INTERCULTURAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION:
MAKING SENSE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN
EMERGENCY RESPONSE CONTEXTS

by

Andrew S. Pyle
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
Communication

Committee:

[Signatures]

Chair

Department Chair
Program Director

Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Date: April 7, 2014

Spring Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
Intercultural Emergency Communication: 
Making Sense of Intercultural Communication Competence 
in Emergency Response Contexts 

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of 
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University 

By 

Andrew S. Pyle 
Master of Arts 
University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2011 
Bachelor of Arts 
Ouachita Baptist University, 2009 

Chairperson: Katherine Rowan, Professor 
College of Humanities and Social Sciences 

Spring Semester 2014 
George Mason University 
Fairfax, VA
DEDICATED

This paper, the culmination of my academic career, is dedicated first to Sarah. You are a gift from God and I love you more than I could ever say. You bring out the best in me and make me want to be better every day. Thank you for making it possible for me to pursue my dream. Now it’s your turn.

I also dedicate this work to Peanut. We have been praying for you for a long time, and we cannot wait to meet you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank God for the opportunities and blessings He has presented me these past few years. I could not have charted a better course, and I look forward to discovering what He has waiting for us over the horizon.

My academic journey has been a bumpy one at times, and the person who has worked most to keep me on track these past few years is Kathy Rowan. Thank you for being the best advisor a person could ask for. I can’t imagine having completed this project without your support and guidance. Also, my committee, Tim Gibson, Mark Hopson, and Xiaoquan Zhao – your feedback has been integral in shaping not only my dissertation, but also how I view scholarship. Thank you.

I occasionally hear stories about departments and programs that promote an atmosphere of cutthroat competition to push their students to work harder – and I am thankful I didn’t attend that type of program. My cohort provided support when I needed it, challenges to help me advance (sometimes when I didn’t want it), feedback to improve my work, and from the beginning – friendship. Emily, Mollie, Suzie, Wan-Lin, and Neil – I am so blessed to have found such wonderful friends and colleagues. I will miss you in the fall, but I am already looking forward to future conferences – so that we can catch up!

A number of people have also had a huge impact on my time at GMU – and while I know I am likely to miss a few, I want to say thank you (in no particular order): Carl, Xiaomei, Xiaoquan, Mark, Kathy, Sheldon, Ed, Chris, and Gary – the courses I took with you were each important for my academic development. Thank you for teaching me. Don, thank you for coffee, lunch, great conversations, and more handouts than I think I could ever organize – I will miss spending time with you, and I have gained so much wisdom from our interactions. Lance, you are an asset to the department and to the university, but most of all to the graduate students who wander into BCA on their first day with no clue what they’re about to walk into – thank you for your kindness and your friendship. Melissa, in the short time you have been in the department you have already made such an impact – I look forward to working with you for many years to come. Anne, you are a champion of students and a brilliant leader – I look forward to seeing where you take the department over the next few years.
Lisa, Maria, and Jessica – you each helped make my time at GMU more enjoyable, and I am quite certain I would not have made it through without you. The department is a brighter place because you are there. Well, it’s a snarky place, too, because of you, but you know what I mean.

Cathy – Maaaaaaaaaah!

Peter, thank you for kind words, smiles, and witty banter. The department is better because you are part of it.

Warren, I have enjoyed connecting with you these past three years. I am glad I had the opportunity to chat with you, and I appreciate your feedback on next steps for my dissertation – I’ll send you a copy of the book when it’s ready.

As for those who have been supportive from afar – Gina, you are the best buddy I could have ever asked for; Mindy, thank you for your encouragement – I look forward to working with you at Clemson; Kristen, you have always been supportive, encouraging, and kind, and I don’t think you will ever know how much I appreciate you; and Dr. Rob Ulmer, you started me off on this path and have been there along the way – I look forward to working with you for many, many years to come.

And last but never least, my family: Sarah, ever my champion; Mom and Dad, who raised me, loved me, and showed me a passion for learning; Jim and Ruth, my second parents and staunch supporters; Michael & Julie, the best brother and sister-in-law a guy could ever ask for – I love you all. Thank you for believing in me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demographic Information for Study Participants</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vii
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Intercultural Communication Competence</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cultural Awareness and Perception of Barriers Model</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intercultural Crisis Communication Competence Model</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. General Model of Cross-Cultural Training Effects</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Modified Training Model with ICC Included</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTERCULTURAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION:
MAKING SENSE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN
EMERGENCY RESPONSE CONTEXTS

Andrew S. Pyle, PhD
George Mason University, 2014
Dissertation Director: Dr. Katherine Rowan

Emergency responders often face difficult intercultural communication situations. There
are few metropolitan areas where a single language is spoken or where a single ethnic
group comprises the population, and research has shown that crisis events and major
disasters and emergencies are on the rise (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). However,
emergencies are generally not analyzed as intercultural communication events
(Falkheimer & Heide, 2006; Lee, 2005). Consequently, the goal of this study was to
explore the extent to which individuals highly involved in such events, emergency
responders, make sense of the intercultural dimensions of their work. In-depth interviews
were conducted with 19 emergency responders who deploy internationally. All
interviewees were asked about the challenges they face, particularly in intercultural
emergency contexts. Results showed that emergency responders were aware of cultural
differences and highly alert to the emotional and physical pain of those they were
attempting to assist. Further, they were cognizant of cultural norms and had a strong
desire to respect local values. In addition, they were aware of the importance of
partnering with those whom they were assisting, rather than “taking over” from the local emergency managers. Participants seemed relatively unaware of their own cultural perspective or lens, i.e., that their views are based on cultural perspectives, just as much as those they are attempting to assist. Further, while they were enthusiastic about the importance of training for their work, they frequently cast intercultural communication training in the category of “security and safety,” rather than as training to increase available communication options for managing difficult contexts.

These results yield questions about the need for intercultural crisis communication education for those who face such situations routinely because of their work as emergency responders, as well as for most individuals in professional settings, as businesses function in increasingly intercultural contexts. Additionally, the results suggest that intercultural crisis communication education might be best conducted by helping people develop specific heuristics and techniques to increase their flexibility in diverse cultural contexts. Based on these findings, two models are proposed. The first characterizes intercultural crisis communication competence. The second describes the ways in which intercultural communication education might enhance professionals’ options for effective interaction in life and death settings.
1. ESTABLISHING THE PROBLEM

On August 29, 2005, at approximately 6:00 a.m., Hurricane Katrina made landfall between Grand Isle, Louisiana, and the mouth of the Mississippi river (CNN Library, 2013). This was not an unexpected storm, as it had been well forecast. Two days before, on August 27, the National Hurricane Service had released its 16th advisory statement about Katrina, indicating the storm was already producing sustained winds of 115 miles per hour, and that “some strengthening is forecast during the next twenty-four hours” (National Hurricane Center, 2005). Focusing specifically on the events that took place in southeast Louisiana, most of the residents were able to evacuate to safety before the hurricane made landfall. For those who were unable to evacuate, Katrina was devastating. The Federal Emergency Management Agency called Katrina the most catastrophic and costliest disaster in U. S. history, with a “total damage estimate of $108 billion” (CNN Library, 2013). Beyond the financial cost, there were more than 1,800 deaths attributed to Hurricane Katrina. This event has been studied as a tragedy of human error (Brinkley, 2006), a problem of coordination (Comfort, 2006), a public policy problem (Burby, 2006), and a problem of race and class (Elliott & Pais, 2006). This event can also usefully be viewed as an intercultural crisis communication problem. One of the major reasons Hurricane Katrina was so devastating was the intercultural communication failures leading up to and following the event. Crisis warnings from officials at the national level conflicted with warnings at the local level (Garnett & Kouzmin, 2007). Officials in New
Orleans presented confusing and conflicting information to the local population about potential breaches to the levees (Townsend, 2006). Local officials also misunderstood the cultural norms of the poorest areas of New Orleans, by sending police officers door-to-door to encourage evacuation in areas where police officers are not only mistrusted, but are often viewed as the enemy (Cole & Fellows, 2008). While it is impossible to attribute the cause of the devastation in New Orleans to one single factor, there is no question that failures in intercultural communication leading up to and following the crisis contributed to the level of destruction that took place following Hurricane Katrina.

In the twenty-first century, crises occurring anywhere on the planet may become contexts for massive, intercultural communication rescue and recovery operations. Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy are two examples of this type of event which occurred within the United States (Elliott & Pais, 2006; Nir, 2012). Around the globe, disasters require the coordinated efforts of multiple, culturally-diverse actors. The 7.4 magnitude earthquake which resulted in 52 deaths in Guatemala in 2012 (CNN Wire Staff, 2012; Ruiz-Goiriena, 2012) and the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami that killed an estimated 150,000 (National Geographic, 2005) are two examples of disasters requiring cross-cultural collaboration. Often after a disaster, thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, are displaced and must find food and shelter. Response teams from around the globe respond to major disasters, presenting not only opportunities for aid, but also for cultural misunderstanding between host culture and responders or among various responding groups. Disaster responses often require the effective interaction of culturally disparate groups.
Emergencies such as fires, shootings, terrorist attacks, earthquakes, sinkholes, accidents, and other tragedies occur on a daily basis around the world. Intercultural emergency communication is necessary to effectively manage these events and their aftermaths. This type of communication occurs at both the local and regional level. There are relatively few metropolitan areas where a single language is spoken or where a single ethnic group comprises the population (DiversityData, 2014). However, despite the numerous contexts in which this type of communication takes place, there is a distinct lack of research into the intersection of crisis communication and intercultural communication (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006; Lee, 2005). This lack of work is unfortunate because, intriguingly, both crises and intercultural communication contexts place a similar pressure on communicators. That is, crises encourage mindlessness and rigidity (e.g., Langer, 1989; Ripley, 2008). Because crises and emergencies surprise affected parties, they are likely to invoke relatively reactionary, defensive, and rigid communication that reduces effectiveness. Consider, for example, Ripley’s (2008) retelling of Elia Zedeno’s story, a woman who escaped from the World Trade Center following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Zedeno tells of procrastination caused by denial; rather than evacuating immediately, she and many others moved slowly through the building, pausing frequently. They took their time to turn off their computers, or tried to make phone calls prior to evacuating. They acted mindlessly. Similarly, intercultural communication contexts can encourage mindlessness and rigidity in interaction. Consider the tendency of people to speak more loudly when they encounter someone who does not understand them or speak their language. Even when it is clear
that the other person does not understand, people often will continue to repeat the same words louder and slower, expecting a different result (Fleming, 1995).

Both crisis and intercultural communication contexts require mindful, reflective decisions. At the same time, the demands of both contexts make ineffective communication likely. Given the global environment in which business and personal life now occur, and the chances that emergencies, disasters, and crises worsen if their intercultural communication dimensions are not carefully considered, it is important to explore intercultural crisis communication for the pragmatic benefit this type of study offers. Additionally, it may be the case that crises, especially crises marked by acute intercultural tensions, by their very nature may function as windows or lenses on fundamental communication problems. These contexts lay bare fundamental tensions in all communication situations. That is, these contexts clarify the tension between assuming one knows what sort of situation one is in and having to, while communicating, listen and learn to authentically respond in a specific setting. Crises make the mistakes which occur in such contexts more painful and more evident to all.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to present a rationale for pursuing research in the area of intercultural crisis communication. This study consists of 19 qualitative interviews with emergency responders who work in diverse cultural contexts, both domestically and abroad. I draw from these interviews by presenting examples throughout the dissertation to provide additional depth and breadth. These interviews have been approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at my institution, and the participants have agreed to be anonymously quoted. Their names have been replaced with
alpha-numeric markers (e.g. I1 for pilot participant 1, and P1 for participant 1 in the follow-up study; each participant will be referenced with “personal communication” and the date of his interview the first time he is cited, and following the initial citation will only be referenced by their participant code). In the following sections I present the problem this gap in the literature poses for crisis communication scholars and practitioners. I then provide a review of crisis communication literature and intercultural communication literature. Next, I address tensions from each perspective that present concerns for crisis communication, intercultural communication, and their intersecting areas. This is followed by a review of the pilot study which was foundational to establishing the current study. Then, I review the methodology for the current study. Next, I present the results and discussion of the study. Last, I describe limitations to the study, provide a summary of key findings, and outline an agenda for future research in this important domain, a research agenda that explores the skills and training needed for effective intercultural crisis communication.

**Complementary Tensions in Crisis Communication and Intercultural Communication**

Both intercultural communication and crisis communication share a tension that Langer (1989) might define as a “premature cognitive commitment” (p. 22). From Langer’s view, this is a concept, thought, or perspective that an individual has mindlessly accepted as true and will then defend as true, despite having conflicting evidence in the environment. This same tension might alternately be described by Weick (1988) as “cause maps” formed in an “enacted environment” (p. 307). Weick argues that a person
creates mental if-then frameworks, or maps, which help the individual determine how to act in a novel context. One example of such a cause map may be the tendency of officials in a disaster to assume criminal, chaotic behavior is occurring because a crisis has occurred (Quarantelli, 2003; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977). Quarantelli and Dynes (1970) and other scholars have shown that the fear of chaos breaking out after a severe storm, power outage, or other crisis, is more a function of officials’ fears than it is a description of likely events. The fact that this fear emerges may be an example of the sort of “premature cognitive commitment” or “cause map” that is likely to emerge in intercultural crisis communication contexts, especially if professionals in these contexts are not provided with education about typical patterns of human behavior in crisis contexts.

**Intercultural Tension**

Consider the intercultural context: a person who meets someone for the first time makes mental judgments and attributions about the other in order to make sense of the new individual. There are certain categories that a person might be placed in immediately, especially if the person is from a different racial or ethnic group. A familiar example for many White Americans might be meeting someone from Japan for the first time. The White individual is likely to attribute the category “Asian” to the Japanese individual. Even if the White individual learns that the other person is Japanese, “Asian” may be as complex as the category becomes. That category will be influenced by stereotypes, which themselves may only be based on general depictions in the media.
Understandably, this type of categorization and stereotyping can be limiting and can cause conflict (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

**Crisis Tension**

Consider now the crisis context: a person in a crisis situation will tend to rely on existing knowledge frameworks and on past training to determine how to respond (Weick, 1988). An emergency responder focused on saving lives is also likely to focus first and foremost on the mission. Focusing on completing the mission is, of course, not inherently bad. On the contrary, saving lives is a noble endeavor. However, a single-minded focus on completing the mission can result in a responder who lacks empathy. As one emergency responder pointed out, for someone in the middle of a crisis, “this is the worst day of their life” (P14, personal communication, February 10, 2014). A callous, mindless, or uncaring comment at this point could be very damaging to the individual or community in crisis. In the short term, this problem may not seem important, especially when compared to saving lives, but a crisis manager or emergency responder who damages relationships is one who makes it hard to work together again in the future. To support the development of research on intercultural crisis communication, the next portion of this chapter offers a review of literature on “sojourners” in other cultures.

**The Problem**

**International Aid Workers as Sojourners**

International aid workers (i.e. U.S. residents working in other countries) are, by definition, sojourners. Nishida (2005) defines sojourners as having specific, goal-oriented motives for visiting a host culture, and indicates that “their length of stay in a
new culture is shorter than that of immigrants and refugees” (pp. 408-409). In this case, international aid workers travel to a specific location to provide assistance as needed in the areas of healthcare, search-and-rescue, or rebuilding (goal-oriented motives), and are in that location either until they have achieved a goal or until they are no longer needed (shorter length of stay). While aid workers do not need to assimilate, or adopt the values of the host culture, they do need to engage in cross-cultural adaptation, which is a “complex process through which an individual acquires an increasing level of the communication skills of the host culture and of relational development with host nationals” (Nishida, 2005, p. 408). Cross-cultural adaptation is necessary for effective intercultural communication. In an international/intercultural/cross-cultural emergency response, effective intercultural communication is vital. Consider the following cases as examples of emergency responders working as sojourners.

**Cases of Intercultural Emergency Communication**

**Responding to the Fukushima Daiichi reactor meltdown.** On Friday, March 11, 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake occurred off the coast of Japan (Nuclear Energy Agency [NEA], 2012). The earthquake caused the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant to shut down. Off-site power was lost, so emergency generators began providing power to the emergency coolant systems to keep the plant from overheating and melting down. A short time later, a tsunami struck the facility, causing the emergency generators to fail. By Saturday, March 12, the backup battery supplies were completely depleted, causing a total loss of cooling to the reactor system (NEA, 2012). Over the following days there were several fires and explosions at different reactor units. The evacuation
radius around the plant extended from 3 kilometers, to 10 kilometers, to 20 kilometers (NEA, 2012). By March 16, the Japanese government recognized the need for assistance in managing the situation and sought aid from the United States, as well as expert nuclear advice from the International Atomic Energy Agency (Alford, 2011). The March 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was “the worst nuclear accident since the Chernobyl explosion in 1986” (Accident, 2011). The earthquake, tsunami, and meltdown each produced distinct challenges for residents, emergency responders, and elected officials, and required effective and successful communication across cultural contexts in the middle of a rapidly developing crisis situation.

The earthquake and meltdown were devastating events. They also provided opportunities for learning. According to a report released in September, 2012, there were a number of lessons to be learned related to intercultural communication during the emergency (Sasakawa Peace Foundation [SPF], 2012). The Japanese government and emergency responders relied on input and assistance from the U. S. government and U. S. military stationed in the area. According to the SPF (2012) report, there was ongoing interaction between representatives from U. S. agencies, as well as collaboration between Japanese and U. S. military assets. Several responders who took part in rescue and recovery efforts following the Fukushima Daiichi event also described working closely with local Japanese officials and coordinating with responding groups from other countries. The U. S. officials and responders who worked alongside the Japanese officials and responders were acting as sojourners during the duration of the response. In this type
of rapidly developing emergency, it would be important for actors on either side to be well-equipped for engaging in effective intercultural communication.

**Responding to the earthquake in Haiti.** A number of factors related to the culture and history of Haiti resulted in distinct challenges for responders to the massive earthquake which occurred in Haiti in 2010. There were also problems associated with the incredible size and scope of the response – more than 100 countries donated money to the response and recovery of Haiti following the earthquake (Haiti, 2011). In addition to the massive donation of funds from countries, considerable contributions were also made by individual donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). More important in terms of intercultural communication was the need for multiple disparate response organizations to work effectively together and coordinate with local populations as they worked to excavate collapsed buildings, conduct search and rescue efforts, provide places for displaced populations to eat and sleep, to offer medical attention to those in need, and to begin rebuilding infrastructure. There were more than three dozen organizations from across the globe working to help respond to the emergency in Haiti (Charities, 2010). Each member of each of these organizations was a sojourner in Haiti, with an added dimension of interacting with members of other organizations from other parts of the world. This context created a need for cross-cultural adaptation in two directions: between an organization and the Haitian population, and among disparate aid organizations.

The types of intercultural communication challenges encountered in Haiti are likely to be typical of the kinds of challenges emergency responders will face in the
future. For example, one emergency responder (P4, personal communication, October 8, 2013) explained that his team of responders arrived in Haiti without sufficient trucks. The taskforce was unable to bring trucks with them, and the resources on the ground once they arrived were limited and already overused. Solving this problem was difficult. Most of his team members were not fluent in French, and the earthquake created massive infrastructure problems such as impassable roads. To solve this problem, the team began working with members of the local population to repair broken down vehicles in exchange for the use of those vehicles while they were deployed in Haiti. The interviewee said:

It wasn’t… the best language transfer between two different cultures, but it was the common understanding that we needed the vehicle, it’s your vehicle, but look let us use it, get it running, and when we get it back to you it will be working, but right now it’s not… trying to communicate that to someone who has nothing, who has no shelter, nothing, and you’re looking to take something that belongs to them. It was a big challenge, but it worked.

