the North American as undisciplined, overly tolerant, and generally lacking self-control. On the other hand, if the communicators understand how their cultural conditioning affects their style, then they are more likely to understand, and maybe even learn from, the other's different style.

Achievement versus Nurturing The term **achievement culture** describes societies that place a high value on material success and a focus on the task at hand, while **nurturing culture** is a descriptive term for cultures that regard the support of relationships as an especially important goal.

There are significant differences in how people from an achievement culture like the United States and those from a nurturing culture like the Netherlands voice their opinions (van den Bos et al., 2010). In achievement cultures—which emphasize outperforming others—those who see themselves as highly capable feel more empowered to voice their opinions, and are satisfied when they can do so. By contrast, in nurturing cultures—which emphasize helping—those who see themselves as *less* capable feel valued as important group members and feel more satisfied when they have the opportunity to voice their opinions.

As you think about the cultural values described here, you may realize that they don't just arise between people from different countries. In today's increasingly multicultural society, people from different cultural backgrounds are likely to encounter one another "at home," in the country they share. Consider the United States and Canada in the new millennium: Native Americans; Latinos from the Caribbean, Mexico, and South America; Middle Easterners; and Asians from China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and other countries mingle with first-generation and longtime residents whose ancestors came from Europe. This is a cultural mixture that often seems less like a melting pot than a salad bowl, in which the many "ingredients" retain much of their own identity.

CODES AND CULTURE

At this point, you probably have a healthy appreciation for the challenges that arise when two or more people try to communicate with one another. These challenges become even greater when the communicators use different verbal and nonverbal communication systems.
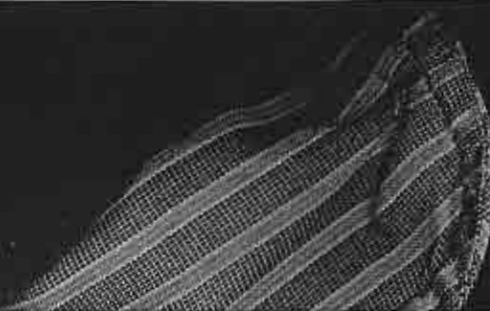
Verbal Codes Although there are remarkable similarities between the world's many languages (Whaley, 1997), they also differ in important respects that affect the way their speakers communicate with one another and with speakers of other tongues. The following sections outline some of those factors.

Language and Identity If you live in a culture where everyone speaks the same tongue, then language will have little noticeable impact on how you view yourself and others. But when some members of a society speak the dominant language and others speak a minority tongue, or when that second language is not prestigious, the sense of being a member of an out-group is strong. At this point the speaker of a nondominant language can react in one of two ways: either feel pressured to assimilate by speaking the "better" language, or refuse to accommodate to the majority language and maintain loyalty to the ethnic tongue (Giles et al., 1992). The impact of language on the self-concept is powerful. On one hand, the feeling is likely to be "I'm not as good as speakers of the native language," and on the other, the belief is "There's something unique and worth preserving in my language" (Bergman et al., 2008).

Even the names a culture uses to identify its members reflect its values and shape the way its members relate to one another. When asked to identify themselves, individualistic Americans, Canadians, Australians, and Europeans would probably respond by giving their first name, surname, street, town, and country. Many Asians do it the other way around (Servaes, 1989). If you ask Hindus for their identity, they will give you their caste and village and then their name. The Sanskrit formula for identifying oneself begins with lineage and goes on to state family and house, and ends with one's personal name (Bharti, 1985). The same collectivist orientation is reflected in Chinese written language, where the pronoun *I* looks very similar to the word for *selfish* (Samovar & Porter, 2004). The Japanese language has no equivalent to the English pronoun *I*. Instead, different words are used to refer to one's self depending on the social situation, age, gender, and other social characteristics (Gudykunst, 1993a).

Verbal Communication Styles Using language is more than just a matter of choosing a particular group of words to convey an idea. Each language has its own unique style that distinguishes it from others. Matters like the amount of formality or informality, precision or vagueness, and brevity or detail are major ingredients in speaking competently. When a communicator tries to use the verbal style from one culture in a different one, problems are likely to arise.

Gudykunst (2005) describes three important types of cultural differences in verbal style. One is *directness* or *indirectness*. We have already

discussed how low-context cultures use language primarily to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas as clearly, directly, and logically as possible, while high-context cultures may speak less directly, using language to maintain social harmony.

Another way in which language styles can vary across cultures is in terms of whether they are *elaborate* or *succinct*. For instance, speakers of Arabic commonly use language that is much more rich and expressive than normally found in English. Strong assertions and exaggerations that would sound ridiculous in English are a common feature of Arabic. This contrast in linguistic style can lead to misunderstandings between people from different backgrounds.

Succinctness is most extreme in cultures where silence is valued. In many Native American cultures, for example, the favored way to handle ambiguous social situations is to remain quiet (Ferraro, 2008). When you contrast this silent style to the talkativeness that is common when people first meet in mainstream American cultures, it's easy to imagine how the first encounter between an Apache or Navajo and a European American might be uncomfortable for both people.

A third way that languages differ from one culture to another involves *formality* and *informality*. One guidebook for British readers who want to understand how Americans communicate describes the openness and informality that characterizes U.S. culture:

> Visitors may be overwhelmed by the sheer exuberant friendliness of Americans, especially in the central and southern parts of the country. Sit next to an American on an airplane and he will immediately address you by your first name, ask "So—how do you like it in the States?," explain his recent divorce in intimate detail, invite you home for dinner, offer to lend you money, and wrap you in a warm hug on parting. This does not necessarily mean he will remember your name the next day. Americans are friendly because they just can't help it; they like to be neighbourly and want to be liked. (Faul, 1994, pp. 3–4)

The informal approach that characterizes communication in countries like the United States is quite different from the great concern for propriety in many parts of Asia and Africa (Bjørge, 2007). Formality isn't so much a matter of using correct grammar as of defining social relationships. For example, there are different degrees of formality for speaking with old friends, nonacquaintances whose background one knows, and complete strangers. One sign of being a learned person in Korea is the ability to use language that recognizes these relational distinctions. When you contrast these sorts of distinctions with the casual friendliness many North Americans use even when talking with complete strangers, it's easy to see how a Korean might view American communicators as boorish and how an American might see Koreans as stiff and unfriendly.

