# Chapter 1

# A rationale for studying intercultural communication: Why should we know about other cultures?

## Chapter objectives

After this chapter, you should be able to:

- Provide several reasons, with evidence, as to why it is important to study intercultural communication
- Describe possible limitations of studying intercultural communication
- Summarize briefly the history of intercultural communication as a field of research

**Building a rationale: Why do we need to know about intercultural communication?**

**The history and focus of intercultural communication: Where did we come from?**

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In 1994, a tsunami hit countries in the Indian Ocean, triggered by an earthquake measuring 9.1 on the Richter scale—the power of about 23,000 atomic bombs (*National Geographic News*, 2005). The tsunami destroyed whole cities and vast tracts of farmland and made many formerly occupied islands uninhabitable. It killed more than 225,000 people in countries including Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Maldives (Brunner, 2007). The World Bank Fact Sheet (Tsunami recovery in Indonesia, Dec, 2006) listed the need for 80–100,000 homes and noted the destruction of more than 2000 schools and 100 health facilities. The World Bank enlisted the help of 15 nations and international agencies (the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the European Commission) to help with the repair and restoration of the region (Aceh Post-Tsunami Reconstruction, 2006). Many such disasters have occurred since, including the 2011 earthquake and resulting tsunami in Japan (see Figure 1.1).

In this story, we see a major international crisis that required multicultural and multinational cooperation. While this case reflects an obvious need for intercultural communication, individuals can also benefit from such an education, even if they never travel outside of their hometown. Many students around the world today are re-investing in their community, with a sense of social responsibility that surpasses that of their parents. Many readers of this book are members of that generation, but even those of different ages may find themselves increasingly aware of the world around them. In this chapter, we highlight the importance of understanding intercultural communication. We then turn our attention to the reasons that we should bring that understanding back to the communities—local, regional, and world—in which we live.



**Figure 1.1** International workers cooperate after the Japanese Tsunami of 2011. What role could you have in international cooperation to solve world problems?
Source: YONHAP/EPA.

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# Building a rationale: Why do we need to know about intercultural communication?

Many university researchers, journalists, business leaders, civic leaders, and bloggers around the world have begun to call our attention to the need to understand cultures and intercultural communication. Whereas at one time, one had to justify the need for an organization or individual to study other cultures, in today's globalized world such a need seems simply to be assumed. The reasons and benefits of studying intercultural communication are broad, from personal growth to community investment to financial incentives. We review these and other motives here.

But before we begin, we should probably define some key terms. Each of these is complex, and we will discuss them in more detail in chapter 3. We will define **culture** simply as the way of life of a group of people, including symbols, values, behaviors, artifacts, and other shared aspects. Culture continually evolves as people share messages, and, often, it is the result of struggle between different groups who share different perspectives, interests, and power relationships (Hecht *et al.*, 2006). For our purposes, **communication** is the process of creating and sending symbolic behavior, and the interpretation of behavior between people. And **intercultural communication** occurs when culture impacts the communication between two or more people enough to make a difference. This differs from **international communication**, which focuses on media systems. Communication between diplomats and international politicians is intercultural, but this is a special type of communication as the communicators represent not only their own interests, but also those of larger organizations or nations. This last form of communication might take place for economic advancement or for the addressing of world problems. UNESCO, in its 2009 World Report executive summary, highlights the need for dialogue across many areas of social and global development. In its closing recommendations, it advocates the development of guidelines for cross-cultural dialogue, the creation and distribution of audio-visual (mediated) materials that are culturally sensitive, the promotion of (cross-cultural) media literacy, the development of minority–majority member dialogues within national cultures, and the creation of "real and virtual forums" for the development of "cultural intelligence" in the business and marketing world (UNESCO, 2009, p. 35). In fact, the name of the UNESCO report involves "cultural diversity" and "intercultural dialogue." But as we shall see, addressing global problems is only one reason to study intercultural communication.

## *The personal growth motive*

Many students live in the here and now—the world of room- or apartment-mates, school or sports organizations, and jobs. Our first motive has to do with the benefit to you, as a person, of learning about other cultures. While there are many personal benefits in learning about other cultures, we will focus on three: worldmindedness, self-awareness, and personal empowerment.

First, learning about cultures and intercultural communication can simply help us better understand others in the world. Bradford 'J' Hall (2003) lists "freedom from ignorance" as one of the benefits of studying intercultural communication (p. 22). Knowing about other cultures helps us to be more responsible employees, travelers, consumers and producers of media, and world citizens, bringing to each interaction

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an increased awareness of others and competence. Hall states, "As we are freed from ignorance and negative attributions, we are able to build better relationships. . . with a wide variety of people" (p. 22). Communication and contact over time can bring us, in both our face-to-face and socially mediated interactions, from a state of ethnocentrism, where we feel that our way is best, to a state where we see the value in the perspectives and ways of living of others. The greatest benefit will come from both education and contact, as these can help us to appreciate cultural difference within our own nation and across borders (see chapter 5).