This effective solution to a problem is a good example of the kind of resourceful, respectful problem-solving communication that is essential in many crises that involve intercultural communication challenges.

**Meeting the needs of multi-cultural populations.** Across the United States and around the world, there are concerns related to safety and health which members of the population must manage on a regular basis. One example where these needs consistently arise is in major population centers in the United States, such as Los Angeles, New York,
or Washington, D.C. These areas are highly diverse in terms of cultural groups, so individuals working in healthcare (doctors, nurses, and emergency medical technicians), firefighters, police, and volunteer workers for emergencies (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA] and Red Cross volunteers, religious organization volunteers, among others) all need training to manage intercultural emergencies effectively. One need not look far to find examples of intercultural communication gaffes in emergency situations. In New York and New Jersey following Hurricane Sandy there were issues related to White upper-class volunteers working with individuals who were, or appeared to be, from other cultures and backgrounds than the volunteers (Nir, 2012). For many, the word hurricane might bring to mind images of Katrina and the failed preparation and poor response which followed. There were many failures with regard to connecting with the members of the population who were not White or middle class, which brought to light greater systemic issues in the region (Elliott & Pais, 2006).

A more extreme example of failed intercultural communication before, during, and after a major emergency is the 1992 Los Angeles riots (Rosegrant, 2009). Area officials, leaders, law enforcement authorities, and emergency responders misunderstood and underestimated the potential for cultural and community backlash to the verdict of the Rodney King trial. Outside of national-level or even state-level emergencies, in highly diverse areas such as northern Virginia, New York City, or Los Angeles, local and routine emergencies can present responders with serious intercultural communication challenges.
Although they are not sojourners, law enforcement personnel, healthcare workers, social workers, emergency responders, and those who work in international business need similar skills to do their jobs effectively.

**Lack of Research**

Recognizing the need for intercultural communication training for emergency responders across multiple international and domestic contexts, it is useful to determine what research exists already. Unfortunately, there is a lack of substantial research in the area of intercultural emergency communication or of intercultural communication during a crisis or emergency (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006; Lee, 2005). Falkheimer and Heide (2006) argue that what research there is in the area of intercultural crisis communication is “dominated by empirical case studies” (p. 180), while intercultural research on its own has a bias toward “quantitative, comparative” (p. 183) studies that examine differences between two specific cultures (e.g., Japanese culture and American culture). Since those articles were written, little work has been done to fill the gap in the literature where the areas of intercultural communication and crisis communication converge. The following section describes existing and relevant work in the areas of crisis communication and intercultural communication.

**Literature Review**

**Crisis Communication Theory and Practice**

**Crisis defined.** The term “crisis communication” has been defined in numerous ways over the past few decades, but to understand crisis communication it is important to first define *crisis*. Hermann (1963) defined crisis as having three parts: surprise, threat,
and a short response time. Other scholars have since presented categories of incidents that might be considered types of crises, including: natural disasters, technological crises, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence, terrorist attacks, economic crises, oil or chemical spills, or malevolence in an organization or community (Coombs, 2012; Lerbinger, 1997; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). In their work on organizational crisis, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2011) tell us that crises can be natural or manmade. A natural crisis might be an earthquake, tsunami, or tornado.

A manmade crisis could be unintentional, as in the case of the gas leak in Bhopal, India, in 1984 that resulted in the deaths of nearly 4,000 people and caused “significant morbidity and premature death for many thousands more” (Broughton, 2005, p. 1). While preventable, the gas leak in Bhopal was an accident. Other manmade crises, unfortunately, are intentional events. One example is the Enron financial scandal that developed into a massive crisis and resulted in economic shockwaves that were felt around the world (Creswell, 2005). The other end of the intentional, manmade crisis spectrum would include acts such as terrorism. Perhaps the most dramatic example of terrorism for a U. S. citizen are the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The World Trade Center attack was a deeply-troubling series of events with long-lasting consequences.

In addition to surprise, threat, and short response time, Weick (1988) characterizes crises as “low probability/high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goals of an organization” (p. 305). Sellnow and Seeger (2013) argue that a crisis “may be a contained, single event, such as the April 27, 2011 tornado in
Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in which 52 people died, or it may be a series of interacting and cascading events, such as the Fukushima earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster” (pp. 7-8).

To draw these multiple threads together, a crisis is defined here as a low-probability, high-consequence event or series of events that require a short response time and threaten the high-priority goals of an organization or community and have implications at the local, state, national, and/or international level. Before deciding on one specific definition, however, it is useful to explore contexts in which individuals might need to use effective crisis communication.

**Crisis communication defined.** Along with a clear definition of crisis, it is important to define crisis communication. Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2011) argue that effective crisis communication is characterized by organizational learning, ethical communication, prospective rather than retrospective vision, and effective organizational rhetoric. Fearn-Banks (2011) defines crisis communication as “the dialogue between the organization and its public(s) prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence” (p. 2). More broadly, Sellnow and Seeger (2013) define crisis communication as “the ongoing process of creating shared meaning among and between groups, communities, individuals and agencies, within the ecological context of a crisis, for the purpose of preparing for and reducing, limiting and responding to threats and harm” (p. 13). Seeger (2006) describes crisis communication as having a variety of goals (which often conflict), such as reducing or containing harm, limiting or managing potential damage to reputation, or restoring public order.
Working with the definition of crisis established above, and considering the various contexts within which crisis communication is studied, crisis communication is defined here as *communication designed to manage the complexities of crisis situations in order to mitigate threats and maximize opportunities for stakeholders, organizations, and communities.* This definition is intentionally broad, as the variables of most importance in a crisis are the type of crisis and the context in which a crisis occurs.

**What crisis is not: False examples.** In addition to defining what a crisis is, it is useful to define what crisis is not. As Rowan (1999) argues, a good explanation includes not only definitions, but also “sets of varying examples and nonexamples” (p. 211). A non-example is an instance one might think is an instance of a concept, but is not. There are problems at individual, regional, and national levels that cannot be defined as a crisis. Remember that crisis communication is defined within the context of the type of crisis being examined. The following are three examples of problems that, while important to an individual, organization, or community, do not fit within the context of crisis as it is defined here.

**Macro-level ongoing events.** There are certain problems that exist at the national and international level that are ongoing problems for governments and organizations. These events might be characterized as crises by the actors involved, yet may not match our definition. One of the main components of the crisis definition is that crisis events are *time bound.* Any global problem that is an ongoing concern does not fit within the definition. For example, war does not count as a crisis. Within the context of a war there would likely be numerous crises, but the war itself does not count as a crisis.
Another example is the ongoing sequestration which began in 2013, the across-the-board spending cuts mandated by the U. S. Budget Control Act causing upheaval across all levels of government and casting shockwaves out across the public and private sectors (Weisman, 2013). The sequestration itself does not count as a crisis. It is a problem that was looming for months, if not years, and after going into effect the results took months to begin unfolding. The sequestration is not a crisis, but the specific cuts and demands of the Budget Control Act are crises – or have the potential to cause crises. For example, as part of the sequestration process there were mandatory furloughs for air traffic controllers – a 10% cut across the board (Wald & Mouawad, 2013). This resulted in flight delays of between 30 and 90 minutes for approximately 20% of all flights in the United States on Monday, April 22 (the first weekday after the furloughs were enacted) (Wald & Mouawad, 2013). These delays caused crises for the airlines that began receiving complaints and demands for refunds from irate passengers.

**Lingering crisis events.** In a 2006 study, DeVries and Fitzpatrick presented a concept they referred to as a “lingering crisis” (p. 160). They argue that the deaths of 68 animals in the Smithsonian National Zoo over the course of two years did not fit into any of the crisis categories that existed up to that point in the literature. The event caused the zoo to lose its accreditation, to be scrutinized by several government agencies, and to lose funding from many of its biggest donors (DeVries & Fitzpatrick, 2006). DeVries and Fitzpatrick (2006) indicate that the event was finally resolved when the zoo regained accreditation. While this event was certainly difficult for the zoo staff and administration,
for the individuals attending the zoo, and for the animals in question, this does not fit the
definition of crisis because of its protracted nature.

_Paracrisis events_. Coombs and Holladay (2012) present the concept of a
paracrisis, or “publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organization with irresponsible
or unethical behavior” (p. 409). They emphasize that paracrises are not situations where
organizations have broken any laws – they have only been accused of acting unethically.
They present several examples of paracrises in their article, such as irresponsible
destruction of unsold clothing by the clothier H&M, rather than donating their clothing to
the needy as their policies require. Other examples include advertisements by Johnson &
Johnson, Cadbury’s, and Dunkin’ Donuts which were offensive, racist, and appeared to
support terrorism, respectively (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). These situations are not
crises, but they can sometimes lead to crises. If an organization did not address a
paracrisis it could become a crisis, in the same way that an unmitigated risk can develop
into a crisis.

_Why Study Crisis?_

In April of 1992, the city of Los Angeles, California, faced what was “by many
measures… the worst U.S. civil disorder of the twentieth century” (Rosegrant, 2009, p.
137) when mass riots broke out following the verdict of the Rodney King trial. On April
19, 1995, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City was
bombed (Haddow, Bullock, & Coppola, 2011; Oklahoma City, 2002). In July of 2001, a
train loaded with paper products and chemicals became trapped in a major freight tunnel
underneath downtown Baltimore, Maryland; while trapped, it caught fire and caused
massive damage to downtown Baltimore (Scott, 2009). On August 29, 2005, “Hurricane Katrina began a chain of events that would devastate and flood a city, breach protective levees, claim thousands of lives across the Gulf Coast, [and] force over 100,000 people into… exile” (Cole & Fellows, 2008, p. 212). On April 20, 2010, at approximately 10:00 PM CDT, the semisubmersible oilrig Deepwater Horizon exploded and caught fire (Telegraph, 2010). This event resulted in the largest response to an environmental disaster in the history of the United States (Baker, 2010).

Each of these events was a crisis that required a coordinated response by individuals working quickly to mitigate damage, meet stakeholder needs, and coordinate an effective response. These individuals had to communicate with one another quickly and clearly with little margin for error. Sellnow and Seeger (2013) indicate that the frequency of crisis events is on the rise. This is supported by recent FEMA (2013) reports on federal disaster declarations, which have “been steadily increasing since 1953” (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 9). In 1953 there were 13 federal disaster declarations, while in 2011 there were 99 (FEMA, 2013). Each year there are more events requiring individuals to work together and communicate effectively to manage complex, high-consequence events in a short amount of time. Crisis communication is one of the most valuable fields of research and study that exists today, and one of the most applicable to real-world situations.

**Interrelated Fields of Study**

As mentioned previously, there are various fields where crisis communication is studied. Additionally, crisis communication is closely related to a number of other bodies
of research. For example, disaster sociology, emergency communication, and risk communication all have overlapping concepts and interests with the field of crisis communication. This section presents useful literature reviews of major research done in the areas of crisis communication, disaster sociology, emergency communication, and risk communication, as well as an explication of the overlapping interests in each area of study.

**Crisis Communication.** Crisis communication, as mentioned previously, is interested in effective communication designed to manage crisis events and create opportunities for those affected by crises. Several scholars have conducted thorough reviews of the literature on crisis communication up to this point, the most recent of which is Sellnow and Seeger’s (2013) *Theorizing Crisis Communication*. In this book they define crisis, communication, and theory, and then present a perspective on more than 40 crisis communication theories and models.

Sellnow and Seeger break the field of crisis communication into eight areas, which provide the reader with useful categories to make sense of the field. They first review various crisis development models, including the standard three-stage model of precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis (Coombs, 2012; Ray, 1999; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001). They also examine more complex models such as Fink’s (1986) four-stage model, Turner’s (1976) six-stage model, and the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) model (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). After the models, Sellnow and Seeger present crisis warning and risk identification literature, such as the “Hear-Confirm-
Understand-Decide-Respond” model (Mileti & Sorensen, 1990) and the protective action decision model (Lindell & Perry, 2004).

The next section of Sellnow and Seeger’s text deals with theories of crisis outcomes, such as organizational learning (Roux-Dufort, 2007; Sitkin, 1996; Veil, 2011), sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995, 2009), situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2009; Coombs & Holladay, 2002), and the discourse of renewal theory (Reierson, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2009; Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer et al., 2010, 2011). They then move into emergency response theories, such as chaos theory, which has been used as a framework for crisis management and communication (Comfort, 1994; Murphy, 1996; Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer, 2002), as well as theories from the disaster sociology literature which I mention in more detail below. After emergency response, Sellnow and Seeger move into mediated crisis theories. They explore first framing theory (Heider, 1959; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), then uses and gratifications theory (Dotan & Cohen, 1976; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973-1974). They also discuss diffusion theories that are useful for studying how news and information diffuses during and after a crisis (McIntyre, Spence, & Lachlan, 2011; Rogers, 2003).

Sellnow and Seeger then describe the realm of image and influence. In this section they review Hearit’s (2005, 2006) work on apologia and Benoit’s (1995) work on image repair. They also discuss kategoria (Ryan, 1988), which is the opposite position from apologia and focuses on “strategies for persuasive attack” (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 172). They also cover risk management, starting with mindfulness literature and the
value of mindfulness in mitigating risk (Bazerman & Watkins, 2004; Heath & O’Hair, 2009; Langer, 1997, 2009). The literature on mindfulness leads directly into literature on high reliability organizations (Roberts, 1989; Novak & Sellnow, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Lastly, they discuss ethical perspectives in crisis communication. The section on ethics examines a wide array of concepts including responsibility (Seeger, 1997), significant choice (Nilsen, 1974), the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Johannesen, 2001), and justice (Deutsch, 1985; Miller, 2002; Rawls, 1971).

In addition to a thorough review of crisis communication theory and literature, Sellnow & Seeger (2013) devote the final chapter of their book to describing how best to apply crisis communication theories to research and real-life events. This book is an ideal resource for students of crisis communication and for anyone who is just starting out as a researcher or practitioner in the field.

Along with Sellnow and Seeger’s (2013) comprehensive overview of crisis communication theory, a number of articles and book chapters have provided reviews of major research and prominent case studies in the field of crisis communication. One such chapter is Lee’s (2005) comprehensive review in Communication Yearbook. Lee explores fundamental concepts in organizational crisis, management communication, public relations, and briefly examines the influence of culture on crisis communication. Case studies are important to crisis communication scholars since much of the research in the field is conducted via case study (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). A thorough overview of crisis communication case studies is Fearn-Banks’s (2011) monograph in which she defines crisis and crisis communication, and then illustrates key theoretical perspectives
and concepts by using multiple case study examples. There are other well-written articles, books, and reviews which offer thorough descriptions of what types of research can be explored in the field of crisis communication, as well as what theories have been developed to make sense of and influence crisis communication, but for the individual just beginning to study crisis communication the materials listed here provide a solid starting point. The following sections contain descriptions of fields of study related to crisis communication and how they overlap.

**Disaster Sociology.** The study of disaster sociology is chiefly concerned with individual behaviors in disasters, emergent organizations in disaster situations, and in how disaster responses are managed (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977). Specifically, disaster sociologists want to know “what humans are likely to do in disasters” (Drabek & McEntire, 2003, p. 108). The field of disaster sociology arguably began with Samuel Prince’s doctoral dissertation, conducted in 1920, in which he investigated the shipping explosion which took place in Halifax in 1917 (Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Scanlon, 1988). The examination of emergent organizations is of chief importance in the disaster sociology literature (e.g. Fritz & Marx, 1954; Neal & Phillips, 1995; Thompson & Hawkes, 1962). “Emergent organizations” or “emergent phenomena” refer to individuals and groups who gather “at the scene of natural and human-induced disasters to care for and assist the physically injured and emotionally distraught” (Drabek & McEntire, 2003, p. 98). Emergent groups might also be thought of as “private citizens who work together in pursuit of collective goals relevant to actual or potential disasters but whose organization has not yet become institutionalized” (Stallings & Quarantelli, 1985, p. 84).
Research in disaster sociology has consistently found that in disaster situations humans are rather unlikely to panic or engage in anti-social behavior such as looting and indicates that myths touting anti-social behavior and panic as the norm during disasters are largely maintained by media portrayals during and after disaster events (Drabek & McEntire, 2003).

There are a number of well-written pieces covering the development of research in the field of disaster sociology over the last four decades and beyond. A foundational work that also functions as a literature review is Quarantelli and Dynes’s (1977) piece in which they describe efforts to codify disaster sociology work. A more recent piece that also functions as a well-written literature review is Drabek and McEntire’s (2003) comprehensive review of the disaster sociology literature written up to that point. While written for a medical audience, Auf der Heide’s (1989) monograph on disaster response is a thorough examination of disaster management and response and would be informative for individuals studying crisis communication or disaster sociology.

**Overlap with crisis communication.** Disaster sociology is focused predominantly on the actions and interactions of individuals during and after a disaster event. While there are clearly parallel concepts between this field and crisis communication, disaster sociology is much more interested in how human networks organize and function than with how individuals or members of organizations communicate. There are lessons in the disaster sociology literature that are beneficial to crisis communication scholars, however. For example, a number of disaster sociology researchers argue that a bureaucratic, command-and-control style for disaster management is ineffective (Drabek,
2001; Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Dynes, 1994; Neal & Phillips, 1995). This is consistent with crisis communication scholarship, which emphasizes the importance of partnering with stakeholders and maintaining clear lines of open communication in order to maintain ethical communication practices (Freeman, 2010; Nilsen, 1974; Ulmer et al., 2011). The findings of disaster sociology research are also beneficial for helping individuals who must manage crisis events and engage in effective crisis communication by determining “what humans are likely to do in disasters” (Drabek & McEntire, 2003, p. 108). While there are clearly major distinctions between the two fields, understanding of research across crisis communication and disaster sociology contexts can help researchers and practitioners in both fields be more effective.

Emergency Communication. Emergency communication differs from crisis communication in a number of integral ways; for example, in emergency communication contexts there is an expectation of total emergency management, rather than the focus on communication processes of crisis communication studies. Emergency management can be defined as “the practice of identifying, anticipating, and responding to the risks of catastrophic events in order to reduce to more acceptable levels the probability of their occurrence or the magnitude and duration of their social impacts” (Lindell & Perry, 2004, p. 5). In emergency communication contexts there is an expectation for preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. Communication is only one portion of a complex set of processes. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (2008), preparedness is defined as (p. 15):
Actions that involve a combination of planning, resources, training, exercising, and organizing to build, sustain, and improve operational capabilities.

Preparedness is the process of identifying the personnel, training, and equipment needed for a wide range of potential incidents, and developing jurisdiction-specific plans for delivering capabilities when needed for an incident.

According to Haddow et al., 2010, preparedness is a key factor in mitigation, or “reducing or eliminating risks to people and property” (p. 71); in response, or working to “rescue and attend to those injured, suppress fires, secure and police the disaster area, and begin the process of restoring order” (p. 165); and in recovery, or the “development, coordination, and execution of… restoration” (p. 97). All emergency responses in the United States must be managed according to the guidelines laid out in the Incident Command System (ICS), which was developed “to establish a set of planning and management systems that would help the agencies responding to a disaster to work together in a coordinated and systematic approach” (Haddow et al., 2010, p. 175). This entire process relies on effective communication, though the emergency communication literature tends to focus on the concept of management.