Nonverbal Codes Many elements of nonverbal communication are shared by all humans, regardless of culture (Matsumoto, 2006; Schiefenhövel, 1997). For instance, people of all cultures convey messages through facial

expressions and gestures. Furthermore, some of these physical displays have the same meaning everywhere. Crying is a universal sign of unhappiness or pain, and smiles signal friendly intentions. (Of course, smiles and tears may be insincere and manipulative, but their overt meanings are similar and constant in every culture.)

Despite nonverbal similarities, the range of differences in nonverbal behavior is tremendous. For example, the meaning of some gestures varies from one culture to another. Consider the use of gestures such as the "OK" sign made by joining thumb and forefinger to form a circle. This gesture is a cheery affirmation to most Americans, but it has very different meanings in other parts of the world (Knapp & Hall, 2006). In France and Belgium it means "you're worth zero," in Japan it means "money," and in Greece and Turkey it is an insulting or vulgar sexual invitation. Given this sort of cross-cultural ambiguity, it's easy to visualize how an innocent tourist from the United States could wind up in serious trouble overseas without understanding why.

Less obvious cross-cultural differences can damage relationships without the communicators ever recognizing exactly what has gone wrong (Beaulieu, 2004; Hall, 1959). Anglo-Saxons use the largest zone of personal space, followed by Asians. People from the Mediterranean and Latinos use the closest distance. It is easy to visualize the awkward advance and retreat pattern that might occur when two diplomats or businesspeople from these cultures meet. The Middle Easterner would probably keep moving forward to close the gap that feels so wide, while the North American would continually back away. Both would probably feel uncomfortable without knowing why.

Like distance, patterns of eye contact vary around the world. A direct gaze is considered appropriate for speakers in Latin America, the Arab world, and southern Europe. On the other hand, Asians, Indians, Pakistanis, and northern Europeans gaze at a listener peripherally or not at all. In either case, deviations from the norm are likely to make a culturally uneducated listener uncomfortable. You'll read much more about cultural differences in nonverbal communication in Chapter 6.

Decoding Messages As you'll see in Chapter 4, attribution is the process of making sense of another person's behavior. Attribution is an unavoidable part of communicating: We have to form some sort of interpretation of what others' words and actions mean. But most behavior is so ambiguous that it can be interpreted in several ways. Furthermore, the usual tendency is to stick to the first attribution one makes. It's easy to see how this quick, sloppy attribution process can lead to making faulty interpretations—especially when communicators are from different cultural backgrounds.

In Table 2.3, a supervisor from the United States invites a subordinate from Greece to get involved in making a decision (Triandis, 1975, pp. 42–43). Since U.S. culture ranks relatively low on power distance, the supervisor

TABLE 2.3 Culture Affects Attributions

BEHAVIOR	ATTRIBUTION
American: How long will it take you to finish the report?	American: I asked him to participate.
Greek: I do not know. How long should it take?	Greek: His behavior makes no sense. He is the boss. Why doesn't he tell me?
	American: He refuses to take responsibility.
	Greek: I asked him for an order.
American: You are in the best position to analyze time requirements.	American: I press him to take responsibility for his own actions.
Greek: Ten days.	Greek: What nonsense! I better give him an answer.
American: Take fifteen. It is agreed you will do it in fifteen days?	American: He lacks the ability to estimate time; this estimate is totally inadequate.
Greek: These are my orders. Fifteen days.	American: I offer a contract.
American: Where is the report?	American: I am making sure he fulfills his contract.
Greek: It will be ready tomorrow.	Greek: He is asking for the report.
	(Both understand that it is not ready.)
American: But we agreed that it would be ready today.	American: I must teach him to fulfill an agreement.
The Greek hands in his resignation.	Greek: The stupid, incompetent boss! Not only did he give me wrong orders, but he does not appreciate that I did a thirty-day job in sixteen days.
The American is surprised.	Greek: I can't work for such a man.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

What Is Your Intercultural Sensitivity?

A series of statements concerning intercultural communication follow. There are no right or wrong answers. Imagine yourself interacting with people from a wide variety of cultural groups, not just one or two. Record your first impression to each of the following statements by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree, using the following scale.

5 STRONGLY AGREE   **4** AGREE   **3** UNCERTAIN   **2** DISAGREE   **1** STRONGLY DISAGREE

_____   1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.

_____   2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.

_____   3. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.

_____   4. I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.

_____   5. I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____   6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____   7. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.

_____   8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.

_____   9. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____   10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____   11. I tend to wait before forming an impression of people from different cultures.

_____   12. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.

_____   13. I am open-minded to people from different cultures.

_____   14. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.

encourages input from the employee. In Greece, however, the distance between bosses and their subordinates is much greater. Therefore, the Greek employee wants and expects to be told what to do. After all, it's the boss's job to give orders. Table 2.3 shows how the differing cultural beliefs shape both figures' attributions of the other's messages.

Culturally based attributions don't just occur between members of different nationalities. Even different use of dialects or accents by native-born

_____ 15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____ 16. I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.

_____ 17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____ 18. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.