As we learn more about other cultures, we also learn more about our own cultures and about ourselves. The more people study other languages, the more they learn about their own language; much the same is true when studying cultures. If you grow up in a culture that makes arguments through deductive, linear logic ("If A is true, and B is true, then C must be true"), you may never be aware of that approach to argumentation until you study or live in a culture in which one makes an argument through an extended, even circular story.

Finally, knowledge of and extended experience with other cultures make us more flexible as individuals. Young Yun Kim and Brent Ruben (1988) suggest that learning new cultures gives us new ways to think, feel, and act. We might, over time, become "intercultural persons," able to move freely between cultures, or at least understand different cultural perspectives more easily. This knowledge makes us aware that the things that we always took for granted as simply fact, or "natural," are, in fact, cultural. We realize that what we always thought was friendship, success, beauty, family, or democracy is in fact something that our culture has defined for us, and often such forces are not simply the neutral flowing of culture from one construction of beauty to another, but are manipulated by corporations, advertisers, politicians, and citizens who benefit from particular views of the world. Knowledge of cultures gives us the agency to choose between different ways of being a friend or being successful. It "gives us a broader view of our own lives and the problems we face" (Hall, 2003, p. 22), even if our choices are constrained by social, political, and economic circumstances.

## *The social responsibility motive*

We are not simply isolated individuals—we live in contact with others, and we have responsibility to live together peaceably and ethically (see chapter 2). But, as Marshall McLuhan's (1962) metaphor of the Global Village illustrates, our communities become more interconnected because of increased technology, media, and ease of travel. In addition, more and more people share this planet with its limited space and resources. As well, a complex web of changing labor relations, social policies, tribal and international conflicts, religious fervor, and other things lead to an increase in social problems. Some of these come from the growing stress on the environment brought about by an increase both of people and of industry. As we face global environmental change (and debate the causes of that change), there is an increased need for global discussion among leaders for policies that are equitable to nations and that can seek to preserve and improve the environment. One such effort was the Kyoto Protocol (2012), an initiative by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, aimed at encouraging 37 industrialized nations to work more actively to reduce greenhouse gases.

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## ON THE NET

**The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change lists 191 nations that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, established in 1997 to reduce greenhouse emissions: http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/status_of_ratification/items/2613.php. Is your nation among those that have ratified it? Go onto websites such as http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/jan/31/world-carbon-dioxide-emissions-country-data-co2 or http://www.carbonplanet.com/country_emissions to see where your country ranks in total and per capita emissions. What are some of the reasons that some of the countries with the highest production of greenhouse gases might not ratify an agreement such as the Kyoto Protocol? What are the implications for such choices for citizens of the countries involved?**

Of course, the environment is only one of the issues that demand global cooperation. A global population clock (Current world population, n.d.) gives the population of the world, at the writing of this paragraph, as 7,109,925,897. According to the World Bank (2013), about 20% of those live in poverty (defined here as less than $U.S. 1.25 income per person per day), or 1.22 billion in 2010. Although it is good news that poverty is down from 43% of the earth's population in 1990, poverty still remains a pressing problem. But how we address it requires a "dialogic" approach (Martin, *et al.*, 2002), in which we talk with people within the situation to understand their own view of poverty and how to address it (see chapter 2). A UNESCO World Report (2009) advises, "Cultural perspectives shape how poverty is understood and experienced" (p. 25). Developmental approaches must take into account local cultural perspectives to be successful. This holds true for issues such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, child soldiers, violence against women, and the search for cures for illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, or heart disease.

In addition to social issues, wars and armed conflicts are occurring throughout the world. One website, Wars in the World (2012) outlines "hotspots" involving 61 different nations and 313 militias and separatist groups. In many cases, struggles are not armed, but are battled over prestige, social status, and social capital within nations, as groups strive to gain recognition and equal opportunity within their own countries, from the Roma in Hungary and other European nations to the Ainu of Japan. This includes struggles for equality for groups of different races, sexes, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations. Some might include within this discussion social class inequalities. For example, Global Finance's online magazine (Global Finance, n.d.) ranks counties based on how great the difference is between poorest and richest families, with Chile, Turkey, Mexico, and the United States being at the unequal end of the spectrum, and Slovenia, Denmark, and Norway having the most equality in incomes. Difference in worker pay may be another indicator of inequality. A popular Internet image (see Figure 1.2) points out supposed disparity among CEOs and average employees in certain countries. However, a *Tampa Bay Times* online news article links to reports that show that the U.S. figure has no basis in research (*Tampa Bay Times*, 2012). The article cites several reputable organizations like the Institute for Policy Studies and the Economic Policy Institute to note that the current ratio is probably only somewhere between 185 to 1 and 325 to 1. Such discrepancies led to the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement and the protest for economic justice for the "99%." U.S. American CEOs don't consider the contrast to worker pay or even to their cross-national peers, to be important. Rather, they consider their pay comparable to peers in other high-producing industries.