For a thorough examination of emergency communication and emergency management, a person just beginning to study this field should review the text by Haddow et al. (2010). The authors present a clear and thorough overview of emergency communication and how organizations and agencies are expected to collaborate in emergency events. In keeping with the crisis communication literature, the field of emergency communication has numerous case studies to explicate both effective and
ineffective processes for emergency communication. Howitt and Leonard’s (2009) edited work *Managing Crises* is a well-written and thorough presentation of emergencies that were managed well, as well as several that were managed poorly.

**Overlap with crisis communication.** While emergency communication scholars and practitioners tend to view their work from a management perspective, emergency managers cannot do their work effectively unless they are trained in crisis communication procedures. To function well within the ICS structure (Haddow et al., 2010; Varley, 2009), individuals at all levels must be able to communicate effectively with one another as well as with individuals at higher and lower levels of the command chain. Additionally, any individual who works in a crisis communication context who might work in an emergency response situation would benefit from knowing the emergency communication literature. Understanding ICS processes would enable a crisis communication specialist to work in an emergency context effectively without needing to be trained in how to work within the chain of command. Additionally, understanding the emergency communication literature could provide a crisis communication practitioner with insight into the bureaucratic process of emergency management from a public administration perspective.

**Risk Communication.** To define risk communication, as with crisis communication, it makes sense to begin by defining risk. Lindell and Perry (2004) define risk as “a condition in which there is a possibility that people or property could experience adverse consequences” (p. 1). Heath (2006) defines risk as “an occurrence that can have positive or negative consequences of varying magnitudes, the occurrence of
which and the effects of which can be variously predicted, controlled, and harmful or
beneficial” (p. 245). Sellnow, Ulmer, Seeger, and Littlefield (2009) argue that risk, at its
most basic level, is the absence of certainty, citing Palenchar and Heath’s (2002)
assertion that the main variable in the risk perception and communication process is
uncertainty. Risk analysts might define risk as a function of the likelihood an event will
occur and the potential severity of the event (Risk = Severity x Likelihood, or Risk = f
[Severity, Likelihood]) (Rowan, 1991). Sandman (1993) argues that risk must include the
concept of outrage, or what the public perceives a risk to be. He posits that risk must be
measured as a function of the hazard (severity x likelihood) and public outrage; therefore,
Sandman writes the risk equation in this way (Risk = f[hazard, outrage]).

Rowan (1991) presents a problematic definition of risk communication which was
common to risk analysts at the time her article was published. Risk communication was
viewed as “a process of having experts inform the public about their decisions” (Rowan,
1991, p. 302). This definition is problematic because it disregards the perceptions and
perspectives of the public. Rowan encouraged a move toward a definition that includes
the perceptions and perspectives of the public in addition to the perspective of the
experts. The National Research Council (NRC) (1989) presented a definition of risk
communication that is more effective, as it is both interactive and recognizes the needs of
multiple actors (p. 21):

Risk communication is an interactive process of exchange of information and
opinion among individuals, groups, and institutions. It involves multiple messages
about the nature of risk and other messages, not strictly about risk, that express
concerns, opinions, or reaction to risk messages or to legal or institutional arrangements for risk management.

This definition is useful because it acknowledges the potential needs of stakeholders while also including factors that a risk analyst would potentially view as important.

There are a number of books and articles that provide thorough overviews of the field of risk communication. For example, Rowan (1991) reviews foundational risk communication literature while also pointing out potential challenges or problems that need to be addressed in risk research. Rowan, Sparks, Pecchioni, and Villagran (2003) present a CAUSE model for risk communication, which is a conceptual model drawing on the work of numerous scholars to help individuals make sense of risk messages. The model is also designed to help risk communicators connect more effectively with members of the public. CAUSE stands for establishing Confidence, Awareness, Understanding, Satisfaction (with proposed solutions), and Enactment (moving from agreement to action); for this model employed in other contexts see Rowan, Botan, Kreps, Samoilenko, and Farnsworth (2009). For major overviews of risk communication literature, a person just beginning to examine the field might review Covello (2009), Kasperenko et al. (1988), or Rowan (2010). Additionally, as with crisis communication and emergency communication, risk communication scholars utilize case studies in research. Someone new to the field might review McComas (2006), Renn (2009), or Sellnow et al. (2009) for good examples of case studies.

*Overlap with crisis communication.* Risk communication, along with the other fields mentioned, is beneficial for understanding crisis communication. Heath (2006)
argues that crisis can only be understood from the perspective of risk by asserting that crisis is merely “a risk manifested” (p. 245). Ulmer et al. (2011) and Sellnow et al. (2009) describe risk events as potential crises. When risks are not managed effectively, they can develop into crisis events. One way of conceptualizing risk and crisis is as two sides of the same coin – they can often exist as two sides of the same situation, phenomenon, or event.

Crises are inherently challenging. When crises occur in intercultural contexts, these challenges are amplified. Consider, for example, an especially painful situation that occurred off the coast of a north African country. A boat carrying more than 100 people capsized several hundred feet from the port. Nearby, there was a team of U. S. emergency responders. The emergency responders wanted to rescue those in the water. However, local religious and cultural traditions said that those in the water were already lost. The interviewee explained:

Due to the religious beliefs that you have to bury the dead before sundown or they don’t go to heaven… the citizens weren’t even worried about treatment or anything… so command communications just went down the drain and everyone was just basically grabbing people and pulling people out of the water, to get them to a burial site. (P8, personal communication, January 6, 2014)

When U. S. emergency responders offered assistance, local leaders refused aid (P8). It may be that such situations are impossible to resolve; on the other hand, studying why such a painful event occurred and what steps, if any, could prevent loss of life in such contexts in the future is clearly a worthy endeavor. Further, a crisis of this sort reveals
the dramatic differences in cultural perspectives that are part of many crises and emergencies around the world.

To understand the interpersonal communication challenges that can lead to or be a part of crises, in the following section I review the nature of culture and intercultural communication research.

**Intercultural Communication**

**Defining culture.** Culture can be defined in a number of ways, depending on the interests of the researcher. Philipsen (1992) defined culture as a “socially constructed and historically transmitted system of symbols and meanings pertaining to communication” (p. 8). Ting-Toomey (2005) defines culture as “a learned system of meanings that fosters a particular sense of shared identity and community among its group members” (pp. 71-72). She describes it as a complex frame of reference consisting of “patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 72). Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) define culture as “the total way of life of a people, composed of their learned and shared behavior patterns, values, norms, and material objects” (p. 79).

Drawing each of these overlapping threads together, I prefer the definition of culture established by Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012): “*culture is… a learned meaning system that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community*” (p. 16, italics in original). A helpful way to view culture is as an umbrella, arching over multiple areas of an individual’s life.
Underneath the umbrella one might find traditions, religion, norms, or language. Each of these fits within the over-arching concept of *culture*. In terms of definition, the consistent trends seem to be the sharing of values, beliefs, and symbols which are passed on from one generation to the next.

**Defining intercultural communication.** Intercultural communication has been defined in a number of different ways since Edward T. Hall’s first work on cultural differences, *The Silent Language*, was published in 1959. Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) define intercultural communication as “the exchange of information between individuals who are unalike culturally” (p. 1). Oetzel (2009) builds on the idea presented by Rogers and Steinfatt, and adds the secondary term cross-cultural communication as “comparing/contrasting two different cultures (such as China and Germany)” (p. 15). The Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) definition is broad and encapsulating. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) offer a more thorough definition of the term: “*the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities attempt to negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation within an embedded societal system*” (p. 24).

**History of the field.** Intercultural communication has a rich history that stretches back into the early 20th century with the work of scholars such as Edward T. Hall in the United States, Masao Kunihiro in Japan, and Geert Hofstede in the Netherlands. Each of these individuals was influenced by their life experiences as they encountered the world in their daily lives, and sought through their research to help explain their experiences
and apply lessons to other situations and contexts. In the following sections I briefly present the work of Hall and Hofstede on the field of intercultural communication.

**Edward T. Hall.** Many intercultural communication scholars view Edward T. Hall as one of the founding scholars, if not the founding scholar, in the field of intercultural communication (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Rogers, Hart, & Miike, 2002; Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). In Hall’s (1959) book *The Silent Language*, and later in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), he explored concepts such as how culture should be defined, what intercultural communication is, and how verbal and nonverbal communication are enacted in intercultural contexts with such concepts as kinesics (movement and gestures) and proxemics (how space is used in different cultures). Reflecting on his work later in life, Hall (1992) indicated that four fields influenced his study of intercultural communication, which were cultural anthropology, linguistics, ethology (the study of animal behavior, see e.g. Macedonia & Evans, 1993 for more on this subject), and Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Rogers et al. (2002) argue that the influence of these four areas were instrumental in shaping Hall’s work, providing him with the framework to conceptualize what are now many of the basic tenets of the field of intercultural communication. For example, Rogers et al. (2002) argue that Hall’s study of anthropology instilled in him the concept of cultural relativism; his study of linguistics helped him think in terms of linguistic relativity; his study of ethology gave him insight into how space is used following his study of “animal crowding and the handling of space” (p. 6), which resulted in his interest in proxemics; and his study of psychoanalytic theory caused him to consider the unconscious nature of nonverbal communication.
Hall’s work in intercultural communication created the foundation for a dynamic field of study that has grown for more than five decades. His work was also influential in the thinking and research of scholars around the globe, such as the Japanese intercultural communication scholar Masao Kunihiro and Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede.

Masao Kunihiro. Kunihiro was an early Japanese intercultural communication scholar who was influential in establishing the study of intercultural communication in Japan (Rogers et al., 2002). He was a university professor and legislator, was a co-translator of Hall’s The Silent Language into Japanese (Chinmoku No Kotoba), and was “a main channel in introducing Hall’s paradigm” (Rogers et al., 2002, p. 16) to scholars in Japan. Kunihiro’s (1973, 1976) work on previously unstudied factors related to Japanese language and intercultural communication practices led to research by Japanese scholars in intercultural communication that had not been considered up to that point. Following Kunihiro’s work and his introduction of Japanese scholars to Hall’s research, scholars such as Ishii (1973, 1984) began to study nonverbal communication within and across cultures, specifically between Japanese-speaking and English-speaking populations. Building on the foundational work of Hall and Kunihiro, Japanese scholars such as Kitao (1989), Midooka (1990), and Miike and Ishii (1997) began exploring topics such as “silence, facial expressions, hand gestures, bowing… proxemics and personal space, and sense of time” (Rogers et al., 2002, p. 16). The work of Kunihiro, building from the foundational work of Hall, led to a generation of scholars who have built a robust field of literature and research which continues to grow today. His work also helped spur on collaborative work across cultural boundaries, as according to Rogers et
al. (2002) there have to-date been more studies of Japan-United States intercultural communication interactions than of any other two cultural groups.

**Geert Hofstede.** Geert Hofstede is a well-known name in the field of intercultural communication, most notably for his *cultural value dimensions*, which he began exploring in the early 1980s (Hofstede, 1982, 1983; Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Hofstede’s (1983) four dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity. In their 2012 book *Understanding Intercultural Communication*, Ting-Toomey and Chung describe the tenets of Hofstede’s four cultural value dimensions and how they can be effectively applied to intercultural communication situations. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) present individualism as the tendency of a culture to emphasize the “importance of individual identity over group identity,” while collectivism is the tendency of a culture to emphasize the importance of “the ‘we’ over the ‘I’ identity” (pp. 44-45). The power distance dimension is divided between small power distance, or the tendency “to value equal power distributions, equal rights and relations, and equitable rewards and punishments on the basis of performance,” and large power distance, or the tendency “to accept unequal power distributions, hierarchical rights, asymmetrical role relations, and rewards and punishments based on age, rank, status, title, and seniority” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 48). The uncertainty avoidance dimension is measured on a continuum between weak and strong. Weak (low) uncertainty avoidance cultures “encourage risk-taking and conflict-approaching modes,” while strong (high) uncertainty avoidance cultures “prefer clear procedures and conflict-avoidance behaviors” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 50).
last dimension, masculinity vs. femininity, should not be confused with male and female. While the potential for attribution of generalized roles and stereotypes is problematic, the general association of a “feminine” culture or a “masculine” culture applies to all members of a culture and is not based on social or cultural distinctions of gender roles. The reader should also not confuse “feminine culture” and “masculine culture” with “effeminate” or “machismo” – the latter are not associated with the former. Cultures characterized as feminine tend to be “societies in which social gender roles are fluid and can overlap – that is, whatever a woman can do, a man can do,” while cultures characterized as masculine tend to be “societies in which social gender roles are clearly complementary and distinct” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 51).

Scholarship of race, class, and difference. While the field of intercultural communication has historically focused on topics such as values, norms, and dialectical tensions, it is important to note the significant work of intercultural communication scholars on topics such as race, class, prejudice, discrimination, and hegemony (Allen, 2009; Hopson & Orbe, 2007; McIntosh, 1988; Orbe & Hopson, 2002). Allen’s (2009) work on difference and how society views and communicates about difference sheds much-needed light on areas of disparity and challenge for non-dominant groups in the United States. Castle Bell and Hastings’s (2011) work on ongoing race relations in the United States by examining Black and White communication challenges, as well as Bell’s (2012) work on challenges faced by interracial couples in the United States, have brought to the surface tensions that many Americans have long thought were no longer an issue.
Intercultural communication skills. Hajek and Giles (2003) offer a thorough account of intercultural communication skill, its nature, challenges to effective intercultural communication in business and professional settings, and approaches to effective intercultural communication education. Their core argument is that there is an inherent tension between the thinking about individuals as members of a culture, and therefore as being defined by their group membership in a religion, nationality, or ethnic group and communicating with people as individuals, being open to their distinctiveness as individuals and their specific concerns, fears, or attitudes in a particular context. Hajek and Giles (2003) describe studies that examined ways of enhancing professionals’ empathy; reducing prejudice and its harmful impact on intercultural interaction; and using simulations as ways of developing intercultural communication skill.

The research and scholars mentioned above have shaped the field of intercultural communication and the understandings of students, scholars, researchers, and teachers for more than five decades. As the world becomes a smaller place and cross-cultural interactions continue to increase in frequency, research in the area of intercultural communication will become even more important. While this review only scratches the surface, scholars such as Gudykunst (2005), Oetzel (2009), Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012), and Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) have written thorough texts which provide well-developed reviews and explanations of intercultural communication literature.

In situations such as the Fukushima Daiichi meltdown or the earthquake and subsequent tsunami in 2004 that resulted in thousands of deaths (Cumming-Bruce & Robertson, 2004), intercultural emergency communication is vital for enacting an
effective response. Unfortunately, as mentioned previously, there has not been enough research on intercultural communication in crisis or emergency situations. This phenomenon, intercultural emergency communication (IEC), needs to be explored more thoroughly (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006; Lee, 2005). To that end, I present research questions to direct a study that will help shed new light on the IEC process.

**RQ1**: What challenges do emergency responders face in intercultural communication situations?

**RQ2**: What do responders perceive as effective intercultural emergency communication?

**RQ3**: What practices do responders associate with ineffective intercultural emergency communication?

To begin answering these questions I conducted a pilot study. The pilot was intended to test potential populations, to test an interview protocol, and to lay the foundation for a larger study. In the following chapter I describe the procedure I followed for the pilot study, the findings of that study, and point towards next steps for IEC research.
2. PILOT STUDY

Pilot Study

Participants

The fire department in Fairfax County, Virginia is home to Virginia Task Force 1 (VATF-1), one of only two internationally deployable Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams in the United States (VATF-1, 2012). The other team rated to deploy internationally is located in Los Angeles County in California. The team in Fairfax consists of approximately 200 members, many from the Fairfax County Fire Department. The team also has medical professionals and individuals with other types of expertise such as engineering, engine mechanics, and canine training, but the majority work day-to-day as firefighters. The members of this team are prepared to deploy at a moment’s notice anywhere in the world to respond to a disaster. When they deploy they are under the umbrella of the State Department, working for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the title of “USA-1” rather than VATF-1. For the duration of the study I refer to the members of VATF-1 as either VATF-1 or “the taskforce.” The Red Cross and FEMA also have teams who deploy to respond to emergencies. As part of their regular operations, members of these teams consistently interact with individuals from cultures different from their own.
Procedures and Instruments

I conducted interviews with members of VATF-1, FEMA, and the Red Cross (n = 5). I conducted semi-structured interviews so that each participant is given the same questions, but there is space for elaboration and additional questions for clarification (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I focused on what Stewart and Cash (2008) would call a critical incident or critical moment style of interviewing. The purpose of this type of interviewing is to give the interviewee a prompt or guide (e.g., Tell me about something you are proud of in an emergency response), and allow them to tell a story about what they experienced within that moment or incident (see protocol, Appendix A). The probing questions that were employed helped to build on the stories that were told within the context of the emergency response. Analysis of these interviews was conducted via a grounded theory approach using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which “is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting… many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems” (p. 104). Through this process the interviews were analyzed and coded, with the intention of determining themes within the data. Although the sample was quite small, three preliminary themes developed during the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Managing the language barrier. The first preliminary theme that arose in the interviews was the participants’ indication that the language barrier was a major challenge any time they were working with individuals from other cultures. Without exception, every interviewee mentioned a time in which navigating a language barrier
caused them to have difficulties during an emergency response. For example, I2 shared a story about responding to an earthquake in Guatemala. I2 is fluent in Spanish, but still had to rely on translators to communicate with members of the local population because:

They have a different dialect. These towns, they’re up in the mountains, literally in the mountains, some of the elevations were between 10,000 feet… I even had problems communicating with them up there, with their dialects they have their own language, own custom, own culture, up in these little villages. They don’t come down to the city…it’s very interesting, a very eye opening mission. (I2, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

This sentiment was shared by the other participants who had worked in contexts where language was a barrier, whether or not they had worked on deployments internationally.

One of the firefighters and the FEMA employee both indicated that there are systems in place to connect them with real-time translators in case they need it during an emergency response. According to the firefighter, however, this process is “slow - it’s not as good as talking face-to-face like you and I are now” (I1, personal communication, December 11, 2012). I1 went on to describe the process of using hand gestures to communicate when language fails. He also pointed out the value of working with people in the crowd (that tends to gather any time there is an emergency). By working with the crowd, responders can engage the existing language skills of people present to bridge the gap for responders and those affected by the emergency. He indicated that oftentimes children are most helpful, as they may have greater English language proficiency than older members of a population.
The two members of the USAR team who regularly deploy internationally talked about the process of communicating and coordinating in places where English is not the first language, and where oftentimes people do not speak enough English for them to have consistent, effective verbal interactions. One participant described a response following an earthquake in Turkey when, despite having USAID translators on-site, there were simply not enough translators present to manage the communication flow. He went on to emphasize how, through gestures and nonverbal communication, they were able to deal with the lack of linguistic interaction.

Whether or not the participant had a plan or procedure in place to manage language barriers, they all indicated that it was a problem that continually occurred and needed to be managed any time there was an emergency. The next stage of this study will continue to probe the types of challenges faced by emergency responders and will seek to determine how responders manage the challenges they encounter.

**Differing practices, expectations, religions.** A second preliminary theme that consistently arose during the interviews was that of recognizing, honoring, and working within the confines of the traditions and religious practices of individuals from varying cultural backgrounds. The members of the USAR team all discussed concerns of respecting the values and morals of the individuals for whom they were working. One USAR member mentioned the modesty that is prevalent in places with strong Muslim cultures, and the unwillingness of individuals to be “exposed to other genders” (I1). He indicated that one way to manage this concern is make sure to not have a male treating a female, or vice versa, if it is at all possible in an emergency. Another USAR member
pointed out, on the same topic, that if it was going to be necessary to potentially violate such a custom, they would “communicate as clearly as possible what we are going to do, and make sure they are okay with it” (I3, personal communication, December 12, 2012).