_____ 19. I am sensitive to my culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.

_____ 20. I think my culture is better than other cultures.

_____ 21. I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.

_____ 22. I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct persons.

_____ 23. I often show my culturally distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.

_____ 24. I have a feeling of enjoyment toward differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me.

SCORING:

To determine your score, begin by reverse-coding items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 22 (if you indicated 5, reverse-code to 1, if you indicated 4, reverse-code to 2, and so on). Higher scores indicate a greater probability of intercultural communication competence.

Sum items 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, and 24 _____ Interaction Engagement (range is 7–35)

Sum items 2, 7, 8, 16, 18, and 20 _____ Respect for Cultural Differences (6–30)

Sum items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 _____ Interaction Confidence (5–25)

Sum items 9, 12, and 15 _____ Interaction Enjoyment (3–15)

Sum items 14, 17, and 19 _____ Interaction Attentiveness (3–15)

Sum of all the items = _____ (24–120, with a midpoint of 48)

members of the same country can affect a listener's evaluation of a speaker. Most cultures have a "standard dialect," which is spoken by high-status opinion leaders. For the most part, people who use the standard dialect are judged as being competent, intelligent, industrious, and confident (Ng & Bradac, 1993). By contrast, nonstandard speakers are likely to be rated less favorably. The likely attribution is "this person doesn't even speak correctly. There must be something wrong with him or her."

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

What distinguishes competent and incompetent intercultural communicators? The rest of this chapter focuses on answering this question. But before we get to the answers, take a moment to complete the Self-Assessment on pages 46–47 to evaluate your intercultural communication sensitivity.

To a great degree, interacting successfully with strangers calls for the same ingredients of general communicative competence outlined in Chapter 1. It's important to have a wide range of behaviors and to be skillful at choosing and performing the most appropriate ones in a given situation. A genuine concern for others plays an important role. Cognitive complexity and the ability to empathize also help, although empathizing with someone from another culture can be challenging (DeTurk, 2001). Finally, self-monitoring is important, since the need to make midcourse corrections in your approach is often necessary when dealing with people from other cultures.

But beyond these basic qualities, communication researchers have worked long and hard to identify qualities that are unique, or at least especially important, ingredients of intercultural communicative competence (Arasaratnam, 2007; Hajek & Giles, 2003).

Motivation and Attitude The desire to communicate successfully with strangers is an important start. For example, people high in willingness to communicate with people from other cultures report a greater number of friends from different backgrounds than those who are less willing to reach out (Kassing, 1997; Massengill & Nash, 2009). But desire alone isn't sufficient (Arasaratnam, 2006). Some other ways of thinking—called "culture-general"—are essential when dealing with people from other backgrounds (Samovar et al., 2007). These culture-general attitudes are necessary when communicating competently with people from any background that is different from one's own.

Tolerance for Ambiguity As noted earlier, one of the most important concerns facing communicators is their desire to reduce uncertainty about one another (Berger, 1988; Gibbs et al., 2011). When we encounter communicators from different cultures, the level of uncertainty is especially high. Consider the basic challenge of communicating in an unfamiliar language.

Pico Iyer (1990, pp. 129–130) captures the ambiguity that arises from a lack of fluency when he describes his growing friendship with Sachiko, a Japanese woman he met in Kyoto:

> I was also beginning to realize how treacherous it was to venture into a foreign language if one could not measure the shadows of the words one used. When I had told her, in Asuka, "*Jennifer Beals ga suki-desu. Anata mo*" ("I like Jennifer Beals—and I like you"), I had been pleased to find a way of conveying affection, and yet, I thought, a perfect distance. But later I looked up suki and found that I had delivered an almost naked protestation of love. . . .
>
> Meanwhile, of course, nearly all her shadings were lost to me. . . . Once, when I had to leave her house ten minutes early, she said, "I very sad," and another time, when I simply called her up, she said, "I very happy"—and I began to think her unusually sensitive, or else prone to bold and violent extremes, when really she was reflecting nothing but the paucity of her English vocabulary. . . . Talking in a language not one's own was like walking on one leg; when two people did it together, it was like a three-legged waltz.

Competent intercultural communicators accept—even welcome—this kind of ambiguity. Iyer (1990, pp. 220–221) describes the way the mutual confusion he shared with Sachiko actually helped their relationship develop:

> Yet in the end, the fact that we were both speaking in this pared-down diction made us both, I felt, somewhat gentler, more courteous, and more vulnerable than we would have been otherwise, returning us to a state of innocence.

Without a tolerance for ambiguity, the mass of often confusing and sometimes downright incomprehensible messages that bombard intercultural sojourners would be impossible to manage. Some people seem to come equipped with this sort of tolerance, while others have to cultivate it. One way or the other, that ability to live with uncertainty is an essential ingredient of intercultural communication competence (Gudykunst, 1993b).

Open-Mindedness Being comfortable with ambiguity is important, but without an open-minded attitude a communicator will have trouble interacting competently with people from different backgrounds. To understand open-mindedness, it's helpful to consider three traits that are incompatible with it. **Ethnocentrism** is an attitude that one's own culture is superior to others. An ethnocentric person thinks—either privately or openly—that anyone who does not belong to his or her in-group is somehow strange, wrong, or even inferior. Travel writer Rick Steves (n.d.) describes how an ethnocentric point of view can interfere with respect for other cultural practices:

> We [Americans] consider ourselves very clean, but when we take baths, we use the same water for soaking, cleaning, and rinsing. (We wouldn't wash our dishes that way.) The Japanese, who use clean water for every step of the bathing process, might find our ways strange or even disgusting. People

MEDIA CLIP

OPENING A CLOSED DOOR: *GRAN TORINO*

Cantankerous widower Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood) spends much of his time nursing a seemingly endless string of beers and grudges as he watches Hmong families transform his Detroit neighborhood from an all-white enclave into a Southeast Asian Laotian community.