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**Figure 1.2** This Internet image suggests a greater disparity in pay between senior employees and average workers in some nations than others. However, some research suggests the figures may be exaggerated. What are the benefits or issues of having extremely highly paid CEOs? Source: *Tampa Bay Times*, 2012.

| *Country* | *Ratio of pay CEO : Average worker* |
|---|---|
| Japan | 11.1 |
| Germany | 12.1 |
| France | 15.1 |
| Italy | 20.1 |
| Canada | 20.1 |
| South Africa | 21.1 |
| Britain | 22.1 |
| Mexico | 47.1 |
| Venezuela | 50.1 |
| United States | 475.1 |

## The economic motive

Even though movements like Occupy Wall Street claim economic injustice, in part, at the hands of big business, we could not exist without corporations, and they have made contributions to societies worldwide. Most students work for some organization at some point in their lives, and it is the business context that provides our next motive for the study of intercultural communication. An E-How Money Internet site (Nelson, n.d.) suggests corporate profitability as the first motive for knowing how to communicate well across cultures. The article cites Wal-Mart's failed $US 1 billion expansion to Germany, led by an American manager who sought to import American practices and clerk–customer relations that just did not make sense in Germany. The company eventually withdrew from Germany.

It should come as no surprise to us that such difficulties would occur, with an ever-expanding and ever-more-interconnected international economy. Multinational corporations continue to grow, constituting an ever-increasing piece of the world economy. Several writers have argued that some multinational corporations (MNCs), such as Wal-Mart, Exxon Mobil, General Motors, and British Petroleum (BP), surpass many nations when comparing company revenues to gross domestic product (de Grauwe & Camerman, 2002). The International Trade Administration, in the United States, reports that manufactured exports support six million jobs, or nearly one out of five manufacturing jobs in the United States (Ward, 2009). Such statistics represent trends around the world. A joint study by the International Labour Office and the World Trade Organization reports that in the mid-1980s, 30% of world GDP was related to global trade; that figure had risen to 60% of world GDP by 2007.

Both the OECD and current CEOs (in an interview study of 1500 CEOs worldwide by an IBM "CEO Study") see a coming shift in global economic power from developed nations to developing nations (Radjou & Kalpa, 6 Aug, 2010). This is evidenced by world events, such as when the nation island of Samoa changed time zones from one side of the dateline to the other, skipping Friday, December 30, 2011, altogether. This changed its alignment from the United

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States to its current most important trading partners, according to Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi (ABC News, 2011). Such a shift in world economics drives a need for what Navi Radjou and Prassad Kalpa (6 Aug, 2010) call "polycentric" organizations—those that leverage potential of new employees both from the Millennial generation and from around the world. Still, only 23% of the CEOs interviewed felt that globalization would have a major impact on their organization in the next five years. And, while Western CEOs see more than 50% of their future growth as coming from world markets like India and China, only 2% have senior leadership from those areas. Statistics such as these, as well as the growing involvement with major corporations in world politics, has led Thomas McPhail (2010) to suggest that large and powerful nations have ceded their leadership of the world to the new giants—multinational corporations.

Although we see the benefit in local jobs and economies of world trade and globalization (something we will talk more about in chapter 11), we realize that these are not neutral forces. One such example is the tension between two world forums: the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum. The World Economic Forum is "an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas" (World Economic Forum, n.d.). The forum, held each year in Davos, Switzerland, is composed of leaders from 1000 organization "members" from many sectors—such as construction, engineering, food and beverage, financial services. One stipulation for membership is that the corporation members must be leaders in their sectors, often with at least $US 5 billion in turnover. Forbes rates Klaus Schwab, the leader of the forum, as number 66 among the world's most powerful people (Forbes.com, 2009).

In open opposition of the World Economic Forum, a group of people began the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. According to a website comparing the two forums:

> The first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2001, and was conceived of by the Worker's Party of Brazil and other Brazilian civil society organizations as a counter gathering to the World Economic Forum held for decades in Davos, Switzerland. The Social Forum stands for the ideals of people-centered globalization, with "Another World is Possible!" as its battle cry. (Washington Peace Center, 2013)

The initial forum had 20,000 participants, with delegates from 117 nations. It has fought to develop local policies to resist both the cultural and economic influences of globalization, especially as such forces, according to the forum, tend to benefit the interests of more powerful economic nations and, particularly, big business. While the themes of the WSF change from year to year, common themes are democratic development, human rights, equality and non-discrimination (e.g., sexism, racism, religious sectarianism), the fight against militarization, the environment, and imperialist globalization. Members of the 2012 conference included some from the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States and the Indignant movement in Spain. The conference had the theme "Capitalist Crisis, Social and Environmental Justice" (Utopia, 25 Jan, 2012).