There are times in an emergency when this type of consideration is simply not a possibility, though.

Another USAR member described the challenge of respecting traditions in the midst of a fire. He described the importance in many cultures of removing one’s shoes at the door. He pointed out that, “when we don’t know the building, we don’t know what’s in there, we just have to say, ‘I’m sorry, we can’t take off our shoes’” (I3). At this point, I learned it would be necessary to probe further to determine whether responders are trained to enact this type of cultural violation in a manner that minimizes the offense, or if responders rely on personal experiences and on-the-ground interactions to determine how to handle situations as they arise.

These types of challenges make it difficult for individuals working within a novel cultural context to do their job well in an emergency while also honoring the expectations and mores of the culture within which they are working. Moving forward with this research, it will be valuable to determine what other types of challenges responders face associated with common cultural practices, expectations, and differences related to religion.

**Differing perspectives on intercultural effectiveness.** While discussing the challenges of honoring culture while also doing their jobs as effectively as possible, a discrepancy became evident between what command-level members of the USAR team
perceive to be accurate and what front-line members of the team witness on-site. This is not a true theme across all contexts, but is something that has prompted interest in further exploration.

The perspective of the one team member was that, while there was a serious lack of training in cultural adaptation when he was younger, in the last several years cultural accommodation training has become a routinized part of deploying to international locations for emergency responses. He gave a specific example of learning local customs of the area where they would be working, such as how to respectfully exchange business cards in Japan. The cultural expectation is that you offer the business card with two hands as a sign of respect. Later, when I interviewed another experienced team member, he mentioned the exact same instance of being trained in how to exchange business cards in Japan. What he described, however, was a situation in which some people were not adequately trained in this type of custom and that many individuals did not adopt the training recommendations. He witnessed a particular situation that stuck with him:

One of our guys he just kind of gave [a business card] with one hand, and also when he gave it, [he dropped it] on the floor – you know obviously you want to get a new card and give them the new card, not give them one that fell on the ground, so it’s a little bit that bothered me when I saw it. (I2)

In this situation, not only did the team member drop the card on the floor then offer the same card to the Japanese individual (a serious sign of disrespect), but he also handed the card to the Japanese individual with one hand instead of two. This was an indication – in Japanese culture – that he found the other person unworthy of receiving the card in a
respectful manner. Although he indicated that it was a simple mistake to make, he insisted that “when we go to another culture we need to be more sensitive to other customs and cultures” (I2). I2’s assessment of this situation and others like it was that “you can go from hero to zero in no time when you disregard people’s traditions.”

Based on the differing perspectives of the same situation presented by the team members, I wonder whether or not there are other similar situations that need to be explored and whether or not there are discrepancies in perception of how effective the team is from the top to the bottom. If this type of differing perspective exists for a wide array of situations in the organization, it will be worth exploring methods for determining where discrepancies exist and how to address them in order to provide the greatest benefit to the organization.

Summary and Conclusion

These themes support the premise of this study that emergency responders face challenges in managing emergencies as a result of intercultural interactions. The preliminary answer to the first research question (What challenges do emergency responders face in intercultural communication situations?) seems to be language barriers and navigating the customs of other cultures while also doing their jobs effectively. RQ1 must be explored further in the main study. The answers of the interviewees indicate that intercultural communication competence is vital for navigating the challenges one might face during an intercultural emergency situation, which sheds some light on RQ2. The interview protocol will be updated for the main study to probe this topic further (see
Appendix A for adjustments made to the interview protocol). These preliminary interviews did not provide enough information to begin answering RQ3.

**Managing the tensions in intercultural crises.** As mentioned previously, intercultural communication and crisis communication share similar tensions. Intercultural categories do not have to be rigid or lead to inappropriate stereotyping, even in stressful, crisis contexts. Categories can be improved upon and developed when they are informed by personal experience and/or intercultural studies. A person who has developed a high level of intercultural communication competence will be much less likely to face intercultural conflict or to be limited by misguided stereotypes. The most general accepted definition of competence is perhaps “fitness or ability to perform… manifested in effective and/or appropriate behavior” (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989, p. 6).

While competence and social skill might often be conflated, Spitzberg and Cupach (1989) would argue that communication skills are what “make up or contribute to the manifestation or judgment of competence” (p. 8). Moving specifically to intercultural contexts, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) indicate the following concepts as integral to a sojourner’s cultural adjustment process: “culture-sensitive knowledge, motivation to adapt, the activation of appropriate and effective communication skills, the mastery of culture-based contextual rules, and the achievement of conjoint outcomes between the intercultural communicators” (pp. 97-98). Gudykunst (2005) and Pusch (2009) discuss valuable skills for sojourners to develop intercultural communication competence, including mindfulness, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility (e.g. cognitive, behavioral), and empathy for members of other cultures.
The same skills that are important for intercultural communication competence are valuable for individuals working in crisis or emergency contexts. Mindfulness, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility, and empathy are all important for crisis communicators and emergency responders. Along with Weick’s (1988) work in sensemaking to see how individuals respond in crises, we can look to the work of Ulmer et al. (2011) to see that “crises do not build character; they expose it” (p. 223). Individuals who have large amounts of experience, whether with intercultural interactions or crises, can draw on that experience to shape their actions. Training is also useful to help individuals manage the tensions of intercultural crisis communication. As Macnamara (2003) points out, “training can enhance communication” (p. 332). Training can equip individuals to be more effective intercultural communicators, and can also help improve and develop the sensemaking process in crisis contexts. To explore the influence and implications of training on intercultural emergency communication, I propose an additional research question for the next stage of this research.

RQ4: How do emergency responders view training as it relates to their day-to-day operations and work as responders?

In addition to the general question about training, I suspect emergency responders view communication training as unimportant, or at least far less important than their other types of training. To explore this idea, I propose the following additional research question.

RQ5: How do emergency responders view intercultural communication training as it relates to their day-to-day operations and work as responders?
The findings of the pilot study were understandably limited, but provided valuable information for the direction of future research. The pilot data suggest that developing intercultural communication competence is important to developing effective intercultural emergency communication. If, as the pilot data suggest, two great challenges for responders are the language barrier and managing cultural differences, it stands to reason that individuals with high levels of intercultural communication competence would be more successful in intercultural emergency contexts than individuals with low levels of intercultural communication competence. The next stage of this research is to explore the concept of intercultural communication competence to determine what that means to emergency responders and how high levels of intercultural communication competence might be developed or trained. In the following section, I propose a preliminary model of intercultural communication competence and what factors are likely to affect it.
3. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: A PRELIMINARY MODEL

Intercultural Communication Competence Conceptualized

The preliminary research pointed to intercultural communication competence (ICC) as an important and meaningful starting point for the next step in this research. ICC has been defined in a number of ways across multiple contexts. Drawing on the work of Deardorff (2009) and Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) indicate the following concepts as integral to a sojourner’s cultural adjustment process: “culture-sensitive knowledge, motivation to adapt, the activation of appropriate and effective communication skills, the mastery of culture-based contextual rules, and the achievement of conjoint outcomes between the intercultural communicators” (pp. 97-98). Each of these items builds on the others, as one must have cultural knowledge to adapt to the culture, to adapt to contextual rules, and to understand the ideal outcomes of intercultural interaction. Gudykunst (2005) and Pusch (2009) discuss valuable skills for sojourners to develop ICC, including mindfulness, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility (e.g. cognitive, behavioral), and empathy for members of other cultures. A broader definition of ICC is behavior which is appropriate or effective in a specific cultural context (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Each of these definitions and perspectives is beneficial for making sense of ICC and applying it to intercultural emergency contexts. For the purposes of this research, ICC is defined as demonstration of mindfulness, flexibility,
adoption of contextual rules, and cultural sensitivity through verbal and nonverbal communication in intercultural communication contexts.

**Intercultural Competence Scale**

One method for conceptualizing ICC is through the lens of Ting-Toomey’s (1999) staircase model for intercultural communication competence (see also Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). This model is built on Howell’s (1982) scale measuring five levels of competence. Ting-Toomey (1999) adapted Howell’s work into a “staircase” or “stair-step” model which progresses through four stages of intercultural communication competence. The lowest level is *unconscious incompetence*, when the participants do not know what they do not know. It is ignorance of any mistake. The second level is *conscious incompetence*, when participants know there are steps they do not know or that they are enacting incorrectly. The third stage, *conscious competence*, occurs when participants know how to function within another culture but must be cognitively engaged and mindful to maintain successful, competent communication. The final stage, *unconscious competence*, occurs when participants slip smoothly from one cultural context to another naturally and without difficulty. This generally occurs with great language and cultural proficiency.

Another valuable perspective on ICC includes not only understanding of culture, but also considerations of effectiveness and goal attainment. Spitzberg’s (2000) model of ICC presents four possible communication styles measured on two dimensions: effectiveness and appropriateness. Effectiveness relates to the goals of the communicator and how effective their communication decisions are in attaining those goals. For an
emergency responder, goals would include finding trapped individuals, rescuing trapped individuals, and treating patients. All of these are short-term goals that lead to the overall goal of a deployment, which would be to save lives. Appropriateness refers to the values, norms, and expectations of the host culture or of the “other” in communication, and how well a person abides by and respects the cultural expectations of the other person in communication. For an emergency responder in an intercultural context, appropriate communication would honor the customs, values, and norms of the place from the time they arrive in the culture to the time they leave the culture.

Communication in this model can be categorized into one of four styles based on the decisions of the communicator. The four potential styles of communication in Spitzberg’s (2000) model are minimizing, sufficing, maximizing, and optimizing. *Minimizing* communication is at the low end of both dimensions, as it is both inappropriate and ineffective. Communication falling in this category might include disparaging or non-empathic statements, or perhaps coarse or insensitive joking that makes light of an emergency situation. *Sufficing* communication is appropriate, but ineffective. In this category, an individual is highly accommodating to the host culture, but they do nothing to help advance or achieve their goal. An example of this occurring could be if a responder discovers that a trapped individual has passed away, and they stop ongoing operations to take time to express sympathy and concern for the family and members of the local community. *Maximizing* occurs when an individual is successful in achieving personal goals, or in this case in achieving the goals of the team, but does so at the expense of the norms and cultural expectations of the host culture. An example of this
might be utilizing verbal aggression to force individuals out of an area that is unsafe. The people affected are now in a safer place, but those relationships would likely be damaged. Lastly, optimizing is the logically ideal situation in which the interacting individuals are able to achieve their goals while also honoring the culture of the other individual or group. An example of this would be if a male emergency medical technician (EMT) discovered that a Muslim female needed medical treatment, and rather than disregarding cultural norms was able to recruit a fellow female EMT to treat the female Muslim patient. If this could be done in a timely fashion and the person was not harmed, this would be an example of optimizing communication. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the four communication styles and their relationships to one another.

Figure 1. Intercultural Communication Competence (Spitzberg, 2000)
The pilot will be developed and expanded via further interviews. The interview protocol was expanded based on the pilot data and further review of the relevant literature. The next stage of this research will provide further insights into the area of intercultural emergency communication. After completing the next round of data collection and analysis there may be insights that enable me to expand the model above or develop additional models that help make sense of intercultural communication competency. The methods for the next step in this research are presented in the following chapter.
4. METHOD

**General Method**

The following chapter presents the sample population and demographic data. Next, methodological procedures are reviewed, including participant recruitment, the qualitative interview process, the transcription process, and analysis procedures. Lastly, steps taken to manage subjectivity and maintain credibility are reviewed.

**Sample**

Following the pilot study it was evident that the Red Cross and FEMA contacts did not have the types of intercultural emergency communication experiences that would help answer the research questions. The study instead focused on individuals who had direct intercultural emergency response experience, including members of VATF-1. The total sample size for the interviews was 19, which included 16 VATF-1 personnel, two members of the Air Force, and one individual who works for an emergency operations center in a large metropolitan area on the east coast of the United States. The entire sample was male, which is largely a function of the overall emergency response population. Relatively few female individuals pursue careers as members of emergency response or urban search and rescue teams.

The sample included individuals who ranged in age from 38-51. The participants self-identified as Hispanic, Black/African American, American Indian, and
White/Caucasian. The participants had been working in their jobs as emergency responders for as few as 4 years, and others for more than 20 years (see Table 1 for complete demographic information). To qualify for the sample, individuals had to work in an emergency response capacity, and either have experience working internationally, or work in a context where they are regularly exposed to individuals whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own. Individuals working as emergency responders in Fairfax County, Virginia, fit within this requirement because Fairfax County is one of the most culturally diverse counties in the United States. According to the latest U. S. Census Bureau data, 47% of Fairfax County residents are non-white, 30% report they are “foreign born” and 36% report a language other than English is spoken at home (State & County, 2013). Individuals who did not meet these criteria were not interviewed.
Table 1. Demographic Information for Study Participants

| Age          | 38-43: 4  
|             | 44-46: 9  
|             | 47-51: 6  |
| Gender       | All 19 participants are male |
| Race/Ethnicity | White/Caucasian: 13  
|             | Hispanic: 3  
|             | African American: 2  
|             | American Indian: 1 |
| Education    | Some College: 3  
|             | Associate’s Degree: 4  
|             | Bachelor’s Degree: 5  
|             | Master’s Degree: 4  
|             | Doctoral Degree: 3 |
| Organization | VATF-1: 16  
|             | United States Air Force: 2  
|             | Fairfax County Emergency Management: 1 |
| Time in Organization | 1-5 years: 1  
|             | 6-10 years: 5  
|             | 11-15 years: 5  
|             | 16-20 years: 4  
|             | 20+ years: 4 |
| Times Deployed Internationally | No international deployments: 1  
|             | 1-3: 8  
|             | 4-6: 5  
|             | 7-10: 1  
|             | 10+: 4 [One 25+; One 50+] |

**Data Collection Procedures**

The interview protocol drew from the protocol used in the previous pilot study, but was enhanced with other probing questions drawn from relevant research (see Appendix A). For example, there are two probing questions from Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) that have been added relating to intercultural communication competency, and questions from Chang (2009) related to job satisfaction and intercultural communication contexts.
Participant Recruitment. The sample was gathered through purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Purposive sampling, also referred to as deliberative or strategic sampling (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000) is appropriate when the researcher establishes research questions or hypotheses that can only be tested with a certain population. For example, if a researcher is interested in determining what factors are associated with effective intercultural communication in emergency responses, the only individuals who would be able to answer those questions are emergency responders who work in intercultural contexts. In this situation, purposive sampling was appropriate. The second type is snowball, or network, sampling wherein I asked individuals I interviewed to recommend others I might speak with (Frey et al., 2000). This was important because the population is very small; VATF-1 only has approximately 200 members, and a recommendation from a fellow team member enhanced my credibility as a researcher. Although the majority of my participants are members of VATF-1, it made sense to interview individuals from other organizations who work in similar contexts. Conducting these additional interviews provided interesting opportunities for a preliminary comparison across contexts. While extremely limited, these three interviews opened interesting avenues for potential further research.

Confidentiality. To build rapport and help establish an environment in which participants would feel comfortable sharing their experiences, I spoke with participants about confidentiality. It was important that participants knew their information and identities would remain concealed. After conducting each interview I replaced names
with alpha-numeric codes (P1 for participant number one, and so on), and removed names from all relevant documents and files.

**Qualitative Interviews.** Qualitative interviews were the main source of data collection for this research. Interviews lasted between 19 minutes and 63 minutes, with an average length of just over 36 minutes. Interviews are valuable for increasing knowledge and understanding about the research questions in a study (Maxwell, 2005). In qualitative work, interviews create a space for the participants to be part of the research; when a participant shares their stories and examines their experiences they can discover information in a way that makes them co-researchers in creating meaning (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

As was the case with the pilot study, the interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. This type of interview process helps to ensure that participants “hear the same questions in roughly the same way – although spontaneous follow-up probes are allowed to clarify remarks or to encourage elaboration” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 194). As with the pilot study, the interview style was what Stewart and Cash (2008) would call critical incident interviews, where the goal is to have participants tell stories and share anecdotes about their experiences. This type of story-telling interview process is also useful because it allows future readers to enter the world of the interviewee and view their experiences as the interviewee does (Foss & Griffin, 1995).

**Data Management and Analysis.** Data were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of the information provided by the interview participants. The recordings were then completely transcribed, yielding 174 pages of single-spaced data. After the transcriptions
were complete, audio-recordings were reviewed as the transcripts were analyzed to maintain accuracy for analysis (Maxwell, 2005). All potential identifiers were removed from the audio files to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

Data management was initially conducted manually, using notebooks, post-it notes, and stacks of paper documents to organize and make sense of data. Eventually, I utilized electronic data files to organize and make sense of coded data. For this research, I employed manual processes at first, and then moved to software once the accumulated data became cumbersome. I then began to reduce the data by determining which data were critical to making sense of the problem, which were beneficial for providing rich examples, and which were not useful at that point in the research. I reduced the data by filtering chunks of text (documents, notes from a journal, transcribed interviews) into categories and codes. This is the process of conceptual development. As analysis progressed, themes began to arise. I created categories for the themes to manage the data. I attributed codes to each section of transcribed data. For example, any time a participant mentioned language as a barrier, difficulty communicating because they did not understand the local language, or needing to work with a translator, I applied the code “language barrier.” Over time, there were a number of codes that began to hang together in groups, or categories. Based on the categories I was able to establish themes across interview contexts. This entire process was conducted via a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In a grounded theory approach, emergent theory is “grounded in” the relationships between the data and the categories into which they are coded; categories develop through the ongoing process of comparing units of data with one
another (this is called the \textit{constant comparative method}). Codes, categories, and definitions continue to change over time as new data alter the analytic framework.

Data were then interpreted by creating links among codes and categories, deciphering meaning within themes using metaphor, relationships, and cultural understanding to interpret meanings within the data. Through this process I was able to take the specific – the experiences of research subjects – and interpret it. Through the interpretation process, I was able to determine themes across contexts. This allowed me to develop a model to help explain and describe findings of the research.

\textbf{Managing Subjectivity and Ensuring Credibility}

According to Patton (2002), qualitative researchers face criticism from the assertion that they tend to engage in selective observation, or focus only on what they want to see during data analysis. This is the primary threat to the credibility of qualitative research. Creswell and Miller (2000) recommend a number of processes researchers can follow to ensure credibility and minimize subjectivity in qualitative studies. Three specific recommendations are note taking, thick description, and member checks, or having participants review and confirm that your findings resonate with their experiences.

\textbf{Note taking.} Note taking during data collection helps researchers to improve reliability, or trustworthiness, and helps to verify results (Silverman, 1993). I took thorough notes during the data collection process as participants’ reports either were consistent with or contrasted other participants’ answers. The note taking process helped in the analysis process as well, as it enabled me to capture potential codes even as
interviews were ongoing, rather than waiting until interviews were complete to begin analysis.

**Thick description.** For the qualitative researcher, thick description is essential for capturing the essence of the data and integral to data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Geertz, 1973). Thick description helps the researcher to produce a valid account of data by demonstrating how the researcher moved from data collection, through analysis, and finally to interpretation. Thick description is also important so that readers can come to their own conclusions about the credibility of the interpretation (Becker, 1998).

One method to allow readers to come to their own conclusions is to provide background information on the research participants (Becker, 1998). To that end, I provide detailed descriptions of the composition, training, and activities of the various organizations of the interview participants. I also, in discussing the results of the research, share numerous examples, stories, and anecdotes from the participants. By sharing this information, the reader is able to decide whether or not to agree with the researcher’s perspective and interpretation.