Walt's prejudices are a product of the time and place where he grew up. They are aggravated by memories of fighting in the Korean War, and by his buddies who speak the same language of intolerance. His racism is reinforced when a neighborhood boy named Thao (Bee Vang) attempts to steal his prized possession, a lovingly maintained 1972 Ford Gran Torino.

Walt's ignorance slowly dissolves as he defends, and gradually befriends, Thao's family when they come under assault by a Hmong gang. His transformation from racist to loyal friend is an object lesson in the power of knowledge to banish intolerance.

in some cultures blow their nose right onto the street. They couldn't imagine doing that into a small cloth, called a hanky, and storing it in their pocket to be used again and again. . . .

Too often we judge the world in terms of "civilized" and "primitive." I was raised thinking the world was a pyramid with the US on top and everyone else was trying to get there. I was comparing people on their ability (or interest) in keeping up with us in material consumption, science, and technology. . . .

Over the years, I've found that if we measure cultures differently (maybe according to stress, loneliness, heart attack rates, hours spent in traffic jams, or family togetherness), the results stack up differently. It's best not to fall into the "rating game." All societies are complex and highly developed in their own way.

Ethnocentrism leads to an attitude of **prejudice**—an unfairly biased and intolerant attitude toward others who belong to an out-group. (Note that the root term in *prejudice* is "prejudge.") An important element of prejudice is stereotyping. Stereotypical prejudices include the obvious exaggerations that all women are emotional, all men are sex-crazed and insensitive goons, all older people are out of touch with reality, and all immigrants are welfare parasites. Stereotyping can even be a risk when it comes to knowledge of cultural characteristics like individualism or collectivism. Not all members of a group are equally individualistic or collectivistic. For example, a close look at Americans of European and Latin descent showed differences within each group (Oetzel, 1998). Some Latinos were more independent than some European Americans, and vice versa. Open-mindedness is especially important in intercultural work teams (Matveev, 2004). Chapter 4 has more to say about stereotyping.

Knowledge and Skill Attitude alone isn't enough to guarantee success in intercultural encounters. Communicators need to possess enough knowledge of other cultures to know what approaches are appropriate. The ability to "shift gears" and adapt one's style to the norms of another culture or co-culture is an essential ingredient of communication competence (Kim et al., 1996; Self, 2009).

How can a communicator acquire the culture-specific information that leads to competence? One important element is what Stella Ting-Toomey (1999) and others label as *mindfulness*—awareness of one's own behavior and that of others. Communicators who lack this quality blunder through intercultural encounters *mindlessly*, oblivious of how their own behavior may confuse or offend others, and how behavior that they consider weird may be simply different.

Charles Berger (1979) suggests three strategies for moving toward a more mindful, skillful style of intercultural communication.

■ *Passive observation* involves noticing what behaviors members of a different culture use and applying these insights to communicate in ways that are most effective.

■ *Active strategies* include reading, watching films, and asking experts and members of the other culture how to behave, as well as taking academic courses related to intercultural communication and diversity.

■ *Self-disclosure* involves volunteering personal information to people from the other culture with whom you want to communicate. One type of self-disclosure is to confess your cultural ignorance: "This is very new to me. What's the right thing to do in this situation?" This approach is the riskiest of the three described here, since some cultures may not value candor and self-disclosure as much as others. Nevertheless, most people are pleased when strangers attempt to learn the practices of their culture, and they are usually more than willing to offer information and assistance.

Social Media in a Changing World

Until a generation ago, face-to-face communication was essential to starting and maintaining most, if not all, personal relationships. Other channels existed: The telephone (in an era of expensive long-distance rates and less-than-perfect technology) might have worked during temporary absences, and postal correspondence helped bridge the gap until the people involved could reconnect in person. Nonetheless, interpersonal communication seemed to require physical proximity.

Now things are different. Obviously, face-to-face communication is still vitally important; but technology plays a key role in starting and maintaining relationships. The term that collectively describes all the channels that make remote personal communication possible is **social media**. You're using social media when you text message with friends or coworkers; send a tweet; exchange e-mails, texts, and instant messages; and when you use

social networking websites like Facebook. The number of social media technologies has exploded in the past few decades, giving communicators today an array of choices that would have amazed someone from a previous era.

By the beginning of 2010, almost 75 percent of Americans under age 30 used social networking sites (Lenhart & Purcell, 2010), and the number is almost as high in many other countries (Global Publics Embrace Social Networking, 2010). By contrast, about 40 percent of those thirty and older were social networkers, and the fastest growth in social networking has come from users 74 and older, where use increased fourfold from 4 percent to 16 percent (Zickuhr, 2010).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In many ways, mediated and face-to-face communication are similar. Both include the same elements described in Chapter 1—messages, channels, noise, etc. Both are used to satisfy the same physical, identity, social, and practical needs outlined on pages 4–8. Despite these similarities, communication by social media differs from the in-person variety in some important ways.

Message Richness Social scientists use the term **richness** to describe the abundance of nonverbal cues that add clarity to a verbal message. As you'll read in Chapter 6, face-to-face communication is rich because it abounds with nonverbal messages that give communicators cues about the meanings of one another's words, and it offers hints about their feelings (Surinder & Cooper, 2003). By comparison, social media are much leaner for conveying information.

To appreciate how message richness varies by medium, imagine you haven't heard from a friend in

several weeks and you decide to ask, "Is anything wrong?" Your friend replies, "No, I'm fine." Would that response be more or less descriptive depending on whether you received it via text message, over the phone, or in person?