Before we assume that the battle between the forums is cut and dried and without debate, we should note that the stated purpose of the World Economic Forum is "improving the state of the world" (Forbes.com, 2009). To that end, leaders are concerned with world crises and situations, but see the response as being in global economic development. So, for example, one frequent participant, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, pledged $US 750 million to the Global Fund, which focuses on world solutions for fighting malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS/HIV (Treinor, 26 Jan, 2012).

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**ON THE NET**

**Do your own Internet research comparing the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum. What are the similarities and differences between their priorities, agendas, and proposed solutions for world problems? Discuss your own perspective with your friends or classmates: What are the strengths and limitations of each approach?**

## The cross-cultural travel motive

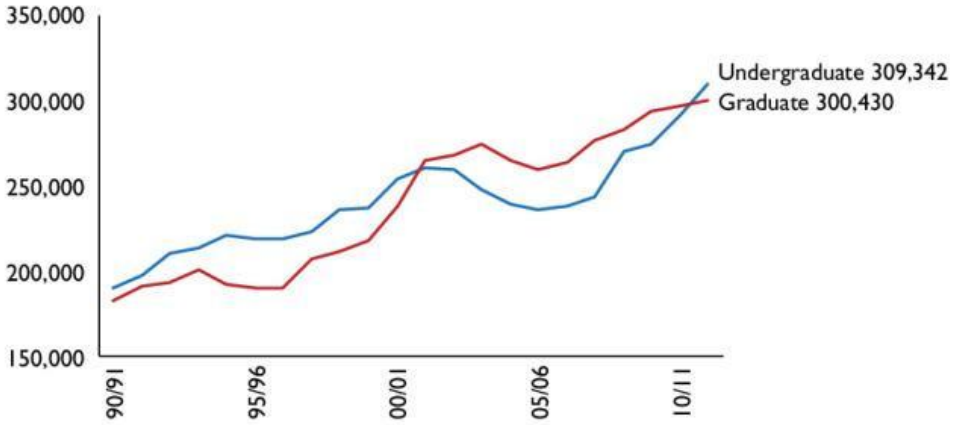
In addition to the number of workers traveling abroad and the economic motive, we see, with modern technology, an increased number of international travelers for different reasons. We have noted above the high rates of international workers. However, we also see high numbers of cross-cultural travelers in three other groups—tourists, students, and refugees.

Regarding tourism, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) anticipated one billion tourists, either domestic or international, globally in the year 2012. The Secretary General of the UNWTO, Taleb Rifai, echoes the perspective of the UNWTO, that increased tourism can create jobs and lead to sustainable world development in an environmentally conscious manner (World Tourism Organization, 2012). Tourism, of course, has a larger impact on some countries than others. Nationmaster.com (2009a) notes that the country with the highest number of tourists (again, counting both local and international tourists) is Turkey, with the Caicos Islands (with over 12,000 tourists for each 1000 inhabitants). Other top ratios of tourist to population include places we might expect—Monaco, Caribbean and Pacific Island nations, and so on—but also Bahrain, Iceland, Cyprus, and Austria. Other countries that still thrive on tourism rate much lower in the ratio of tourist to inhabitant, such as the United States (number 105 on the list), Japan (132), and Brazil (152). While tourism is important for these locations, the impact of tourism may be on local cultures and communication. Tourism grows and falls by region and with the economy. For example, tourism in the Asia-Pacific region grew by 13% between 2009 and 2010, with the Middle East showing the highest increase in tourism (14.1%) that year (United Nations ESCAP, 2011). France was first as a destination for international travel (in contrast to the Nationmaster statistics), but third in revenue, with the United States being third on the list for arrivals, but first in terms of revenue generated, with tourists spending an average of $1616 each within the United States. To consider the impact of tourism on culture, we should consider both the number of tourists per size of population, but also the economic impact on the country (Tourism Intelligence Network, n.d.).

***What do you think?*** What are the positive and negative aspects of a high degree of tourism on a local culture? What are some of the ways that people within a culture might receive the benefits of cross-cultural tourism while minimizing the negative impacts?

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**Figure 1.3** The number of students traveling internationally is growing by an average of 12% per year. What do you think are the reasons that drive this increase? Undergraduate international students outnumbered graduate international students in 2011/12, the first time since 2000/01.
Source: Open Doors® Report on International Educational Exchange, 2012.