**Member checks and external validation.** After data were analyzed, I presented my analysis to individuals I interviewed as well as to non-participants within the study population. Member checks and validation from non-participant members of the population enhance the quality of results and maintain the credibility of qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Member checks are an important method for data
triangulation and are useful for minimizing and dismissing potential doubts about the findings of the research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

In the following chapter I present the results of the study and discuss the interview analysis. I present a model of intercultural crisis communication competence, and discuss next steps for future research.
5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When I began interviewing emergency responders, I did not know how much I simply did not understand about what someone faces in a disaster response situation. By interviewing emergency responders who work in intercultural contexts, I gained insight into a world that most people will never glimpse, much less be able to understand. As a qualitative researcher, I used methods which are inductive, emergent, and shaped by my experiences collecting and analyzing data. I pursued this research from what Geertz (1973) would call an emic perspective, rather than from an etic perspective. An etic perspective, generally used in quantitative research, is based on theory and would seek to define the participants’ behaviors from a specific pre-defined perspective. In an emic perspective, the researcher wants to know what meaning is to the participant; the researcher should try to find out what it is like to walk a mile in the participant’s shoes, and what “shoes” means to the participant (Geertz, 1973). For the qualitative researcher, questions can change over the course of the research as data analysis provides further insight into the phenomena being studied.

To bring research full circle, from an emic perspective, I must also use thick description and vivid examples to create a context in which the reader can visualize the experience of the interview participant. As mentioned previously, it is also important for the qualitative researcher to provide the reader with background information (Becker, 1998). To that end, I begin presenting the results of this study by painting a picture of
what it is like to be an emergency responder who deploys to disaster events around the world. The exemplar for the background information presented in the following section is the urban search and rescue (USAR) team VATF-1. In the pilot and again in the method section I described some of the characteristics of the team and its composition. In the following section I expand on that information.

Key Terms

Before describing the background and characteristics of the taskforce, it will be useful to review key terms and frequently used jargon:

- **AST** – American Support Team; a specialized team with as few as a handful of people deploying to provide assistance in coordinating a response. ASTs deploy much more frequently than Heavy (Type 1) or Medium (Type II) or Light (Type III) teams, which are the types of teams that deploy with heavy equipment to break concrete and extract trapped individuals. AST teams deploy internationally to assist in situations when the services of an entire heavy team may not be required.

- **BOO** – Base of Operations; this is the central hub for the taskforce during a response.

- **DART** – Disaster Assistance Response Team

- **Delsar** – A search tool that detects vibrations and sounds, used in the search process to detect movement of live individuals in a collapsed environment.

- **IST** – Incident Support Team; the domestic counterpart to ASTs, utilized in similar ways. When hurricanes, tornadoes, or floods occur, ISTs are often
deployed to provide guidance and support for the individuals coordinating the response to these events

- **LEMA** – Local Emergency Management Agency; this is used to refer to any entity or organization in the host culture that has authority and influence to direct response efforts and coordinate distribution of resources during a deployment

- **Locals** – Refers to members of the host culture; depending on context, they are referred to as locals, patients, victims, or hosts

- **OFDA** – Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance; this organization is housed within USAID and is responsible for coordinating disaster assistance procedures for the U. S. government

- **Rock breakers, Knuckle draggers** – This is the nickname taskforce members have for technical rescue specialists who operate on the front line, breaking apart concrete to reach entombed individuals

- **Type I, Type II, & Type III** – These are Heavy, Medium, and Light teams, respectively
  - **Type I** - This team would likely be deployed for a major disaster with significant structural collapse, such as a major earthquake
  - **Type II** – This team is a reduced size team carrying less equipment than a Type I team that would respond to floods or hurricanes
  - **Type III** - This team has minimal equipment and would be used more for guidance and support than for full-scale rescue operations

- **UNDAC** – United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
• USAID – The United States Agency for International Development; this organization is housed under the U. S. State Department and conducts a wide array of humanitarian efforts around the world

**Deployment Characteristics**

When VATF-1 deploys domestically to respond to an emergency, such as Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Sandy, or the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon, they load their equipment into trucks and drive to the event. When they deploy internationally, their transportation options are more limited. As P4 pointed out:

Moving the people is not the hard part, you can move 75 people, 60-75 people and six dogs with relative ease on a commercial carrier. The challenge is all of the equipment we carry with us, and typically you have to have a cargo aircraft or a military aircraft, and [because of the war] the availability of military airframes has been vastly curtailed for a fairly long period of time. (P4)

Aside from managing transportation needs, for an international deployment the team members still have to have up-to-date passports and visas. Once they arrive in the host country, before they can get set up and begin their work they must go through customs, the same way any other international traveler would. As P9 put it, “it’s no different than if you and your wife traveled somewhere, and we still need all the country clearances, we need the visas. And we need to go through the customs and all that other stuff” (personal communication, February 5, 2014). Even when all of the human team members are accounted for, occasionally the canine team members have additional challenges to entering a foreign country. According to one participant, “a lot of countries won’t let us
bring the canines,” and when they do, they have to go through a “quarantine… at least twelve hours, maybe even twenty four hours” (P9). Eventually, the team makes it through customs and to the response site so that they can begin the important work of saving lives. The following section outlines the response process.

The Response Process

Once the team members have made it through customs, the real work begins. P6 described the overall structure of a deployment as follows:

Some deployments are rapidly evolving, highly intensive, others are more smoldering or gradually progressive in their nature. So the first one involves a two shift 24-hour work cycle, 12-hour shifts, roughly. There’s a command and communications briefing before a general team briefing, and a crew-to-crew of like discipline change of shift reporting. Then you work your operational period, throughout the day, communications are primarily, you’re working on specific concrete tasks with reporting of success, mission accomplished; need more resources to accomplish it; or here are the barriers encountered and what I need to overcome the barriers and accomplish the objective. (P6, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

In events that are less intensive, for example when the team deploys domestically to prepare for a hurricane response before the hurricane makes landfall, “the intensiveness…is relatively low because we haven’t done physically demanding tasks yet” (P6).
Setting up camp and getting to work. In highly intensive events such as earthquake responses, the search teams begin their work as soon as they arrive in-country. While they are out beginning the search process, other team members begin to set up the BOO. One rescue specialist described this process:

Since we’re the rescue specialists, we also help set up with the command structure and the base of operations… half the group will do that, while the other one starts out in the field, so we have a place to come back to. (P16, personal communication, February 16, 2014)

While the rescue squads and other team members are setting up the BOO, the search teams are already working to locate trapped or “entombed” individuals. Search teams, generally made up of between five and nine people, will move through areas where they could potentially find trapped individuals. They rely on interactions with locals to determine whether or not someone is known to still be in a building, as well as on their own expertise in determining where people are likely to be trapped. While inspecting a building, they have three distinct types of tools to determine whether a person is trapped and still alive. These tools include listening devices, search cameras, and canines. The canines are trained to detect live individuals. As P11 pointed out, “by using all three resources, to include listening devices and search cameras and the canines, it improves your probability that you may end up finding someone” (P11, personal communication, February 7, 2014).

Conducting a rescue. Another aspect of the response is confirming that someone is actually still alive in a building. Delayering, or removing rubble from a collapsed
building, is a time consuming and exhausting process. Before engaging in the process, responders want to be certain that they are working toward saving someone who is still alive. While the responders want to help extract anyone who is trapped in a building, it would be unwise to spend time and energy extricating someone who has died when someone else could still be saved. To make sure that they are working toward a live individual, they always confirm via two of their three main search tools. For example, if a microphone picks up words or tapping they will try to also confirm with a canine or with a search camera. What this means is that, in order to maintain the highest levels of efficiency and increase chances of saving the most people, sometimes a search team must mark a building and move on until some of the rubble can be delayered. Once the rubble pile has been decreased, the team can return and see if they can gain better access to a site. One responder shared a compelling story of this type of situation:

There was one victim in Turkey… You have a dog go and the dog’s barking, barking, barking. And you always go and try to verify things with two resources before we commit. All these folks and all this equipment, they begin to dig through, maybe fifteen feet of concrete or something. You know what I mean? And maybe, so, the dog’s barking. Okay, we can’t verify, for whatever reason. We move on. Come to find out the lady was trapped between the concrete. She couldn’t respond. She couldn’t tap. She couldn’t do anything. She was buried too deep to get the camera. So, we moved on. They’re delayering the building. You know, delayering, delayering. Next thing we know, we get a report: “Hey, we hear somebody.” Same exact spot where the dog was barking. I believe they were
delaying it, and she was just – the guy just happened to turn his equipment off. He was sitting there, smoking a cigarette, and heard her scream. But she was too far down to be heard, until after he delayered… But she was right where the dog said she was, but just fifteen feet down or so. But then we dig her out, she’s totally fine. (P11)

Once someone is extracted, the team members determine whether or not the person needs immediate medical care. Each rescue squad has members trained as emergency medical technicians. Their standard practice is, “if we do come across a, uh, victim, our job is to stabilize the victim, treat the victim as best as we can and get them, and then hand off that victim to the local, the local stations” (P10, personal communication, February 6, 2014). “Local station” here refers to medical centers or emergency medical hubs that have been set up for the duration of the response.

**The role of medical personnel.** The doctors and other medical personnel who deploy with the team are able to offer medical assistance to those who need it, but that is not their main purpose. According to one of the VATF-1 team doctors:

Primary priority is provision of care and maintenance of health for taskforce members both human and canine. Second would be medical evaluation and stabilization during extrication of victims encountered in a collapsed environment. Third would be evaluation of other victims or peoples that we encounter. Uh, we advise the operations advisor or the incident commander on any and all issues of medical importance. (P6)
The primary priority for medical personnel on the team is the USAR team members specifically because working as a search and rescue specialist in a collapsed structure is incredibly dangerous. In situations such as Haiti or the 1999 earthquake in Touliu, Taiwan, danger still exists for any person working to find individuals trapped in a collapsed building. When a team is searching a building and an aftershock occurs, there is a chance the building could collapse further. P11 pointed out that “even though you’ve got an escape plan taken care of, you’re still crawling through debris…through broken concrete… If something bad happens, if this thing goes down a little bit, we might be here…for a long while.”

**The strain of a response.** The response process has a certain rhythm: search, rescue, offer medical aid, repeat. This process is at the same time challenging, fulfilling, dangerous, and exhausting. Responders face both physical exhaustion: “we’re exhausted – you’re hungry, you’re thirsty, everything aches, you’re lightheaded because you’ve been working and not getting enough food and water, you’re just drained to exhaustion,” (P2) and mental or emotional exhaustion:

By going on a mission…I’ve put myself in a position of seeing a whole lot more and experiencing a whole lot more, emotionally, than what I ever could have done by watching something on TV or reading a book. Now, I’m seeing people - You know what I’m saying? Now I’m seeing people. Those folks who are deceased. Those folks who are disfigured. Those folks who have lost loved ones. Those folks who are still digging, those folks who depend on you. Making the conscious decision about whether or not I need to leave. (P11)
Team members recognize that “when they come back, they might be a little bit different after all the things that they’ve seen and all the things that they’ve encountered while they’ve been in-country” (P13, personal communication, February 7, 2014).

While no one could conceive of the scope or scale of a disaster without experiencing it, team members quickly come to understand the immensity of a disaster event. One responder describes the experience of learning to cope with the scale of a disaster:

When you go on a deployment it’s all around you and it is dynamic, it’s ever-changing by the second, and there’s really nothing you can do to prepare for that. You can plan, plan, plan; train, train, train; but until you’ve done it several times it’s just going to be difficult to prepare. Because we’re talking about something on a grand scale. When you look down a city block and all of your buildings are leaned over and these are 10-story buildings, 5-story buildings, and everything is on its side. And there is no shelter, there is no more normalcy. It’s very challenging. (P3, personal communication, October 7, 2013)

Another participant, P2, described working in Haiti as compared to other responses. P2 is one of the most experienced members of the team and has been on dozens of international deployments. His description of working in Haiti is vivid and compelling:

When we were down in Haiti, again, this earthquake was the worst of the worst you could get. We’ve been to a lot of responses, but this one had the most people trapped in it, the most people alive that we were able to rescue, so we had a lot of – everything you study about, read about, trained, everything we trained for was
in Haiti. We did everything. Like, a lot of places, we went to Japan in the tsunami, and um, we did some but we didn’t do to the extent we did in Haiti. And I’ve been to floods in Colombia, or Panama. You pull people out with a boat, but you’re not really working with those people and talking to them, “We’re gonna get you out, we’re gonna get you out,” and talking to them for hours at a time. (P2)

**Get home, turn around, go back out.** Another aspect of working as part of VATF-1 is the quick turnaround time that is occasionally required. While taskforce members are guaranteed 72 hours of downtime following a response, they occasionally are called up again to re-deploy as soon as the 72-hour period is complete. This is especially true of individuals who are proficient in multiple languages, as they are able to function without necessarily having to rely on a translator. One example of this happened right after Hurricane Sandy in 2012:

I was at Hurricane Sandy, up in New Jersey… I came home, was home for approximately no more than 72 hours… and then an earthquake in Guatemala hit, a 7.2 off the coast of Guatemala… So I went to Guatemala after being home for three days after being in New Jersey for Hurricane Sandy. (P2)

In the example above, P2 was part of an AST deployed to assist in the recovery efforts in Guatemala.

**Leaving something behind.** Sometimes, when possible, the team members are housed in hotels or similar structures. In events like Haiti, there were no structures available so all teams that responded to the event had to bring their own tents to stay in. When the team prepares to leave, they leave as much of their equipment behind as
possible. While deployed, the team leadership will have made connections with local leaders and with individuals who have influence in the community. Upon leaving, the taskforce leadership will make sure that those who have influence can help distribute tents, medicine, food, and water that the team leaves behind to those who need it.

**Working with other teams.** In addition to VATF-1, in a large-scale disaster response there will be other responding teams, often coming from all across the globe to help manage a response. For example, in Haiti VATF-1 members mentioned working with a taskforce from France. In Japan, there were six teams from various countries invited to help respond to the Fukushima meltdown, including teams from China, Russia, and the United Kingdom. To be successful in a response, it is important for team members to be able to coordinate and collaborate with teams from other parts of the world.

One example of the necessity for this type of cooperation occurred in Haiti. There were limited resources in Haiti, including fuel, transportation, and security assets. One participant explained the problem as he experienced it:

We didn’t have perfect resources to get our job done. And it’s not that the country didn’t want to assist us with assets, but that other groups are competing for the same assets. I’ll give you an example: in Haiti originally we were there doing search and rescue of the people trapped and we were having to compete with other agencies for fuel, for transportation, for vehicles, and for security assets to accompany us to the work sites. But they needed those same resources because they needed to deliver water, food, and medication, and train people to provide
those same resources, and so it’s very hard to compete against those – of course, at that time, we thought we were the most important component of the rescue, but we had to take a step back and realize that no, that there’s a bigger picture and that we have to go along, but that’s probably one of the most difficult challenges that we’ve faced. (P1)

Another problem was the limited vehicles available for transport. VATF-1 did not bring trucks with the taskforce, so they had to rely on what could be found in-country. P1 shared this story about that process and how they managed it over time:

We were able to secure a couple of trucks that were dedicated to us, and we were managing the teams who were trying to go out at the same time so we created a rotation so bringing other teams back and, with operations it was pretty challenging, with a limited number of trucks, so we looked at what we had and when we were done using those resources we took them somewhere so they could be used to move water or other resources, those kinds of things. (P1)

This type of collaboration is integral to the overall response process. Working with other teams to coordinate and collaborate allows taskforce members to build relationships that can benefit the taskforce as well as the local population.

In the following section I describe the motivations that drive taskforce members and cause them to continue returning and working as emergency responders over the long-term, with some interviewees having worked in emergency response for more than 20 years.
Motivations

As mentioned above, the work of an emergency responder, while fulfilling, is also challenging and stressful. Over time, working so closely with death and destruction is likely to take an emotional toll on a person. To continue working in this type of environment, a person must have a strong motivation to continue. The interview participants indicated a number of reasons why they continue to pursue work as an emergency responder over the course of several years. Several of those reasons were common threads for multiple participants.

Help others. One of the most frequently mentioned reasons for working as an emergency responder, and more specifically for continuing to work as an emergency responder, was a desire to help others. According to P14, “It’s just a further extension of why I joined the fire department. I wanted to help people.” Another responder explained, “I have a passion, obviously. That’s why I’m in this job in the first place - to help people” (P15, personal communication, February 16, 2014). P2 went as far as to describe a particularly difficult and physically taxing rescue, and indicated that when they finally extricated the young woman from the rubble that “I have a feeling… I know what [a rock star] feels like now.” P2 also mentioned that sometimes, what keeps him going in a response is what I have begun calling The Golden Rule of Rescue – “whoever was trapped, it could have been anyone’s family or relatives, anybody, and you would want the same work done to your – anybody you know” (P2). I especially liked the way P8 phrased it when he said that he just wants to “get people back home” (P8, personal communication, January 6, 2014).
Utilize skills. In addition to a desire to help people, many of the respondents indicated that they have skills they have developed over the course of their lives and various careers, and they want to be able to bring those skills to bear on helping manage emergency responses. One responder, who worked in international responses with USAID for many years and recently transitioned to working as an emergency manager in the county, indicated that “I’ve been traveling for a very long time, and I wanted to try to bring some of my experiences and my skill set from the international level to the local level” (P7, personal communication, November 6, 2013). One respondent with experience in construction indicated that working as a responder was “just a different way to utilize my skills” (P16). He has experience working with “hand tools, pneumatic tools, [and] hydraulic tools,” which has made him a valuable member of the team as well.

Dedication to the team. As I conducted interviews I was struck by the VATF-1 members’ devotion to the team. Without exception, each member described their excitement and good fortune at being able to be part of the taskforce. VATF-1 is one of only two teams based in the United States that is rated by the U. S. government to deploy internationally for emergency responses. As one respondent phrased it, “just being part of [this team] is, you know, the top of the pyramid. You can’t go any higher than that” (P16). Another participant gave an example of the teamwork and dedication that goes into making the taskforce function on a regular basis:

I have to say, [I’m proud of] the amount – the teamwork that goes into deploying this team. You’re talking 82 people that normally do not work together on a regular basis, you know, we train together periodically, not as much as you would
think because we have civilian members, in conjunction with our fire department personnel, which can be stationed in the county of Fairfax at 37 different fire stations, so you may never even see that guy until you have that, those two or three team drills every year. So I think it’s just the teamwork. If you reflect that one thing it has to be the teamwork and just the dedication of each member to push forward, and just say look, this is a team mission and this is what we’re going to do together. So just teamwork. That’s what I’m most proud of. (P3)

This team is cohesive, motivated, and driven. They also have respect for their position as representing the United States any time they deploy. When they work internationally they no longer identify as VATF-1, but instead as USA-1. Their patches carry the American flag. Many of the taskforce members described themselves as ambassadors.

**Ambassadors**

When members of VATF-1 deploy, they represent the United States. They recognize and are proud that “every time we deploy we represent the United States” (P1). Several participants indicated they have heard locals on deployments equate “America” with their uniforms. As ambassadors, the responders have emphasized the importance of respecting the customs of the host culture when they deploy. One respondent described the work that taskforce members have done:

To make sure we don’t offend people by certain actions, things we do, or things we need to take into consideration before we go stepping into somebody’s house or you know the synagogues or wherever else we’re going that might be a very private place for certain people and not so private for other people. (P13)
Perhaps the most memorable description of the importance of acting as an ambassador in a host country was P2’s assessment, mentioned previously, that responders can very quickly go from being a “hero,” to a “zero,” by making mistakes that violate cultural norms.