You almost certainly would be able to tell a great deal more from a face-to-face response because it would contain a richer array of cues: facial expressions, vocal tone, and so on. By contrast, a text message contains only words. The phone message—containing vocal cues but no visual ones— would probably fall somewhere in between.

Because most mediated messages are leaner than the face-to-face variety, they can be harder to interpret with confidence. Irony and attempts at humor can easily be misunderstood, so as a receiver it's important to clarify your interpretations before jumping to conclusions. Adding phrases such as "just kidding" or emoticons like :(can help your lean messages become richer, but the potential for your sincerity being interpreted as sarcasm still exists. As a sender, think about how to send unambiguous messages so you aren't misunderstood.

The leanness of social media messages presents another challenge. Without nonverbal cues, online communicators can create idealized—and sometimes unrealistic—images of one another. As we'll discuss in Chapters 3 and 6, the absence of nonverbal cues allows communicators to manage their identities carefully. After all, it's a world without bad breath, unsightly blemishes, or stammering responses. Such conditions encourage participants to engage in what Joseph Walther (1996) calls *hyperpersonal* communication, accelerating the discussion of personal topics and relational development beyond what normally happens in face-to-face interaction. This may explain why communicators who meet online sometimes have difficulty shifting to a face-to-face relationship (see the Focus on Research box on page 55).

Synchronicity Synchronous communication is two-way and occurs in real time. In-person communication is synchronous, as are phone conversations. By contrast, **asynchronous communication** occurs when there's a time gap between when a message is sent and when it's received. E-mail and voice mail messages are asynchronous. So are "snail mail" letters, and Twitter postings.

The asynchronous nature of most mediated messages makes them fundamentally different from synchronous communication. Most obviously, asynchronous messages give you the choice of not responding at all: You can ignore most problematic text messages without much fallout. That isn't a good option if the person who wants an answer gets you on the phone or confronts you in person.

Even if you want to respond, asynchronous media give you the chance to edit your reply. You can mull over different wording, or even ask others for advice about what to say. On the other hand, delaying a response to an asynchronous message can send a message of its own, intentionally or not ("I wonder why she hasn't texted me back?").

Dark Side of Communication

ALONE TOGETHER

Social scientist Sherry Turkle has made a career of studying how technologies shape who we are and how we relate to one another. After 15 years of research and hundreds of interviews, she argues that the "always on, always connected" nature of our world has changed the way we interact. Instead of a life enriched by a small number of meaningful relationships, we now have scores or even hundreds of superficial ones. We count as "friends" people we barely know on Facebook, and we increasingly communicate with those closest to us in 140 characters or less via texting, IM, and tweeting. Turkle argues that this overabundance of superficial contacts offers the "illusion of companionship."

It isn't the frequency or brevity of mediated messages that Turkle finds dangerous and depressing. It's the way these forms of communication make us less willing to engage in closer, deeper, more personal relationships. She describes young children who lavish attention on increasingly sophisticated electronic toys. She worries about teens who are uncomfortable with the immediacy and unpredictability of phone conversations, and who spend more time crafting online identities than talking in person with others. She tells familiar tales about working adults who ignore their families to stay in touch with others via the Internet.

"We don't need to reject or disparage technology," Turkle says. "We need to put it in its place." She urges us to stop multitasking, at least once in a while. To turn off our devices. To ask ourselves who really matters, and to spend quality time communicating in depth with those people.

Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other.* New York: Basic Books.

Permanence What happens in a face-to-face conversation is transitory. By contrast, the text and video you send via hard copy or social media channels can be stored indefinitely and forwarded to others. The permanence of digital messages can be a plus. You can save and share the smartphone photos of your once-in-a-lifetime encounter with a celebrity. And if your boss e-mails saying it's okay to come in late on Monday morning, you're covered if she later complains about your tardy arrival.

There can also be a downside to the enduring nature of digital messages. It's bad enough to blurt out a private thought or lash out in person, but at least there's no permanent record of your indiscretion. By contrast, a regrettable text message, e-mail, or web posting can be archived virtually forever. Even worse, it can be retrieved and forwarded in ways that can only be imagined in your worst nightmares. The best advice, then, is to take the same approach with mediated messages that you do in person: Think twice before saying something you might later regret. As one writer (Bennehum, 2005) put it, "Old e-mail never dies."

SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELATIONAL QUALITY

At first glance, social media might seem inferior to face-to-face interaction. As noted earlier, it lacks the rich array of nonverbal cues that are available in person. One observer put it this way: "E-mail is a way to stay in touch, but you can't share a coffee or a beer with somebody on e-mail or give them a hug" (Nie & Erbring, 2000, p. 19).

"Cyberpessimists" argue that there's a dark side to relying on mediated channels. (For a review, see DeAndrea et al., 2010.) Some critics describe how the

almost hypnotic attraction of an Internet connection discourages a sense of community (e.g., Putnam, 2000). Others claim that the "always on" nature of today's communication technology leads to more superficial relationships. (See the Dark Side box on page 54.)

Some research supports this position. A few older studies showed that heavy Internet users spend less time talking in person and on the phone with friends and family members (Bower, 1998; Nie, 2001). Even worse, excessive Internet use has been linked with depression, loneliness, and problems at school and work (Moody, 2001).

Despite claims like these, a growing body of research suggests that social media can be rich and satisfying (Walther & Ramirez, 2010). One survey revealed that social networking sites usually don't replace offline relationships as much as extend them (Kujath, 2011). For example, in one study, regular Internet users were 20 percent more likely to communicate daily with a relative or a friend, and 66 percent of them said their contact with friends increased because of e-mail (Horrigan et al., 2001).