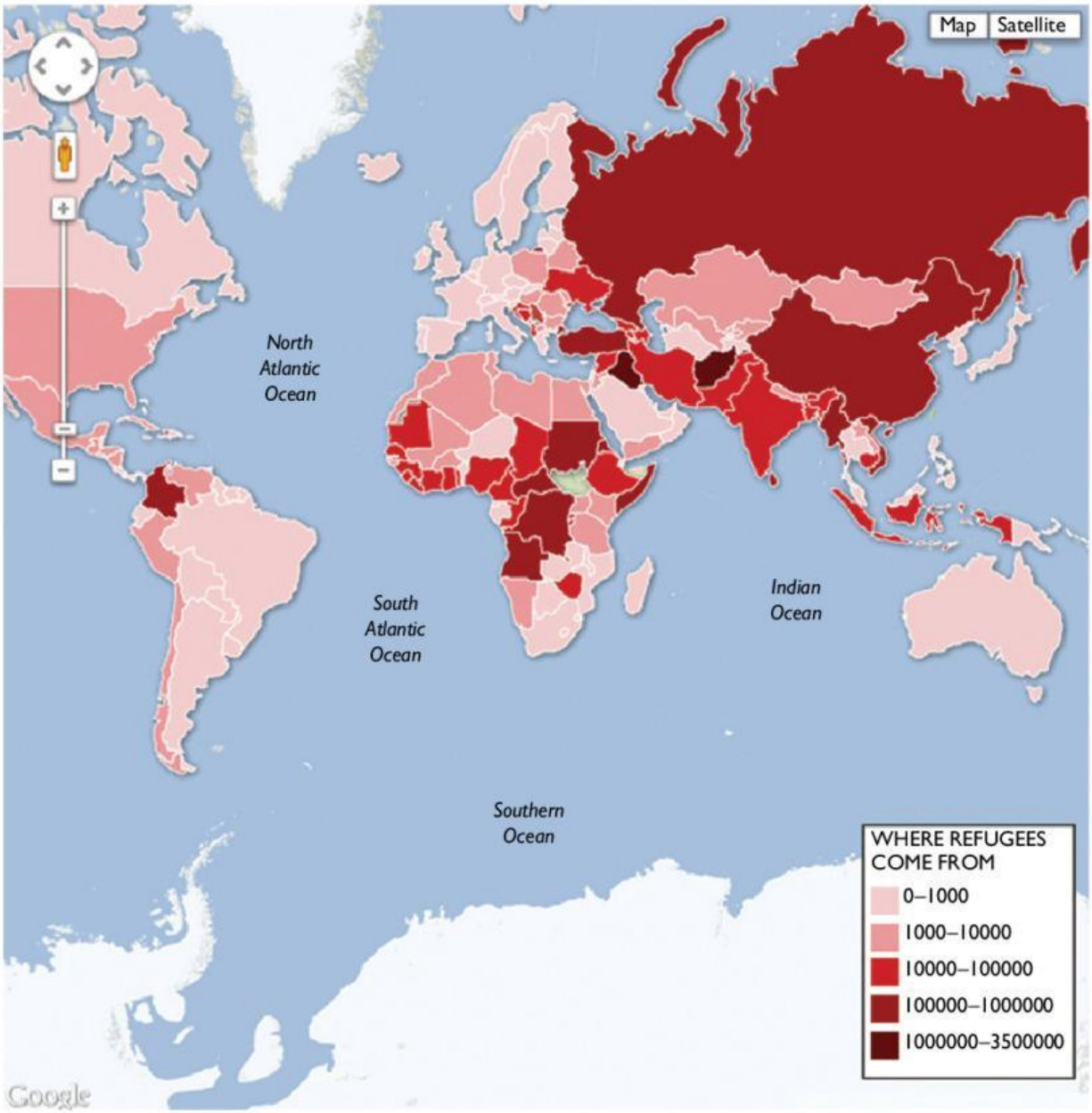

Another major source of international travel is international education. Very likely, many readers of this book are reading it in a country outside of their own. The Institute of International Education, based in the United States, reported a 5% increase in international students studying in the U.S. from the 2009/10 year to the 2010/11 year, with students from China, India, and South Korea constituting nearly 50% of the students. There were nearly 300,000 each of undergraduate and graduate students studying abroad in the United States (Institute of International Education: Open Doors, 2012). BBC News, reporting statistics from UNESCO, suggests that the increase in students crossing national borders is an international phenomenon, with a "sharp increase" of 12% of students studying internationally around the world (see Figure 1.3). China, alone, had 440,000 students abroad in 2011 (Coughlan, 9 Mar, 2011). The growth of international study has economic impacts both for host countries and for universities, but for our purposes, the greater impacts are on the students who travel abroad and on the students and teachers with whom they work.

One group of people travels not by choice but to escape hostile situations. This group consists of refugees and asylum seekers. The United Nations Refugee Agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UNHCR, 2012–2013) defines a **refugee** as someone who has traveled outside of her or his country because of a fear of threat to freedom or life based on reasons of group belonging (e.g., race, sex, ethnicity, political affiliation, tribal group). The **asylum seeker** differs slightly in that she or he is seeking legal protection from the new state, rather than simply moving there because of conditions of strife. Some flee not from threat of a government or ruling party, but from threat of famine.