The previous section presented the reader with important background information on the work of emergency responders in intercultural contexts. The reader gained insight into the overall timeline and procedures of a response, the scope and scale of a response, and the dangers of a response. The section ended with a description of the factors that motivate responders to continue to work in emergency response contexts, and how taskforce members view themselves vis-à-vis the host cultures in which they are deployed. The following section addresses RQ1 and provides an overview of the challenges and successes that responders encounter in emergencies.

**High Reliability Organization**

Members of VATF-1 are part of a High Reliability Organization (HRO). Weick (1987) and Novak and Sellnow (2009) among others have studied HROs to determine what counts as “high reliability.” Nuclear power plants, airlines, and meat-packing plants are all organizations that must function as HROs. HROs are complicated, danger-prone, and potentially accident-filled organizations whose employees must operate at a consistently high level of mindfulness, often in settings where the job task is tedious for long periods of time. Airline pilots must have a high level of skill and training to do their jobs, yet they spend most of each flight watching an array of controls and monitoring gauges, which could easily become a recipe for boredom, dozing, and laxity. Employees
of meat-packing plants work in dangerous environments where the machinery could easily maim or kill a careless worker, but the work is itself quite tedious and repetitive. At the same time, workers in these HRO contexts make mistakes rarely and accidents are not common.

Members of VATF-1 are often in similar situations. Their jobs are highly complicated and dangerous, and they take great pride in the skill level required to function effectively. The search process and much of the rescue process is comprised of fairly repetitive work in a context where it could be easy for responders to zone out or lose focus. The training of these individuals and their team focus helps keep them engaged and on-task in the midst of an emergency response.

**Challenges Faced and Successes Achieved: Addressing RQ$_1$**

The first research question I presented asked what types of challenges emergency responders face in intercultural communication contexts. The following section presents the answer to that question, as well as a follow up describing the successes responders experience in overcoming the intercultural communication challenges.

**Challenge: The Language Barrier**

The first and most frequently mentioned challenge for individuals working in intercultural emergency contexts was the language barrier. This challenge was described as an ongoing issue both domestically and internationally, as the responders’ day-to-day work takes place in Fairfax County, which is one of the most culturally diverse counties in the United States (State & County, 2013). There are so many distinct languages and dialects spoken in Fairfax County, the county administration has had the web site and
online materials translated into 80 different languages (see http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/languagetranslations.htm for a complete list).

Over the course of each interview, the participants mentioned language as a consistent barrier to their work. One participant indicated that managing the language barrier, even with a translator, “[is] time consuming… it’s a real challenge” (P4). For responders, the language barrier “obviously… can cause a breakdown in communication” (P5, personal communication, October 14, 2013). When language barriers arise, the team relies on either taskforce members with language proficiencies, or on local interpreters and translators. Recall the example mentioned in the pilot study of the responder who, though fluent in Spanish, still needed a translator to communicate with the local population while responding to the earthquake in Guatemala. Even responders who have strong language proficiencies must sometimes rely on translators. For those responders who have no proficiency in a host culture’s language, they must always rely on some sort of translator or interpreter for verbal communication. Working with translators carries its own challenges.

**Working with translators.** Most of the participants mentioned working with translators to achieve their goals during a deployment. One participant talked about the experience of working with translators. He gave two examples of working with translators, first in Japan: “we had uh, a translator/guide that was assigned to our unit, and um, he worked directly with us, and um, he worked for the ministry department so he had a high level position within the country of Japan” (P5). The second example concerned deployment to Haiti: “we were gathering up locals that had past or previous positions
within the U. S. embassy there, and the embassy brought them in so that we could get out
on the streets and get to work with the locals” (P5).

Despite working closely with translators, working with an intermediary is never
an easy or seamless process. One example came from a participant who pointed out the
potentially differing perceptions or definition of a shared word:

If you were trying to speak one shared language, a lot of the meanings of words
and phrases are culturally derived, so if you – when a Ukrainian says a word we
may have that word but it don’t mean the same thing. That can be challenging, so
you kind of recognize that those words might not mean the same thing and you try
to work through that. (P6)

Another challenge of working with translators relates to the intricacies of needing
precision in communication about medical treatments. One participant shared a
compelling story about working in Djibouti and attempting to offer aid to someone
through a translator:

[About] the language barrier, um, being able to speak to the interpreter and then
the interpreter asks them the question, like if I ask you are you taking any
medications, what medications are you taking, when was the last time you ate,
just pertinent history information, have you had any surgeries, I can have a
conversation with you and get that information from you, but that’s not the case
with interpreters. You’re getting a very garbled, misguided kind of information
because you’re also dealing with – not specifically with Afghanis, but you’re
dealing with, uh, natural medications. Like the Djiboutians take what’s called
Khat, and it’s an opioid derivative, it’s a hunger suppressant, and it’s given to them by the government. Okay, well that messes with all kinds of central nervous system and respiratory considerations that, you know, granted I deal with that here stateside, but I can be able to ask somebody hey, are you taking any medications, and they think of a pill, and they can say okay, yeah, I’m taking Motrin and Oxycontin, whereas you go overseas and ask are you taking any medications, and they say no. But their eyes are pinpoint and they’re acting just like they’re drugged out because they’re on an opioid. (P8)

Each of these concerns adds an additional level of challenge and potential frustration to working in an intercultural environment. The situation is exacerbated even further when there are no translators available to assist with the communication process.

Not enough translators. Many of the participants described working in an emergency context and not having access to translators, often because there were simply not enough translators to be able to assist every team that was out in the field. P1 described working in Turkey in 1998, because “we did not have a lot of translators, and the locals did not speak English.” The taskforce always attempts to deploy individuals who speak the language of the host country, but it is simply not always possible. When the team deployed to Haiti there were multiple teams in the field conducting search and rescue operations, and there was one taskforce member who spoke French. P4 indicated that in Haiti, “one of our biggest challenges was finding reliable interpreters among the local population.” Beyond the challenges of needing to find translators to work with the
local population, taskforce members on international deployments are frequently working with response teams from other parts of the world.

**Success: Overcoming the Language Barrier**

Taskforce members must frequently work in situations where they do not speak the language and there are no translators to interpret. Participants described how, in these contexts, they would work to manage the language barrier as they were able.

Some participants indicated that they would “just get past it,” when asked about the language barrier. A common statement was that the end goal of saving lives was always more important than the language barrier. One participant explained that “It’s almost like two people walk into an end goal…They don’t have to talk. It’s - the goal is already there and so there’s no real argument or anything like that. It’s an end goal” (P16). Another common idea was that when verbal communication failed, the best option was to use nonverbal gestures. For example, “to be honest with you, most of the time, whether it’s hand language or drawing something in the sand or drawing something on a piece of paper, you typically can find out what people need” (P7). This perspective was supported by another respondent who told a story about using drawings to coordinate water distribution in Eritrea:

Yeah, uh, an example is in Eritrea, which is on the horn of Africa. They, in the two camps we were working in, they didn’t understand or speak English, um, the individual from one of the UN agencies within the camp was not available, and we were there to talk to someone about, are you familiar with water bladders? Buffaloes, buffaloes we call them, it’s basically a big water bladder that people
will come and bring big containers to carry water back to their homes. And we’re trying to get a water bladder into the community, and they couldn’t understand us. So we essentially drew a picture of a bladder with water coming out of it and people walking up to it with containers to put water, and then they were able to show us a place that was central to the community where no one had to walk a longer distance than any other in the community and we were able to have it set up and they had water for a certain amount of time. So sometimes it’s as small as that, it’s not always about technology, it’s not always about money, sometimes it’s about writing something down on a piece of paper to get people to understand.

(P7)

Other strategies suggested by participants for connecting with locals when they could not communicate verbally were pointing, gesturing, and showing someone an example of what they needed.

Other participants suggested that there are times when it is simply not possible to overcome the language barrier without a translator or interpreter. In these instances, the participants had no recommendations about how to proceed other than to continue to use nonverbal communication and hope to make sense of the situation.

**Challenge: Working with Other Response Teams**

For the most part, participants indicated that working with other teams was fairly seamless. One respondent indicated that there are few challenges to working with other teams:
Working with the other international response teams, whatever cultural differences there may be between them, certainly the Russians have their own culture, the French have their own culture, the Germans approach things and the Austrians approach things in different ways, but with regard to the response component it’s all pretty standardized and um, it does not present many challenges really. (P4)

While this may generally be the case, some participants shared stories of challenges they encountered in trying to work with members of teams from other cultures.

The first example of a challenge encountered working with other response teams was a story of working with a French team during the response in Haiti:

So they had a collapse and they were working on a victim, it was a female victim that was inside of a building and directly behind a gas station…and the French ended up getting there. And the problem was, the French were very territorial and without getting into a great detail, it was their site, we honor that, but we were asked to help. So we brought a bunch of people and I was one of the lead people, I was the search team manager on that deployment, and my job was to try to interact with the current people…and try to, you know, work out what can we provide to support you? So what we were able to do and what I was able to utilize was that we had a doctor on our task force that spoke French. So I grabbed him right from the formation of my portion of our search team and grabbed him with my team, and I used him as an interpreter for the whole mission that I was there. (P15)
This situation seemed to start off well, because the responder took the initiative to utilize his resources and initiate discussion and collaboration procedures with the French team via the taskforce member who is fluent in French. The situation was not so simple, unfortunately:

So I was able to utilize him and talk through him to their team who didn’t want anything to do with us because they thought that “we’re going to give it up to the Americans, this rescue.” And ours is a - we don’t really care who gets titled or claim for it. We just want to help get this person out. And so this was a few days into [the Haiti] mission. So long story short, is, is that we did - we basically were kept completely physically away by like 100 feet. And actually we were kept at bay, like don’t even come - so the access to this building was on top of a building, so we had to come up with a ladder on top of a building and look at this adjoining building, and we were not allowed to even first of all, come up on top of that one building. Then we were able to get on top of the building a few of us at a time. So we’re kind of worming or, wiggling our way into this, and the reason is, again, is that we’re not seeing a whole lot of productivity here, we have some things to offer that we see that you don’t have, capability wise. And let us help, let us work together, whatever. So you had to build a relationship before you could get acceptance and before they would allow us to do it. Now, we did do that. We got on top of the building. Then I was able to worm, wiggle in a circle. Let me take a look and see what’s going on. So I was able to kind of get closer, and I’m talking hours into - they went out from daylight through dark. And we were able to
finally get in there to help them, you know, just by assisting with medical stuff and maybe you give them some ropes or some things like that, and some advice here and there, and we finally were able to get that victim out. (P15)

It was extremely fortunate that the taskforce members were able to connect with the French team and extricate the entombed individual, because if they had not the situation could have been deadly:

It wasn’t but a couple of hours later that we had a large aftershock and that whole building collapsed and that woman would have perished. So hopefully - The relationships we were able to build basically meant that they were able to rescue that person alive as well as not having some of their own team members injured or killed because that’s what we obviously always keep in the back of our mind is, are we going to be the next victim? (P15)

In this situation, the VATF-1 members had to be persistent and continually work to build trust with the French responders so that they could help and offer assistance in the middle of a difficult, risky response. For the reader’s benefit, it is worth noting that this story was shared without pride or boastfulness. P15 simply presented the situation as he experienced it: the members of VATF-1 had the training and equipment that would allow the rescue to be made successfully and quickly, which for them was more important than any concerns related to prestige or recognition. Note also that the French team would have their own interpretation of this situation, which we unfortunately cannot explore.

Another example of a challenging encounter with other teams came from a participant who described the challenges faced by command-level guidelines. P6 told a
story about conflict between response groups that developed because of command-level barriers due to differing objectives:

We had two taskforces on a rubble pile, both with ample work to do, both with ample skill to apply to the task at hand, but some territoriality – this is my section of the pile, don’t come over here, such and such, we’re working over here you stay over there. (P6)

As was evidenced in the example of working with the French team, sometimes response groups need to work together to achieve their goals, and sometimes their goals or motivations conflict with one another. This type of challenge or conflict is a puzzle that needs to be explored further. Why do teams working toward the same apparent goal, which is saving lives, respond with territoriality and mistrust when other teams offer assistance, input, equipment, or advice? This challenge to interaction is fortunately not an insurmountable barrier.

**Success: Cooperation and Coordination**

Over the past 15-20 years, the international search and rescue community has become close-knit and cohesive. Many of the participants described the opportunities they have had to conduct international training simulations with other emergency response taskforces from around the globe. This has resulted in the opportunity for taskforce members to learn from one another and develop a certain amount of trust and professional respect. The conflict mentioned above that P6 described between command level groups was resolved by individuals working at the ground level:
[But at] the worker bee level, “Whoa, that is a wicked cool search cam, show me your search cam, how do you use that? Can I, hey why don’t you come over to our pile and show us how that works on our pile.” The next thing you know the teams are integrated, and why? Because they’ve got cool tools and they’re showing each other how you do stuff and the relationship is built and then the rescue team goes up to the command, ops leader, goes to the command and says, “hey they have this cool tool and we want to bring them over, can some of their squad come over and show us how they use that tool? Because we may want to buy one when we get back.” (P6)

By simple virtue of one group of responders expressing interest in and respect for the work of another group of responders, the “worker bee” personnel were able to help overcome the barrier between response groups.

**Challenge: Cultural Differences**

Another ongoing challenge for responders working outside of their home country or home culture is managing the disparate cultural expectations of their hosts. For example, one recurring example of culture as a challenge for responders was the religious tenet of individuals in Muslim populations that restricts the interactions of men and women. This cultural norm becomes a challenge when, for example, a female Muslim individual has been injured in a disaster and the only person available to treat her is a male responder who is, of course, not a close family member. One responder shared this example (this individual is a medical specialist in the Air Force):
You’re dealing with, especially in Afghanistan, you’re dealing with the different hierarchies and the structure of how men and females are in that society. You have to ask permission to treat the female, the husband has to be there, and you know under certain circumstances when you don’t have enough time or room on a helicopter to take, you know, the father or the grandfather or the husband or the grandfather or whoever, you have someone who stepped on a landmine and you need to treat this person and need to perform an amputation, and you have to go find the husband and you know he’s trying to get all of his clothes and you’re trying to get everyone on the aircraft, so that can be kind of frustrating. So it’s like you have to have permission, and it can be very frustrating when you’re just trying to provide medical care to that person. (P8, personal communication, January 6, 2014)

Another cultural challenge that responders face deals with treatment of a person’s body.

There’s some cultures where, if the body is not whole, it cannot be, you know, accepted, you know, I, I forget the exact terminology, but basically, it’s not accepted into death unless the body’s whole, so if we’re making a rescue attempt, you know, sometimes, to save a life, we, they may have to do a medical amputation of a limb. And, you know, in some cultures, if the body’s not whole, they have no use for you. (P9)

These types of challenges are constant factors for emergency responders in intercultural contexts. In the example of the need for amputation, there is an emotional and psychological strain on the members of the team, as well as the physical strain of taking
part in a response. There is also an assumption on the part of the responders that they are acting “rationally” and the members of the host culture are acting “irrationally.” In reality, both sides are acting equally “rationally” based on their own culturally-based logic.

**Success: Preparing for Cultural Interactions**

Each participant I spoke with has some level of culture training. For the three individuals who are not part of VATF-1, the training was much more extensive. Their training involved specific language and culture instruction for places they would be working for more long-term deployments than members of VATF-1. The taskforce does have culture training for members to prepare for deployments. Much of the taskforce training takes on the form of cultural “dos and don’ts,” which can be very helpful for individuals who do not have a lot of time to prepare before they deploy to a location. It might also be beneficial for taskforce members to engage in training that would help them to see their actions and motivations as cultural actions and motivations. Understanding how their own motivations are based on their own culture and the shared culture of the taskforce could help them to more easily make sense of and understand the cultural norms, values, and expectations of host cultures.

One downside to the VATF-1 preparation is that much of what they do to prepare is directly related to security and safety concerns. Rather than building ongoing intercultural communication training into their routine training regimen, it seems that cultural training often consists of a pre-deployment briefing for the team on how to remain safe and what types of security challenges might exist once they arrive in-country.
The taskforce is known to consistently be well-prepared to do their job and to train their team members effectively for the tasks they perform on deployments. However, it might make sense to develop more thorough and ongoing intercultural interaction training processes that can occur before the taskforce deploys.

**Challenge: Psychological Stress**

One of the first challenges mentioned by taskforce members is the logistical challenge of getting off the ground when they are ready to deploy. While the team is always ready to deploy within two hours of receiving the call to give aid, they must often wait for anywhere from a few hours to two or three days to get approval from the U. S. government to deploy. This is frustrating for members of a highly-trained team who are ready to deploy at the drop of a hat. This challenge can add to the psychological stress of an already taxing deployment. Once they are on the ground, the team members face an array of much more difficult stressors.

**Pressure from locals.** One of the most commonly expressed challenges that responders mentioned is the pressure that they feel from locals and onlookers as they are working to find or extract trapped individuals. P2 shared a story from his work in Haiti:

> We were working in the Hotel Montana, and you know everyone is saying, “Are you going to get him out?” And we’re working on it, and it’s a very complex operation, everybody says “you’ve gotta pull him out,” but it’s a whole lot more than that. If you take out the wrong piece of the puzzle the whole thing could collapse, so you’ve got to be careful. (P2)
There is also the challenge of search and rescue teams is the pressure from locals who have nothing but hope that their loved one is still alive and well. One participant shared this example:

One problem that we run into every once in a while when we’re doing recons is people see us coming there and know that their loved ones might be buried in the pile, and they tell us: “Oh, no, I heard him,” or, and one of the hardest things that you have to deal with is, you know, you can send a recon team over there and put a Delsar on a rubble pile. It magnifies sound waves in the concrete, and everything. It picks up earthquake waves, so you can hear somebody tapping or you can hear somebody talking six layers under. And so it’s a very sophisticated piece of equipment. And if we hear nothing, it’s very hard to tell the people who are standing outside that building, you know, “We don’t hear anything. I’m sorry. We need to move on.” So, the difficulties are two things. First, we’re there for the humanitarian effort and we want to help everybody we can, but we’re also there - whatever positive hits we do get - we want to work them completely. And we, I don’t want to say waste time, but we don’t want to lose any time of not being able to place it toward live rescues. (P13)

The pressure to save people is not limited to the rescue teams as they work on extrication of entombed individuals. One participant shared the experience of working in Japan after the tsunami in the OFDA command center and witnessing the heart-wrenching search by one young woman for information about someone she knew:
Through one of the towns we went through to go search, there was a young woman there and she lived in this town and her parents lived with her. She had gotten up to go to work that day, and obviously the earthquake happened and the tsunami happened and basically wiped out this whole town. We came to this town to search it over a two-day period and she sat outside the kind of command OFDA had set up, in tears, waiting for some word of, just some type of closure that they had found some kind of fragment, something to give her something. And I mean, and she waited the whole time. Seeing those kind of – you see it on TV, but until you see it in person—you can see it on TV, but until you see this person firsthand, it gives you a different perspective of what crisis is.

This pressure from locals for the responders to find someone and to save someone is intensified multiple times over when the rescue teams lose someone they are trying to save.