Even more significant than the amount of communication that occurs online is its quality. Couples who talk frequently via cell phone feel more loving, committed, and confident about their relationship (Jin &

F⊕CUS ON RESEARCH

Less Can Be More: When Online Partners Meet in Person

Imagine meeting someone online—in a chat room, on a blog, or through a social networking site like Facebook. After interacting for months using various technologies (e-mail, texting), you find yourself wondering whether getting together in person would enhance your growing relationship. The answer, according to a recent study, might surprise you.

Communication researchers Artemio Ramirez and Shuangyue Zhang placed over 800 previously unacquainted college students into two-person "virtual partnerships." Over a 9-week period, the partners were required to complete a series of tasks together. Some of the duos communicated only online, with no face-to-face contact. Others began their work online but later met in person to finish their tasks. The researchers wanted to know whether "modality switching"—that is, moving from online to face-to-face communication—would affect the way the partners thought and felt about one another.

The findings: Partners who communicated exclusively online actually felt greater intimacy and social attraction to one another than those who met in person. For those who did meet face to face, the longer they delayed getting together, the lower their attraction when they finally met in person. The researchers explained that in online-only relationships, "idealization and heightened expectations can occur"—and that face-to-face meetings sometimes lead to a chilly dose of reality.

These findings raise a cautionary note for communicators who meet online and look forward to their relationship's flourishing in person. While some relationships can handle the transition, this study suggests there are risks involved—and that success is hardly guaranteed.

Ramirez, A., & Zhang, S. (2007). When online meets offline: The effect of modality switching on relational communication. *Communication Monographs, 74,* 287–310.
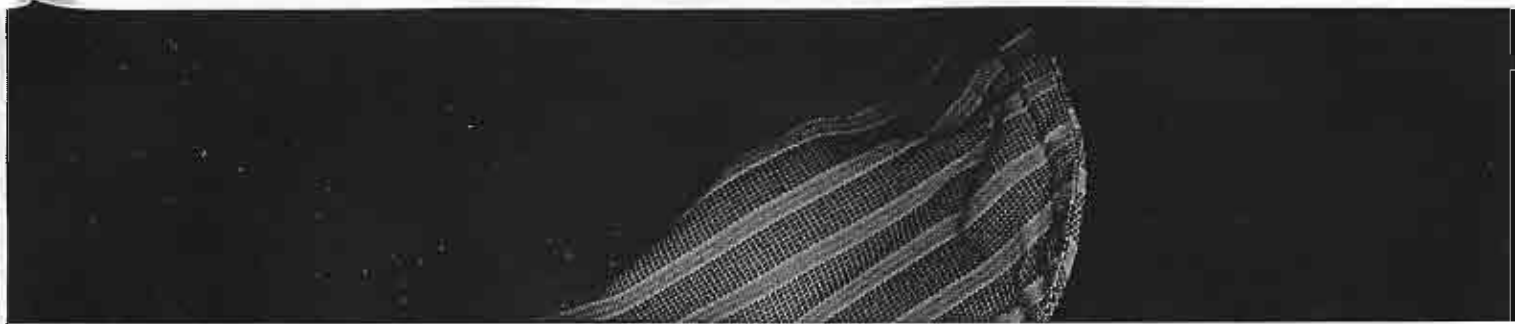
Peña, 2010). In long-distance relationships, partners who use social media to stay in touch report greater levels of intimacy (Gunn & Gunn, 2000) and higher levels of trust (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Almost 60 percent of American teenagers say that their use of the Internet helps their relationships with their friends, and almost a third report that it helps them make new friends (Lenhart et al., 2010). And finally, participants who have both in-person and electronic contact with friends are less lonely than their counterparts who have fewer ways of keeping in touch (Baiocco et al., 2011).

There are several reasons why mediated channels can increase both the amount and quality of interpersonal communication (Barnes, 2003). For one thing, it makes communication easier. Busy schedules and long distances can make quality time in face-to-face contact difficult or impossible. The challenge of finding time is especially tough for people who are separated by long distances and multiple time zones. In relationships like this, the asynchronous nature of e-mail provides a way to share information that otherwise would be difficult. Online chat is another way to keep in touch: Discovering that a friend or relative is logged on and starting a conversation is "like walking down the street and sometimes running into a friend," said one computer consultant (Marriott, 1998).

Sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1994b, p. 52) offers one example of how social media transformed the quality of a relationship:

> E-mail deepened my friendship with Ralph. Though his office was next to mine, we rarely had extended conversations because he is shy. Face to face he mumbled so, I could barely tell he was speaking. But when we both got on e-mail, I started receiving long, self-revealing messages; we poured our hearts out to each other. A friend discovered that e-mail opened up that kind of communication with her father. He would never talk much on the phone (as her mother would), but they have become close since they both got on line.

Experiences like these help explain why Steve Jobs, the cofounder of Apple Computer, suggested that personal computers be renamed "*inter*-personal computers."

COMMUNICATING COMPETENTLY WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Like face-to-face communication, mediated interaction can seem natural and almost effortless. But despite its apparent ease, there's potential for trouble unless you proceed mindfully. The following guidelines will help.

Be Careful What You Post A quick scan of social networking home pages shows that many users post text and images about themselves that could prove embarrassing in some contexts: "Here I am just before

my DUI arrest"; "This is me in Cancun on spring break." This is not the sort of information most people would be eager to show a prospective employer or certain family members.

As a cautionary tale about how your digital goofs can haunt you, consider the case of Kevin Colvin, a young intern at a Boston bank who e-mailed his boss saying "something came up at home" and he would need to miss a few days of work. A Facebook search by his boss revealed a photo showing Kevin's true location during the absence: an out-of-town Halloween party with the missing intern dressed in a fairy costume, complete with wings and wand. Besides seeing his pixie-like image plastered over the web, Kevin found that his indiscretion was not a brilliant career move. (To see the photo and read the boss's reaction, type the words "Kevin" and "cool wand" into your search engine.)