Like the groups above, these travelers do not always cross national borders. As we will see when we discuss the nature of culture in chapter 3, rarely do cultural borders coincide with national borders. Thus, an internal migration of refugees might provide just as "intercultural" an experience as the crossing of refugees from one country to another. The United Nations Refugee Agency fact sheet (*Guardian*, 2011) lists 10.5 million refugees and people in "refugee-like conditions," as well as 14.7 million internally displaced persons as of January, 2011 (see Figure 1.4). Adding these to those recently returned "stateless people" (those who do not belong to any nation state), and others, amounts to a total population of

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**Figure 1.4** Are there refugees or displaced persons in your country? What sort of help or support do they need? What policies and conditions lead to refugees in your nation or those that your nation is involved with? Is there anything you can do to aid refugees in your area?
Source: http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/interactive/2011/jun/20/refugee-statistics-mapped
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concern of 33.9 million people (Populations of concern, n.d.). Other statistics rate the number of refugees at nearly 16 million (Nationmaster.com, 2009b), with a total of 43.7 million forcibly displaced persons. Contrary to the belief of many that the majority of cross-border refugees go to the so-called "wealthy nations," four out of five of these refugees are currently housed in the developing world (UNHCR 2011 refugee statistics: *Guardian*, 2011).

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## The media motive

Another reason to know more about culture in general and intercultural communication specifically is that we are consumers and producers of mediated messages that travel across cultural borders. As in our discussion of cross-cultural travelers above, we should think of such cross-cultural media usage both in terms of national cultures and cultures within national boundaries. First, in terms of national cultures, new technology has drastically changed the ways in which we see the world. McPhail (2010) notes how Turner Broadcasting Company's Cable News Network (CNN) changed the way we did news, with coverage of international events in the 1980s and early 1990s, such as Tiananmen Square and the Gulf War. Like other major networks, such as the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) or Al Jazeera, CNN had international partners all over the world, in places such as Angola, Belize, Greece, and Venezuela. But the coverage made news coverage both more immediate—often with live coverage of events—and more internationally focused, something more relevant in the United States perhaps than other countries, as national network news tended to give only brief coverage of international events. In addition, the Turner Network began the rise of global media conglomerates, as Turner sought to increase cable sales with the creation of Nickelodeon, Arts & Entertainment (A&E), USA, Disney, Showtime, HBO, ESPN, and C-Span. McPhail covers giants in several industries—advertising, news services, and the international music industry. International news giants include Deutsche Welle (Germany), Channel News Asia, and Euronews. Music industry giants include Vivendi-Universal (France), Sony (Japan), EMI Group (United Kingdom), Warner (United States), and BMG (Germany).

At any one moment, depending on where we live, we see products advertised by companies in other countries, listen to music made in other countries, see adverts for products made in other countries, or watch news about what has happened in other countries. Especially in the last instance, it is helpful for us to understand the cultures involved to be able to understand what is happening in a particular location. For example, in 2011 National Geographic filmed a special on the troubling conflict between Turkish- and Greek-descended inhabitants of Cyprus, noting the division that resulted from a 1974 conflict. However, Benjamin Broome (2002) notes that Turkish and Greek Cypriots see different major turning points for the centuries-old tensions in Cyprus. The latter date, 1974, is the date of a Greek coup and, more importantly, of the arrival of Turkish troops that led to the current division of the island. This is the date the Greek Cypriots tend to label as the start of the current conflict. Turkish Cypriots, however, trace the conflicts back to the 1960s and Greek Cypriot efforts to join the island (which is off the coast of Turkey) to Greece. In this case, there are two totally opposing perspectives of the history, and, while the National Geographic programme seeks to be balanced, it takes one of the perspectives more prominently. With this in mind, we must realize that any news source or even information source we read, such as Wikipedia.com, is written from a cultural perspective.

### ON THE NET

**A great deal of controversy surrounded the release and content of a video documentary, *Kony 2012*, produced by a group called Invisible Children (http://invisiblechildren.com/kony/), an advocacy and development group working with children in the war-torn areas of Uganda and its African neighbors ("Programs," n.d.)—including child soldiers (Figure 1.5a). The video is about Joseph Kony, of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda (Figure 1.5b), which the video names as one of the world's worst war criminals. Do some Internet research on the video. What are some different perspectives about its merits? How would a deeper understanding of Ugandan culture(s) inform you of the meanings in the video?**

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**Figure 1.5b** Joseph Kony, of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, answers journalists' questions.
Source: Stuart Price/AP/Press.