**Losing someone.** The example from P2 working in the Hotel Montana and feeling the pressure of bystanders pushing the responders to “pull him out” does not have a happy ending:

[We were] working on this gentleman for probably over 24 hours, plus or minus, and while we’re working we’re talking to him, you know, “where are you from,” and you know, smiling and talking to him, “we’ll get you out, we’ll get you out,” and he had a lot of medical conditions as well, and you know we were asking him – and then by about the 24th hour we were working on him, he’d already been trapped for a day or two before we got there, and by the 24th hour we were
working on him it’s already 36 hours he’s been in there or more, so we’re working and it’s already been more than 36 hours, and this gentleman is older, and his health wasn’t real good, so we work on him, and then we lost him. He passed away. And um, it kind of bothers me, and a lot of people who work there, you know we’re working and we’re talking to him, and in the next couple of hours he starts going downhill. And his vitals and everything, you can just see him, his energy and everything has dropped. The doctors were there, but there was nothing we could do, no medication or anything, but just get him out, we tried – we gave it all we had, and we still couldn’t get him out. So that right there is one of the hardest challenges, talking to someone while you’re working and then you just see him pass away right before your eyes. (P2)

The experience of losing a patient is unfortunately not an uncommon experience for emergency responders. It is important to remember that taskforce members who deploy internationally also work day-to-day as fire fighters and emergency medical technicians in Fairfax County. One participant shared an experience following the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon that shook him to his core:

We dealt with a lot with the nursery at the Pentagon and dealing with what we had to deal with there. I have kids so that really kind of I guess, you know, having to bag and tag as we call it, I mean, better using any other words than that, really affected me. In fact, to a point where I would have nightmares waking up in the middle of the night just screaming and I had to go see a psychiatrist to try to fix
myself, because I knew there was an issue and subconsciously I wasn’t dealing with it very well. (P17, February 16, 2014)

This type of event is part of life for individuals working in this context. While every single day does not include watching people pass away, it is certainly a part of life and one that takes a toll on the responders. Another challenge on international deployments is being instructed to move on when they have not yet extricated a patient.

**Packing up and moving on.** When the taskforce deploys internationally, they are working for the U. S. State Department under OFDA, which is part of USAID. Despite reporting to OFDA, when deployed, the taskforce must follow the guidelines set forth by the United Nations. Sometimes, this leads to frustration for the taskforce members:

They [the United Nations] are the ones that we work for and we have had times when we have like discovered people and for whatever reason beyond me, we’ve had to actually mark and move on, and maybe not have come back to even have anybody return to dig that person out of the pile. (P15)

More than one responder indicated the frustration of leaving a person behind without knowing if anyone ever went back to finish digging them out or if they were able to be saved.

The other context in which taskforce members must pack up their gear and move on occurs when they know that the person they were attempting to save has succumbed to their injuries. The taskforce members found it hard to articulate what to say and how to inform family members that their loved one has passed away. One taskforce member shared his thoughts on the matter:
People are waiting to tell them something positive, and you ain’t got nothing positive to tell them, other than focus on what the mission is. I mean, as long as we’re here, we’re going to keep on searching. And being able to be prepared for the questions that they may have - some you know you can’t answer. Some you know that you have no answer. You know, and it’s really about being honest.

(P11)

To manage these challenges and diffuse the impact of the psychological strain the taskforce members experience, it is important to have a strong support system and a culture that is accepting of the need to have emotional and psychological assistance.

Successes: Achieving Goals and Social Support

**Saving lives and meeting needs.** In the section above, I mentioned the challenge of losing a patient in the middle of an attempted rescue. Perhaps the best counter to that challenge in a response context is seeing a life saved. In the same interview that P2 shared the story of losing a patient, he also shared the experience of working with someone for more than 24 hours and seeing her pulled safely from a collapsed structure:

We were working in a – we were assigned at Port au Prince University – there was a lot of people trapped. And um, we were working on this girl – I’m sorry I can’t remember this girl’s name, but we were working on this girl that was trapped, for probably about three days, under – nonstop continuous operations, 24 hours a day, nonstop, and um, we finally – after the third day of working on this young girl, her family, her friends, her neighbors are outside the university, and it was somewhere between 3 and 4 o’clock in the morning, and …we finally pull
this girl out, and we’re exhausted – you’re hungry, you’re thirsty, everything aches, you’re lightheaded because you’ve been working and not getting enough food and water, you’re just drained to exhaustion. So finally we get this girl out, 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning, and finally we carry her out right there in the Main Street where the ambulance is waiting, and we have somewhere between 50 and maybe 70 people in that whole street, and they finally hear us – “hey, they got her out, they got her out,” and so – we’re walking out with the stretcher with this girl, and everyone just starts chanting “USA! USA!” – and I tell you what, that right there, that was one of the proudest moments I have ever felt to be an American, and to be able to wear this uniform, and the echoes of this going in the street – it’s only maybe 50 or 70 people, but it sounded like thousands of people chanting. It just felt amazing and you know – no matter how tired you are – that went away, and it has a huge psychological effect on you – you’re like, “okay – let’s go back for more! Let’s keep working!” You’re not hungry, not thirsty, not lightheaded, you feel – I mean- amazing. (P2)

This is only one of many examples the participants shared of being able to save a life and bring hope back to a community. In Haiti alone VATF-1 completed 16 live rescues, which according to the participants was more than any other single team in the response.

The VATF-1 members are also interested in leaving places better off when they leave than when they arrived. In a place that has experienced as much destruction as Haiti or Japan, there is little that can be done to make a difference. However, two examples from Japan stand out as notable efforts to meet human needs. The first is a simple act, a
kind gesture by one of the taskforce canine handlers. The team was dispensing fresh water to locals near a Japanese port, and the following took place:

A lady had come up with her young son and she was very interested in one of our search canines. You know the fact that he was able to come up and pet him, she was able to get a picture of him sitting with the dog—actually in some little sense—made life better for them for that 30-second period. They kind of got to forget about something that was going on in their lives. (P14)

The second example is a testimony by one taskforce member about the efforts by another taskforce member to help meet the needs of school-aged children who had lost everything:

We were deployed internationally and in a very impacted area, and we had our base of operations, our rear base of operations in a school, a school that was very impacted by the event. And uh, they were due to have the last, the promotional ceremony for their class. And you know assuredly a lot of the kids had lost family members, the teachers had lost family members, the entire nation was impacted. And when you’re deployed like that, managing all of the uncertainty, managing all of the perceived stress, the perceived responsibility for the taskforce members can present a very narrow focus, and inspiring [one of my team members] had the sensitivity and the awareness to take up a collection from team members to donate to the school and to the school system to try and benefit them. (P6)
This simple gesture took little effort or output on the part of the responders, but had an important psychological impact on the individual who shared the example and likely on the students and teachers of the school as well.

**Getting everyone home safely.** When the team deploys, they know that they are entering dangerous areas and doing work that could leave them trapped alongside the very people they are working to save. This type of stressful environment, while taxing, can also build strong bonds. Walsh (1996) explores the impacts of crises and other stressors on family bonds. Groups and teams that go through stressful situations together often develop closer bonds to one another. The camaraderie in the taskforce and in similar groups is likely a strong factor in helping members manage the psychological stress of a disaster deployment.

Many of the team members mentioned a perpetual goal in each deployment is to see each team member return home safely. Being able to do that and know they did their jobs without experiencing a mishap is essential to members of the team.

**Psychological support resources.** Aside from the events that taskforce members experience which are uplifting, there is a strong employee assistance program (EAP) in place to help manage the emotional and psychological challenges that team members face. The taskforce member quoted above who responded to the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon shared this example of how taking part in the EAP helped him cope after responding to the Pentagon attack left him shaken and struggling to do his job:

I had to go see a psychiatrist to try to fix myself, because I knew there was an issue and subconsciously I wasn’t dealing with it very well…Our EAP…set me
up with a guy… and I went through hypnosis to try to correct the problems because of what I’d seen and what I’ve done. And it worked, I mean, I’m still in the job thankfully, but I couldn’t even go into a burning building at that point without kind of having not freakish thoughts but, you know, just kind of things in the back of your head…I just had to reprogram myself, and now you think of things a little bit different. (P17)

Another team member indicated that the system they have in place is designed to maintain confidentiality for the taskforce member. If a person goes to his or her supervisor and indicates there is an emotional problem, that person is connected with the EAP. Team members can choose to seek help privately and maintain full confidentiality, or they can request to have other experienced team members sit with them as a group and talk through the challenges they are experiencing. There is an array of options, and I was surprised at how much the taskforce encourages its members to seek support and take care of their emotional needs.

**Addressing RQ**

The first research question asked what types of challenges responders face in intercultural communication situations. After conducting interviews, it is clear that there are a number of major challenges for emergency responders. Some of the challenges that developed supported and expanded the findings of the pilot study, including language as a barrier and the challenge of managing disparate cultural norms and expectations. Additional challenges were presented as well, including coordination challenges with
other response teams and the psychological strain of working in a major disaster or emergency context.

The third concept presented in the pilot study was the idea that there are differing perspectives on the level of, and need for, intercultural communication training. That was somewhat supported in the current study. It became clear that some participants are more culturally aware and mindful than other participants. For example, P9 is one of the participants who conducts pre-deployment research to help the taskforce prepare for cultural differences they might face during a deployment. He is the same participant who shared the anecdote about the challenge of needing to conduct a medical amputation on an individual in a culture where amputation for any reason is not allowed. He shared this example with the simple prompt, “What types of challenges do you face related to working with people from other cultures?” P9 was highly articulate about the types of intercultural challenges that team members might face. Other participants, when provided the same prompt, indicated that the only challenge was a language barrier. These are the two extremes of the spectrum in terms of cultural awareness. What might benefit the team and help decrease the gap in perceptions about and understandings of intercultural communication is training in how to engage in perspective-taking.

Perspective-taking, or “the ability to entertain the perspective of another” (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), is important to managing stereotypes, accepting difference, and enacting empathic responses (Davis, 1983; Kohlberg, 1976; Piaget, 1932). Perspective-taking explores questions such as “What happens when we’re not on the same page?” and “What does it mean when we don’t perceive things the same way?”
Research in perspective-taking has shown that intentionally entertaining the perspective of the other individual can shape a person’s actions, attitudes, and attributions (Regan & Totten, 1975). What the interviewees are saying when they describe the importance or respecting the locals’ host culture, of acting empathically, and of seeking ways to overcome the language barrier, is how important perspective-taking is. Without realizing it, one Air Force participant even pointed out the value of perspective-taking when someone in the host culture enacted effective perspective-taking:

The interesting thing with watching this one chief that I worked with [in Afghanistan], first, he did not get stressed about it. He would laugh about [gender relations]. In fact, he would predict when a situation, when there was an issue, he would talk to me and predict what some of the European police advisers were going to say, or what the European perspective was going to be on this on the gender issue. And he was almost always right. And then he would not get upset or he would come to me and say, “You need to do this and this and this and this.” Um, because he knew where they were coming from. (P12)

Training that focuses on perspective taking would help responders function more effectively and would make many intercultural challenges more manageable. The following section reviews the answers to the second research question.

**Effective Intercultural Communication: Addressing RQ2**

The second research question asked what characteristics or skills emergency responders consider important for effective intercultural communication. The following section presents the answers that arose following analysis of the interview data.
Four Key Components for Effective Intercultural Communication

Over the course of each interview I asked the participants to think of someone they believe excels at intercultural communication. I then asked them to tell me why that person, or those people, came to mind and had them describe the characteristics that made each person an excellent intercultural communicator. The following are the four main characteristics that participants listed as key for effective intercultural communication.

Language proficiency. This first characteristic is not surprising, as one of the first topics each person mentioned as a challenge was language as a barrier to communication. While no one went into great detail about the benefits of language proficiency, multiple participants mentioned language skills as highly important for an effective response. P5 mentioned a taskforce member who is fluent in two other languages, and indicated that “he’s very good at communicating.” Another common characteristic that was mentioned was the value of experience.

Experience. The value of experience for communicating effectively was mentioned more than any other single attribute, skill, or trait. As P3 put it, when looking for someone who functions very well in intercultural contexts “you’re looking at your more experienced, your more tenured members that have been around a while. And I don’t think, I don’t mean to spite the newer people…but that’s just something you gain through experience” (P3). The person P4 mentioned stood out to him “because he’s practiced in it, in dealing with people from other nations.” Another participant indicated that, to an extent, intercultural communication skill is something “you naturally have, but
probably learn to fine tune it along the way because of the environment that you’re all too
often faced with” (P5). One individual went so far as to say “to be quite honest, a lot of
that coordination and dealing with partners outside of your agency is more of an
experience thing. No one can really tell you how to communicate with your outside
partners” (P7). In addition to language skill and experience, participants tended to focus
on the personality traits that they believe make their teammates strong intercultural
communicators.

**Personality traits.** Over the course of the interview process a wide array of
personality traits were said to cultivate or inhibit effective intercultural communication.
Participants touted a “calm, cool demeanor” (P5), a person who is “even-tempered,
compassionate, measured, never too high, never too low, and always contemplative”
(P6), and someone who is “calming, willing to listen, and trustworthy” (P7). Each of
these traits characterize aspects of a competent communicator as well as a strong leader,
so it is not surprising that these traits were selected as important for effective intercultural
communication.

Another trait that stood out as important was empathy. This was evident not only
in the answers that participants gave to this question, but also in the stories that
participants told about other responders. For example, the story about the taskforce
member who organized a collection for school children and the story shared by the
participant who witnessed the child in Japan taking a picture with one of the search
canines are both examples of taskforce members acting and communicating empathically.
One other example stands out as a taskforce member noting a display of empathy from a
member of a host culture. The Japanese offered to take a group out to the coastline via helicopter so that they could survey the damage and get a sense for what they were doing in the response. While flying out, the helicopter encountered turbulence:

When the up and downs in the helicopter started making some people throw up in the back, the poor guy in the back that sits up on a little tailgate that flips down on the double rotor, type of helicopters. I don’t know much about helicopters, but that guy that sat in the back pulled his own handkerchief out and started handing it to people so they can wipe their mouths when they were throwing up in their helmets… he was super friendly and that was very nice. You know, when you get onto a personal thing after, you know, seeing such a large amount of destruction and you take it all down to something friendly like that, that makes a big difference. (P18, personal communication, February 18, 2014)

This event struck the participant as meaningful. Even though the helicopter crewman could not speak a word of English, he recognized their discomfort and offered the small aid he could provide them.

**Ability to manage conflict.** Major disaster responses are volatile and filled with uncertainty. This type of environment is ripe for conflict, especially when a person must work with and rely on individuals whose customs, norms, values, and beliefs are likely vastly different from their own. Add a language barrier to the situation, and it would be easy to have an international incident. One participant told a story about an incident he inadvertently caused while working with some children on the earthquake response in Haiti:
So we set up tents for these what used to be I guess a school and it was for kids and adults in general. So we went to the kid area and there is, you know, a number of different things as far as injuries. So we’re talking to them, we’re showing them, you know, what we do and kind of like a get to know each other. Well, there was one little girl that I had a little flashlight that was hanging in my vest and I turned it on, she looked at it, she liked it, and then when we went to another little girl and it was the same thing. And before the end, I took my little flashlight and I gave it to the last little girl, I go hey, here you go. Well, the one that was the first one saw that, and she freaked out. She started screaming and crying, I want that flashlight, I want that flashlight, you know, and then the other one’s crying because she didn’t want to have it taken away, and my buddy next to me said, “Boy, you just created an international situation here,” you know? And it’s a silly thing like that, but it happens. So when they tell us don’t interact, don’t give them anything, don’t do this, don’t give them a gift. Don’t take your jacket off and give it to them. It’s because of situations like that happen and that was lesson for me, you know? (P19, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

While this was not a major problem and it did not cause any long-lasting harm for the children, the team, or for overall relations in the area, it was an example of a time when simply not being mindful of a situation resulted in conflict.

One participant shared a story of attempting to manage conflict between two distinct cultural groups in the middle of an emergency response. Each group started out in
conflict with him and his team because they assumed he was only intending to help the other group. When I asked him how he managed the situation, this was his answer:

The way to get around that is time – you have to get them to trust you, to get them to recognize that you are on their side and you’re here to help them. The way to do that, fortunately or unfortunately, is time – being there. You know, getting them to trust you, having a relationship with the community, so when they see you coming in, having the Fairfax county colors on or USAID colors on, they know you’re coming in to help them. I’m not sure if that makes sense, but there’s not a short-term fix for a problem like that. It really requires being in the community and showing them you’re on their side and helping them, gaining their trust. (P7)

In addition to P7’s anecdote about building relationships over time and building trust to diffuse conflict, a major theme across all interviews with regard to effective intercultural interaction was the importance of building local relationships.

**Build Local Relationships**

At the core of nearly every interview was a cognizance of the importance for emergency responders to build relationships with individuals and groups who have authority in the community, with the LEMA, and with members of the local population.

**Connect with local authorities.** Participants made it clear that in a response, “local authorities” could refer to local government, could refer to the LEMA, or could potentially refer to members of the community who have authority and influence. Relationships with local government and with the LEMA are important because they are
the first line of contact for the taskforce. The LEMA is likely going to be in charge of and will “have the ability to direct the incoming resources” (P18).

One participant told a story about connecting with a local leader in Haiti named Chief Z. P15 built a relationship with Chief Z when the team responded to a school collapse in 2008. When VATF-1 returned to Haiti following the earthquake in 2010, P15 became reacquainted with Chief Z. He explained their relationship and the value of connecting with individuals like Chief Z:

We ran into Chief Z in Haiti when the earthquake happened. And he knew that oh, you know, the Americans - meaning Virginia Taskforce-1 is what he actually meant - are here. So we can, you know, use them and we’re buds, and we have a relationship built, which we did, and that’s kind of what we do…When we get that buy in from them, and they remember what good work we do, then we can come back and do more good work, which we did as well in Turkey because we went there twice. (P15)

Building relationships with local authorities is also important for making certain work continues after the taskforce leaves. As one of the participants, a medical specialist, indicated, “if you get a foot in at the ground level, then you can interact with the ministry of health all you want, but if the local community leaders don’t buy in you’re going to have zero lasting impact” (P5). Connecting with influential locals helps members of the taskforce function more effectively over the duration of their deployment, and allows their work to continue even after they return home.
**Build relationships to earn trust.** It is important for the taskforce to build relationships with locals as well because it is the locals who assist in locating trapped and entombed individuals. As they move through an area, teams will glean intelligence from locals they encounter. One participant described the process of gathering local intelligence:

If we’re walking… looking at buildings that there could be life in, and there’s a house and there’s a person there, one of the neighbors, we can say “Hey, does anyone live here? Have you seen them? Did they get out? Were they home at the time of the emergency? Things like that. And if they tell you, “They took off. They’re down the street at the Hyatt,” - Okay, we don’t have to check this. We know everyone’s okay. (P9)

Sometimes it is difficult for team members to connect with or interact with locals because of their uniforms or because of their security escort. From a taskforce perspective, “I think the biggest difficulty is people see us and they know, if they see us and they know our uniforms, and we are automatically related to a military regime” (P13). When the team is not taken for military personnel, they are sometimes hindered by the U. N. Peacekeeper security troops who escort them on their operations. One participant described the challenge of responding in Haiti, where locals would not come and help them if they were working with a security force in black uniforms. The force that wore blue uniforms was no problem, but if they were with security personnel in black uniforms they would not encounter locals to assist them.
**Equip locals for future work.** Taskforce members are interested in ways that they can equip locals to be better off when they leave than when they arrived. One way they have done this is utilizing their skills to restore and repair as they worked. Recall the anecdote from P4 about repairing trucks for response work in Haiti and leaving them in better shape for the owners when they left. The participants shared numerous stories of the value of building relationships with locals and partnering with them to complete their work. When they prepare to leave, taskforce policy is to leave as much equipment behind as they can so that locals can continue to benefit from it in the future.