Some incautious posts can go beyond being simply amusing. One example is the practice of "sexting"—sharing explicit photos of one's self or others via mediated channels. One survey revealed that 10 percent of young adults between the ages of 14 and 24 have texted or e-mailed a nude or partially nude image of themselves to someone else, and 15 percent have received such pictures or videos of someone else they know (Lenhart, 2009). Perhaps even more disturbing, 8 percent reported that they had received a nude or partially nude image of someone they knew from a third party (MTV, 2009). The impulsive message or post that seems harmless at the time can haunt you for a lifetime.

MEDIA CLIP
ONLINE BUT DISCONNECTED: *THE SOCIAL NETWORK*

In this character study, Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg) is portrayed as a genius at computer programming and meeting the needs of the marketplace. At the same time, he is a disaster in the domain of personal relationships.

Film critic Roger Ebert called Zuckerberg's character "a heat-seeking missile in search of his own goals." He insults and humiliates his girlfriend Erica (Rooney Mara) and betrays his best friend Eduardo Saverin (Andrew Garfield). He builds an empire but lives in an isolated world of his own creation, indifferent to the feelings of those around him.

The irony of Zuckerberg's successes and failures offer a parable for our times. Mastering communication technology is no guarantee of interpersonal competence. On the relational front, success must come the old-fashioned way. Meaningful relationships can't be reduced to bits, bytes, and dollars.

Be Considerate The word "etiquette" calls to mind old-fashioned rules that have little to do with today's world. But whatever you call them, mostly unspoken rules of conduct still keep society running smoothly. We don't shove or cut in waiting lines. We return others' greetings, say "please" and "thanks," and (mostly) let others speak without cutting them off. By acting appropriately, we feel good about ourselves, and we're more effective in getting our needs met.

Communication by social media calls for its own rules, which some refer to as "netiquette." Here are a few.

Respect Others' Need for Undivided Attention If you've been texting, IMing, and e-mailing since you could master a keypad, it might be hard to realize that some people are insulted when you divide your attention between your in-person conversational partner and distant contacts. As one observer put

AT WORK

Choosing a Communication Channel

A generation ago, choosing which communication channel to use on the job wasn't very complicated. If a face-to-face conversation wasn't desirable or possible, you either mailed a letter or used the telephone. Today's communicators have many more options. If you want to put your thoughts in writing, you can use e-mail, fax, text messaging, instant messaging ... or the traditional pen-and-paper approach. If you want to speak, you can use a landline telephone, a cell phone, or an Internet-based system such as Skype.

Sometimes the choice of a medium is a no-brainer. If a customer says "phone me while I'm on the road," you know what to do. If your boss only responds to e-mails, then it would be foolish to use any other approach. But in many other situations, you have several options available. The table below outlines the advantages and drawbacks of the most common ones. Choosing the best channel can make a real difference in your success. In one survey (Lengel & Daft, 1988), managers who were identified as most "media sensitive" were almost twice as likely as their less-savvy peers to receive top ratings in performance reviews.

	SYNCHRONIZATION	RICHNESS OF INFORMATION CONVEYED	SENDER'S CONTROL OVER MESSAGE	CONTROL OVER RECEIVER'S ATTENTION	EFFECTIVENESS FOR DETAILED MESSAGES
Face-to-Face	Synchronous	High	Moderate	Highest	Weak
Telephone, Teleconferencing, and Videoconferencing	Synchronous	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Voice Mail	Asynchronous	Moderate	High	Low	Weak
E-mail	Asynchronous	Low	High	Low	High
Instant Messaging	Almost synchronous	Low	High	Varies	Weak
Text Messaging and Twitter	Varies	Low	High (given briefness of message)	Low	Good for brief messages
Hard Copy (e.g., handwritten or typed message)	Asynchronous	Low	High	Low	High

Adapted from Adler, R. B., & Elmhorst, J. (2010). *Communicating at work: Principles and practices for business and the professions* (10th ed., p. 29). New York: McGraw-Hill.

it, "While a quick log-on may seem, to the user, a harmless break, others in the room receive it as a silent dismissal. It announces: 'I'm not interested'" (Bauerlein, 2009).

Chapter 7 has plenty to say about the challenges of listening effectively when you are multitasking. Even if you think you can understand others while dealing with communication media, it's important to realize that they may perceive you as being rude.

Keep Your Tone Civil If you've ever posted a snide comment on a blog, shot back a nasty reply to a text or instant message, or forwarded an embarrassing e-mail, you know that it's easier to behave badly when the recipient of your message isn't right in front of you.

The tendency to transmit messages without considering their consequences is called **disinhibition**, and research shows it is more likely in mediated channels than in face-to-face contact (Watts, 2007). Sometimes communicators take disinhibition to the extreme, blasting off angry—even vicious—e-mails, text messages, and blogs. The common term for these outbursts is *flaming*. In text-based forms of social media, flaming includes profanity, all capital letters, excessive exclamation points, and question marks (Turnage, 2007). Here is the account of one writer who was the target of an obscenity-filled e-mail:

> No one had ever said something like this to me before, and no one could have said this to me before: in any other medium, these words would be, literally, unspeakable. The guy couldn't have said this to me on the phone, because I would have hung up and not answered if the phone rang again, and he couldn't have said it to my face, because I wouldn't have let him finish. . . . I suppose the guy could have written me a nasty letter: he probably wouldn't have used the word "rectum," though, and he probably wouldn't have mailed the letter; he would have thought twice while he was addressing the envelope. But the nature of e-mail is that you don't think twice. You write and send. (Seabrook, 1994, p. 71)

In some online communities, flaming is part of the culture, and is a way to instruct or correct a member who has misstated facts or abused the group's rules. But in most contexts, it's hard to find a justification for flaming.