**Figure 1.5a** Child soldier, Uganda 1996.
Source: Lars Astrom/AP/Press Association Images.

The very presence of sources like Wikipedia and YouTube alert us to another key aspect of media, and that is the rise of computer-mediated and social media. There is no doubt that the Internet has changed our lives and, in some ways, connected us to the world. In 1995, only 0.4% of the world, or 16 million users, were on the Internet. By December, 2011, the figure had reached 2,267 million, or 32.7% of the world population (Internet growth statistics, n.d.). Sifry's Alerts (Sifry, 22 Sep, 2008) reports that Technorati, a website that tracks blog posts, was tracking 133 million blogs as of September, 2008, with about 10.4 new blog posts posted every second. *How Much Information?*, a report out of University of California, Berkeley (2003), notes the difficulty of imagining or quantifying how much "information" there is. However, based on size of information produced (e.g., five exabytes in 2002 alone, or the equivalent of 37,000 libraries the size of the Library of Congress in the United States), the amount of recorded information per person in the world (about 800 megabytes), new information via emails (400,000 terabytes/year), and so on, suggests that the amount of "new information" in the world might be doubling every three years (University of California, Berkeley, 2003).

Two things are apparent with this explosion of new information. First, if we are on the Internet, we will have contact with people from other cultures. We might play *Left for Dead* to kill off the zombies, meeting players from other cultures, then browse online news from Al Jazeera or the BBC, then video-chat with or email friends or family in another part of the world. Social networking gives us MySpace, Friendster, Google Plus, Orkut (popular in Brazil), Mixi (Japan), Renren (China), Cyworld (South Korea), and Facebook. The latter, founded in 2004, now has more than 3000 employees and 845 million users (Newsroom: Factsheet, 2012). Many of us use Twitter, possibly with worldwide feeds. Or we might engage in friendship networks or online random chats like Omegle or Chatroulette.

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### Break it down

Go on to a chat site with a positive reputation—preferably one that is international, such as Omegle.com or Chatroulette (chat safely!). Chat with people from your own country or others, and see what you can find out about their culture and current issues within that culture, from the other person's perspective. (If you are speaking to an individual, don't expect her or him to be able to speak for the whole culture!) What are some strengths and limitations of this exercise?

But such cross-cultural social networking also interacts with culture. Cultures shape how people use social networking sites, with research just now being published in this area. For example, a 2010 study found that Chinese and U.S. American students presented themselves differently on social networking sites, with the Chinese presenting themselves as competent or using supplication more than the U.S. Americans, and the latter using more ingratiation than the former (Chu & Choi, 2010). Another study found ethnic differences between African, Asian, and Caucasian U.S. Americans in aspects of Facebook usage, such as references to family in the "About Me" section, the number of self-descriptions, the number of groups to which they belonged and the presence of another person in their profile picture (DeAndrea *et al.*, 2010). The interconnectedness we have through the Internet and social media also has the potential to impact culture, either positively or negatively, something we will return to in our discussion of globalization (see chapter 11). Some, for example, have credited the use of cell phones and Twitter with having a major role in Middle Eastern struggles for democracy in the late 2000s.

***What do you think?*** Having considered some of the reasons for studying culture and communication, which do you feel are the most important reasons, and why? How might some of the purposes that people study intercultural communication compete against each other? For example, could studying intercultural communication to promote national and business interests indirectly contribute to situations where one needs to study intercultural communication to help refugees or address the needs of the poor? Is there a way to reconcile such difficulties?

## Challenges of studying intercultural communication

Even though there are many benefits of studying intercultural communication, Bradford "J" Hall (2003) summarizes some things to watch out for. One of these is the danger of oversimplifying our understanding of cultures. The UNESCO World Report (2009) advises, for example, against reducing our understanding of culture to national identities and to resist the danger of seeing cultures as stagnant and unchanging. There are many cultural identities within national cultures and that cross national boundaries, such as the Ewe tribe in Africa, which can be

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found in Ghana, Togo, and Benin, or the Basque people, who are found in Spain and France. Some cultures, such as Celtic culture, have left remnants in many nations, and other groups, such as the Roma in Europe, continue to exist in many places, with similarities among all Roma, yet many differences even within the group. We understand, by not simplifying, that cultures are fluid and constantly changing. Hall warns us against overgeneralizing—that is, while individuals are influenced by their cultures, they are not their cultures and have unique aspects and experiences that distinguish them in some ways from all other members of their culture. Finally, Hall notes, there is a tendency to exaggerate differences. This happens first of all because difference simply draws our attention more than similarity. It is much more interesting to think of how Swiss and Germans may be different than how they are alike (Kopper, 1993). But the film industry and television often magnify the differences. For instance, the 1986 Hollywood movie, *Gung Ho* (Blum & Howard, 1986), about a U.S. American factory bought and run by a Japanese company, makes Japanese and American business styles seem more different than they probably are. Finally, even research supports difference: it is much harder to publish research that highlights similarity than research that finds differences.

## The history and focus of intercultural communication: Where did we come from?

With an increase of intercultural interaction and recognition of cultural groups within national boundaries, it is no surprise that scholars from the late 20th century onward have dedicated increasing time and effort to the understanding of intercultural communication. But as a field of study, intercultural communication is relatively new. Some writers look to the roots of this field of study in writers such as Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud (Rogers & Hart, 2002). However, most see the beginning of the modern study of intercultural communication in the works of Edward T. Hall (Figure 1.6) and his colleagues at the Foreign Service institute in the 1940s and 1950s. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz (1990) outlines how the focus of the early anthropologists and linguists set the stage for how our discipline first conceived of culture and how it would do research (See chapter 2). Hall and his colleagues saw culture as patterned and predictable. Beginning with his book *The Silent Language* (1959), Hall provided a great contribution to the study of intercultural communication. He shifted research focus from specific cultures to an examination of interaction between people from different cultures. He developed many frameworks, for space usage (**proxemics**), for time (**chronemics**), and so on, giving us many terms we still use in the discipline of intercultural communication today.

We see two important aspects for our beginnings in terms of focus and rationale for the study of intercultural communication. The first is that the study of intercultural communication began with the Foreign Service Institute, a branch of the United States government, to help its diplomats be more effective in meeting state goals (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). Some might argue that the very discipline was born in relations of power. But clearly, we also see an organizational focus that continues today. This relates to the second aspect: Hall's pragmatic focus. Much of the previous sociological and anthropological study of culture had been broad, looking at religious, leisure, family, education, labor, and other systems. But Hall found that his trainees most needed to know how to communicate effectively. So he and his colleagues really focused on practical

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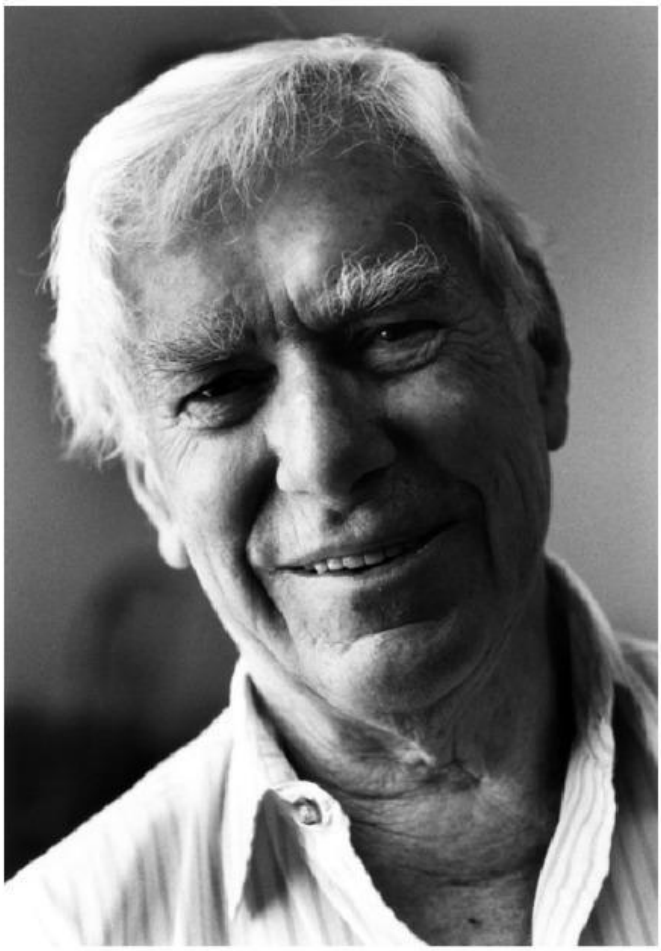


**Figure 1.6** Edward T. Hall, who wrote a number of books between the 1950s and the 1970s, including *The Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension*, and *Beyond Culture*, that form a foundation for the modern study of intercultural communication.
Source: Karin B Hall/Photo © 2004 Warren Martin Hern, reproduced with permission.

aspects—how close to stand, how much to touch, how to think of time. Hall produced training methods and extended the study of intercultural communication to business workers, missionaries, and students.

Leeds-Hurwitz (1990) notes that the field of anthropology was not interested in this narrow focus on communication, so the new field of study found itself "homeless." Guo-Ming Chen and William Starosta (1998), provide an excellent, concise summary of what happened over the next few years. Our coverage will be still more concise. There was brief coverage of culture and communication in the 1960s, but the 1970s saw a great growth in the field. Many new college texts, associations, and publications began in that decade, including *The International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (a cross-disciplinary, international journal put out by SIETAR), *The Handbook of Intercultural Communication*, and the first issue of *The International and Intercultural Communication Annual.*

We call the 1970s the decade of research, as many scholars were researching a variety of topics. Young Yun Kim (1984) summarizes much research of that time, noting there was a lot of research in the fields of cross-cultural transitions (e.g., culture shock), international business, cross-cultural counseling, and technology transfer.

We call the 1980s the decade of theory; where scholars were looking at the connection between many variables in the 1970s, in 1983, the first major theory book came out,

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