Flaming isn't the only type of mediated harassment. Ongoing "cyberbullying" has become a widespread phenomenon, often with dire consequences (Bauman, 2011). More than 4 in 10 teens report being the target of online harassment—and the problem is international in scope (Huang & Chou, 2010). Recipients of cyberbullying often feel helpless and scared, to such a degree that one report found they are eight times more likely to carry a weapon to school than other students. There are several reported cases in the United States where a victim of cyberbullying committed suicide (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007), which is sobering in light of reports that 81 percent of cyberbullies admit their only reason for bullying is because "it's funny" (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007).

One way to behave better in asynchronous situations is to ask yourself a simple question before you send, post, or broadcast: Would you deliver the same message to the recipient in person? If your answer is no, then you might want to think before hitting the "enter" key.

Be Mindful of Bystanders If you spend even a little time in most public spaces, you're likely to encounter communicators whose use of technology interferes with others: Restaurant patrons whose phone voices intrude on your conversation, pedestrians who are more focused on their handheld device than on avoiding others, or people in line who are trying to pay the cashier and talk on their cell phone at the same time. If you aren't bothered by this sort of behavior, it can be hard to feel sympathetic with others who are offended by it. Nonetheless, this is another situation where the "platinum rule" applies: Consider treating others the way *they* would like to be treated.

Balance Mediated and Face Time Being connected 24/7 can steal time from in-person communication. But research confirms what commonsense suggests: "face time" is still important (Vitak et al., 2011).

Overuse of social media can range from slightly abnormal to borderline obsessive. It's tempting to use the term "addict" to describe someone who spends an unhealthy amount of time online. Whether or not the label is technically accurate, there's plenty of evidence that becoming hooked on the web can be harmful to emotional and relational health (Junghyun & Haridakis, 2008; Ko et al., 2005).

So what is the happy medium? There's no simple answer, but there are a couple of tests to keep in mind. If your loved ones hint—or directly tell you—that they would like more face time with you, it's probably wise to heed their request. And if you find that technological devices are subtracting from, rather than adding to, your interpersonal relationships, it might be time to monitor and limit your social media.

Summary

The growing diversity of American culture and the increased exposure to people from around the world make an understanding of intercultural communication essential.

When members of different cultures interact, their values can affect interaction in ways that may be felt but not understood. These values include

an emphasis on high- or low-context communication, individualism or collectivism, high or low power distance, relatively more or less avoidance of uncertainty, and either achievement or nurturing.

The codes that are used by members of a culture are often the most recognizable factors that shape communication between people from different backgrounds. Verbal codes include language spoken and the worldview created by it, as well as verbal communication style. Nonverbal codes also differ significantly, as do the attributions that cultural conditioning generate.

Intercultural communicative competence involves four dimensions: motivation and attitude, tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness, and knowledge and skill.

Social media differ from the face-to-face variety in several noteworthy ways: They are typically less rich, often asynchronous, and can be permanent. Social media do pose risks for relationships; but when used mindfully, they can enhance them. This chapter offers several guidelines for using social media with due caution and consideration. Following them can help relational communication thrive, as well as increasing the effectiveness of one's identity management.

Key Terms

- Achievement culture (41)
- Asynchronous communication (53)
- Co-culture (31)
- Collectivistic culture (38)
- Culture (31)
- Disinhibition (59)
- Ethnocentrism (49)
- High-context culture (36)
- Individualistic culture (38)
- In-group (31)
- Intercultural communication (33)
- Low-context culture (36)
- Nurturing culture (41)
- Out-group (31)
- Power distance (39)
- Prejudice (50)
- Richness (52)
- Salience (33)
- Social identity (31)
- Social media (51)
- Synchronous communication (53)
- Uncertainty avoidance (40)

Activities

1. Invitation to Insight

What in-groups do you belong to? You can best answer this question by thinking about whom you regard as belonging to out-groups. Based on your observations, consider the criteria you use to define in- and out-groups. Do you rely on race? Ethnicity? Age? Lifestyle? How do your judgments about in- and out-group membership affect your communication with others?

2. Critical Thinking Probe

Identify one of your important interpersonal relationships. Consider how that relationship might be different if you and your partner adopted values and norms that were opposite from the ones you already hold. For example, if your communication is low context, how would things be different if you shifted to a high-context style? If you are tolerant of uncertainty, what might happen if you avoided any surprises? Based on your answers, consider the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural values and norms you hold. Think about the pros and cons of cultures that have differing values and norms.

3. Ethical Challenge

Some cultural differences seem charming. However, others might seem alien—even inhumane. Explore the question of whether there are (or should be) any universal norms of behavior by identifying what rights and practices, if any, should be prohibited or honored universally.

4. Skill Builder

Use the criteria on pages 48–51 to evaluate your intercultural communication competence. Identify one culture with which you currently interact or could interact with in the future. Collect information on communication rules and norms in that culture through library research and personal interviews. Based on your findings, describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively with the culture's members.

5. Invitation to Insight

Send the same message to four friends, but use a different medium for each person. For example, ask the question "How's it going?" Use the following media:

- e-mail
- instant message
- text message
- telephone

Notice how each response differs and what that may say about the nature of the medium.

6. Invitation to Insight

Construct a diary of the ways you use social media in a 3-day period. For each instance when you use social media (e-mail, social networking website, phone, Twitter, etc.), describe

    a. The kind(s) of social media you use

    b. The nature of the communication (e.g., "Wrote on friend's Facebook wall," "Reminded roommate to pick up dinner on the way home".)

    c. The reason you chose that medium for that particular message

Based on your observations, describe the types of media you use most often and why you chose them. Do you think some of your messages could have been more effective if you had used a different medium?