**Addressing RQ₂**

The second research question asked what emergency responders associate with effective intercultural communication practices. Most of the results are not surprising as they tend to match what the literature suggests is important for intercultural communication. The participants suggest language proficiency, intercultural experience, personality traits such as empathy, and managing conflict well are all important for effective intercultural communication. These findings are limited by the nature of the research, as the participants are only able to report what they have experienced and what they understand or recall from their experiences. The participants also emphasized the value and importance of developing relationships with members of the host culture.

In his work on ethics, Nilsen (1974) describes the importance of building relationships with stakeholders so that it is possible to have the types of relationships that are necessary for stakeholders to make informed decisions. This same concept applies to the responders’ dedication to building relationships with members of the local population.
They demonstrate clear dedication to ethical action by pursuing the types of relationships that will help local populations to thrive because of their interactions with members of the taskforce.

Quarantelli (1986) reports that following a disaster people are much more likely to enact prosocial behaviors, rushing to assist others and attempt to save lives, than they are to panic or enact antisocial behaviors. Quarantelli even suggests that average people are likely to begin acting, as they are best able, as emergency responders during a disaster event where they perceive that help is needed. This report is supported by the experiences of the taskforce members. Recall the story shared by P11 of the woman who was trapped beneath concrete whose presence could not be confirmed by the search equipment. The canine detected her, but they could not confirm her presence so they left and came back later. According to P11:

She was right where the dog said she was, but just fifteen feet down or so. But then we dig her out, she’s totally fine. Two hours later, we come back through, and she’s out there helping dig. And you just, it’s amazing. It gives you an appreciation for how folks are. You know, just from a cultural standpoint. They just—this is just—they’re just hard workers. (P11)

This is only one example of the resilience of the individuals that taskforce members encounter. Recognizing the value of partnering with stakeholders (Nilsen, 1974), and understanding the research that Drabek and McIntire (2003) and Quarantelli (2003) have done on emergent organizations and the ways that people respond following crisis events, it will be helpful for responders’ training to include methods for recognizing and
partnering with emergent organizations as they develop in emergency environments. This will be important for two reasons: first, individuals in emergent organizations provide the first line of assistance and insight into the local situation for emergency responders; and second, if responders know that emergent organizations are likely to develop, they can watch for them and utilize them while also ensuring that local individuals do not put themselves in danger while trying to help the responders.

As a final note on the second research question, responders would benefit from additional training in mindfulness in the midst of stressful emergency situations. I do not suggest that they need additional mindfulness training for their job tasks, but instead for intercultural interactions. Events such as mishandling a business card in Japan, or inadvertently causing an “international incident” with a group of children, would be less likely to occur if participants were trained to engage mindfully in cross-cultural contexts.

**Ineffective Intercultural Communication: Addressing RQ 3**

The third research question asked what emergency responders associate with ineffective intercultural communication. Just as the participants were aware of an array of traits and skills that are important for effective intercultural communication, they also indicated a number of actions that, while on a deployment, would be damaging to their local relationships and would violate their own cultural expectations. Three procedures in particular stood out from the participants’ stories and examples as particularly damaging to intercultural interactions. First, participants said they never wanted to be perceived as “coming in and taking over” from the LEMA, as they view themselves as providing assistance and meeting existing needs. Next, many participants emphasized the
importance of not disrespecting locals or local authorities. The last point, which came out more through their examples than through explicit statements, was the importance of empathy; participants’ stories suggested a person who lacks empathy is an ineffective intercultural communicator.

Taking Over

Taskforce members made it clear throughout the interview process that they see themselves as assisting the LEMA, local authorities, and members of the population when they deploy to a disaster event. One participant explained it the most clearly, saying: “one of our core tenets is that we’re not coming in and taking over your event, we’re here solely and primarily to assist you in your management of this event” (P6). Despite their high levels of training, state-of-the-art equipment, and experience, they see themselves as assets to be utilized. Even though their intent is clear from their perspective, they often face challenges from locals when they first arrive. As one participant described it, “some places that we go into, they may think that we’re trying to take over,” when in reality “we’re there to be directed, and we are an asset” (P18).

To minimize misunderstandings, it is important for taskforce members to establish relationships and build trust with local responders. P9 emphasized the importance of “[getting] the trust of [local rescue teams], because you don’t want to come in and take over their incident.” Another respondent indicated that they face the same challenges when they respond domestically, and that they have come to expect resistance as part of setting up in any response situation. P15 provided an anecdote describing this situation:
A couple different times we were down in North Carolina for one of the hurricanes. I’m drawing a blank on what it was. The mayor of the town didn’t want us there because they thought that we were going to be the big brother, that we were going to take over, and they were going to lose power and things like that. It’s like, that’s not the case, and you have to build relationships by trying to explain to them and offer them assistance instead of coming there with the bully type attitude.

Whether responding domestically or internationally, the taskforce expects resistance and understands that building trust and strong relationships is the key to being able to conduct themselves to their full capacity in a response situation. By viewing themselves as assets to be utilized, they maintain more effective communication and avoid damaging local relationships.

**Disrespecting Local Culture**

The idea of making certain not to disrespect locals and local culture came down to two basic concerns: first, responders do not want to violate local customs; and second, responders do not want their attitude or demeanor to reflect poorly on themselves, on the taskforce, or on the United States.

An example shared by two participants that highlights the desire to not violate local customs is the story I described earlier of exchanging business cards in Japan. Initially, P1 explained how important it is to the taskforce to be aware of and trained in appropriate cultural interactions:
[Before we deploy] we look into the culture, into the religion, things that we should avoid from doing, and we try to learn from the local area. When we deployed to Japan this last year we – one of our team members is from a Japanese family, and he told us how to greet people, how to extend the business card or give someone a business card, so we try to learn that – every time, and so we look for people that can assist us in learning those things. (P1)

While this is an example of the taskforce ideal, as I already shared, P2 witnessed a team member enacting the exchange of business cards in a manner that was culturally inappropriate. P2 did not share this example as a criticism or an insult for his team member; in fact, he went to the team member’s defense describing the stressful context and the need for even more preparation and intercultural communication training.

Another example of respecting local cultural norms was reported by P1 who was deployed in Turkey for an earthquake response: “when we traveled to Turkey, which is a Muslim state, we had to follow when people stop for prayers and stuff like that, and that wasn’t an issue” (P1). Other examples of respecting local customs include mindfulness about the interactions of male and female individuals in predominantly Muslim cultures, and respecting religious convictions of locals even when it goes against the goals of the mission.

In addition to respecting local customs, the participants emphasized the importance of their attitudes during a response. One participant’s description of this concept is insightful:
If you come with like a New Jersey or New York attitude, and some people we had that were deployed from New York and New Jersey came with an attitude of “what’s your problem?” And, you know, that kind of talk that immediately builds a barrier…So we Americans, no matter where you come from, even if you’re from more northern than Virginia here, you’ve got to understand you can’t come with the “what’s your problem,” or a fire department mentality, because they’re not firefighters and they’re not from the U.S. - if you’re traveling outside of the U. S. - or they’re just not from your neck of the woods. You don’t speak our language, whether you’re in Louisiana and you have little Bayou, you know, type stuff, you’re not from there. But if you’re from there, then we’ll kind of listen to you a little bit more. So you got to figure it out and some of those people that we have that have a rough, you know, demeanor, we’ll just not put them at the forefront. (P15)

The taskforce members are highly aware of the potential effects of their attitudes on the individuals they meet and with whom they interact, so they report working hard to maintain appropriate attitudes that help facilitate relationship development and maintenance. The last piece of ineffective intercultural communication consists of communicating and interacting with locals without empathy for their situation and experiences.

**Lacking Empathy**

Emergency responders face an interesting challenge in their jobs. As one responder put it, “the fact is, our best day is their worst day, so, we’d rather have no worst
day. We’d rather have, ‘Hey, we did all this training and, yeah, we don’t get deployed because nothing bad is going on’” (P10). The participants described the importance of respecting the emotions and reactions of people in the midst of disasters, as for them it is not simply another event, it is their life being shaken around and rearranged, and so the responders work hard to show compassion for the victims of a disaster:

We always talk about as part of the fire department... You talk to some of the younger guys, even if it’s a minor vehicle accident that we see routinely every day, and we kind of get nonchalant about it. Or do you say to yourself: “This is the worst day of their life.” So, try to be a little, have a little bit of compassion for the things people—you know, even if they’re kind of wound up over a nothing accident, this is the worst day of their life. So, very much the same way, when we go internationally, it’s increased exponentially, not just the worst day of their life, it’s the worst day they’ll ever see as a nation, and you can go in there, and even if it’s a smile—you’re not doing anything other than a smile and a nod, it’s greatly appreciated. It goes miles. (P14)

Participants reported working hard to carry this commitment to empathy and compassion in every aspect of the response. Sometimes this commitment even means continuing to search and get confirmation of life or death even after they are certain that there is no hope for survival:

In Taiwan, having to, you know, two parents sitting there with their young child buried in the rubble. You know what the deal is. You know what I mean? The difficult part was that you know, that kid had a—what is that bear name, man?
I’m trying to think of this bear... Winnie the Pooh. So, Winnie the Pooh bear is playing music. It probably got crushed, you know what I’m saying? In the background you can hear it playing music. It’s the kid’s bear. You know the kid’s right there behind that, underneath that slab of concrete. You know what I’m saying? And the dogs ain’t responding. ‘Cause the dogs are only gonna bark if it’s alive, you know what I’m saying? No tapping from the acoustics, Nothing from the—you can definitely hear music playing from the bear. And the kid’s parents right there. You know what I’m saying? Okay, we know what the end result is. We got to go through the next building. But being there and trying to explain that dialogue, which took hours, you know what I’m saying, before you could move on, through interpretation and everything else, you know what I mean?

The participant and his team took the time with this mother and father to let them know they had done a thorough search, and then to work with a translator to help them understand the situation. For a responder who is focused only on getting to the next site, they could have been brusque, short, and callous. They could have simply said, “There is no hope,” and then moved on. Instead, they took the time to work with the parents and make sure they knew they had done everything they could. This example, while heart-wrenching, powerfully captures the care that the responders take for those affected by disasters.

**Addressing RQ₃**

Regarding the third research question, participants were most concerned about being seen as attempting to take over an event from the LEMA, disrespecting local
culture, and lacking empathy in their interactions with locals. These three areas were most highly associated with ineffective intercultural communication.

The taskforce already has a strong system in place for preparing members for their tasks and equipping them to work on a disaster response both domestically and abroad. There are team members who work before a deployment to prepare a culture briefing on the place where the team is headed. This briefing often has as much to do with safety and security as it does with cultural norms, values, and expectations. One participant indicated he would like to see more institutionalized cultural training between deployments:

I’ve been preaching this to my chain-of-command, above and below, before we go to another country, it bothers me because we want to know as much as we can about that country and culture before we go to that country, because we’re basically ambassadors for the U. S., and the thing that bothers me is that sometimes we don’t get enough… I’ve been pushing this, and hopefully we’ll be doing a better job at it – having cultural awareness before we go into a country. (P2)

This is not a critique of the team, but of the training model, as the participant went on to explain:

We don’t have enough time, sometimes we deploy within 4-6 hours, so you don’t have time to really take the time to research that country or culture, the language, religion, or anything, before we go to that country…[But] when we go to another culture we need to be more sensitive to other customs and cultures. (P2)
Not having enough time to prepare for the cultural norms, values, and expectations is a real problem, and one that will not easily be solved. Team members could perhaps benefit from ongoing cultural awareness, cultural flexibility, and mindfulness training that would enable them to function more effectively in contexts when they may not have enough time to learn the intricacies of a specific culture.

Training: Addressing RQ4 and RQ5

The fourth and fifth research questions ask what the participants’ views are on training, and then specifically on intercultural communication training. The interview protocol includes questions that tap into the participants’ views of training. To determine their perceptions of intercultural communication training, I asked multiple probing questions about various aspects of their ongoing training procedures. If culture, communication, or intercultural communication were not mentioned, I prompted them to see if those were concepts that they discussed in training. The following section explains the overall training process for taskforce members, explores their perceptions of training, and reviews their perceptions of communication and intercultural communication training. The section closes by comparing VATF-1 training to the training processes of other participants.

VATF-1 Training

Training overview. Members of VATF-1 partake in rigorous, ongoing training to ensure that they are prepared to enter a response situation at peak performance levels. As most of the team members are in the Fairfax County Fire Department, they have regular
training to maintain the skills necessary to function in their day-to-day roles. There are additional training procedures that are also necessary for VATF-1 membership.

For example, depending on a team member’s specialty, they may have training in logistics, managing hazardous materials, technical search procedures, technical rescue procedures, swift water rescue, or canine handling. For technical search specialists the training includes management of equipment such as listening devices and search cameras so they can utilize their tools to save lives. Technical rescue specialists are referred to as “rock breakers” or “knuckle draggers,” and are concerned with how to break apart concrete and delayer rubble piles so that trapped or entombed individuals can be extracted.

Team members are required to take part in eight hours of training per specialty per quarter to maintain their certifications in whichever specialties they have developed. So if a person is trained as a logistics specialist and a rescue specialist, they must take part in 16 hours of training each quarter to maintain those specialties. Some teams within the taskforce train more frequently than the required number. For example, the medical team members have monthly training sessions where they practice and prepare for responding to an emergency. Along with the squad and unit training, the entire team gathers at least once each year for a large-scale simulation of a disaster. This enables the team to maintain their proficiencies and practice working with other squads and teams within the taskforce so that on a deployment working together feels natural.

In addition to required team training procedures there are additional programs available. For example, team members can take online ethics training, online training
dealing with money management and time management, and online culture training. According to several team members, the main focus of the online culture training deals with safety and security for team members. For example, one participant indicated, “We may deploy somewhere with unexploded landmines, so we need to know where it isn’t safe to go” (P3). Another participant explained that the security training is helpful for informing responders how to act if they are taken by someone while deployed.

**Perception of training.** I was surprised at how enthusiastic taskforce members were about training. While I expected participants to value training, I did not expect them to be excited about it. I expected to hear a few sighs or, at a minimum, jokes about how training is a drag, or boring, or a drain on time, even though it is necessary. I heard none of these things. The closest anyone came to complaining about training was one participant who pointed out that training is not compensated time:

Every quarter I’ve got to volunteer as you would say eight hours off my day for each - I’ve got to do eight hours technical rescue and then I’ve got to do eight hours of safety officer training, and that’s free. That’s not even compensated, which is not a big deal because, you know, I’d do it for free anyhow, but it’s a lot having a family, you know? I’ve got kids and a wife, and you’re gone, you know, for an extra eight hours a day not getting get paid for it. It’s basically volunteering your time. (P17)

Even though P17 indicated it was a bit taxing to conduct the trainings each quarter without compensation, he insisted that the training was necessary and that he would not choose to go without it.
The participants clearly valued training for their work, but one point that stood out was the team commitment to cross-discipline training. One participant described the value of training across multiple disciplines:

We have related certifications such as hazardous materials, uh, we have swift water awareness, so there’s the medical side but then you have to have some awareness level at least of other disciplines so that you don’t get yourself in trouble in those domains, not so that you can rescue someone necessarily, but so that you can keep yourself from getting into trouble. (P6)

Another participant emphasized the value of cross-disciplinary training as important for building redundancy into the overall team. The concept is taken from a military point-of-view; that is, if an officer falls, the person behind should be able to move into that role and the organization should be able to continue to function. If someone on a deployment is injured, called away, or unavailable for some reason, other members of the team must be able to pick up the slack and get to work. The most surprising and heart-warming example of the need for cross-discipline training and ongoing maintenance of certifications came from a person who responded to the earthquake in Turkey:

A very young boy was one of our last rescues, which was a very moving rescue. He was stuck in between two bunk beds. He was extremely lucky that that wood structure held up for that concrete collapse. So that was very intense because we actually had all four rescue teams out. Someone came to our base of operations and told them they had a live subject down the road and we sent out a recon team knowing that it was a live save and part of our upper management team went
down there and started using tools to break the concrete to extricate the patient.

(P13)
This is a moving story not only because a boy was saved, but also because the upper management of the response learned of a need and responded. They did not wait to call in another team from the field, or pull people from other sites to come help; they grabbed the necessary tools and began digging out the “entombed” boy. This was only possible because the individuals managing the response maintained their training and certifications in techniques that allowed them to dig the boy out.

Some participants had an interesting perception of communication training. One perspective on communication training described by participants was that it must deal with command and control processes, or with technical processes. Command and control is defined by the U. S. Department of Defense as “The exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission” (Department of Defense, 2010, p. 45). As many of the taskforce members are former military personnel, it makes sense that their view of communication and communication training would include command and control processes. The other interesting perspective on communication training was related to the use of radios and other types of technical communication, as opposed to interpersonal, organizational, or intercultural communication processes.

**Perceptions of intercultural communication training.** As mentioned previously, one of the training tools available for taskforce members is online culture training that deals with security and safety. While this is useful and important, it has also
caused some to think of intercultural training as equivalent to security or safety training. Is it possible that conceiving of culture training and intercultural preparation through a lens of “I might be attacked or captured” could lead to less empathy and more prejudice?

Interestingly, when prompted about intercultural communication training, some participants equated it with leadership training and indicated that it would be important for someone that had more experience or had worked in the organization for a longer period of time. One participant indicated that “at the manager and taskforce leader level, those are the entities that cross agencies, that interact – at the worker bee level you’re often working on your sole specific task that’s in front of you so it’s less tangible” (P6). He suggested that since individuals at the “worker bee” level have less interaction with individuals from other cultures, intercultural training is not necessary. This perspective is problematic, as all members of the organization would benefit from intercultural communication training. The best support I can offer for this assertion is the anecdote described by P6 later in his interview about personnel at the “worker bee” level building bridges between the taskforce and another response team by connecting with them over interest in their equipment, technology, and techniques.

**Comparison between VATF-1 and Other Participants**

While the training processes for VATF-1 and the other participants were similar, there were some important differences across contexts that are worth noting. For example, the two Air Force personnel had much more intercultural communication training than the average VATF-1 member. The former USAID employee also had greater experience in intercultural contexts than most VATF-1 members by virtue of his
prior job description. As a result of their increased training and experience, the three non-
VATF-1 participants were likely more sensitive to cultural nuance than the average
VATF-1 member. Importantly, the responses, stories, and anecdotes of the non-VATF-1
participants were on par, in terms of cultural awareness and sensitivity, with the VATF-1
members who demonstrated high levels of cultural sensitivity and awareness.

There is one interesting idea that was presented by one of the Air Force
participants which was also mentioned by a VATF-1 member. This was the idea that “we
are all in some way, shape, or form kind of an equal level, just because we all receive
similar training” (P8). While it is possible that the team members across all contexts are
producing basically the same results because they have the same type of training, I would
question whether or not the training is truly so unifying. It seems likely that sometimes
the training does not stick as deeply with one person as it does with another, and that as a
person gains more experience their training would become more embedded and easily
accessible. This line of reasoning is supported by Ting-Toomey’s (1999) staircase model;
as individuals undertake more training and gain experience, they become more competent
and internalize their training. Since no two people have the same experiences,
competence develops at a different rate for each person. Part of the reason that regular,
ongoing training is so important is that people need time to internalize what they have
learned and time to build the emergency response equivalent of muscle memory, or
unconscious competence.
Addressing RQ4 & RQ5

The fourth research question asked how emergency responders view training. It became evident very quickly that all of the participants, both VATF-1 members and non-members, believe training is highly important. They take training seriously, and recognize the importance of engaging in a training process over time. One participant, who conducts training for emergency managers, indicated that training is most effective “over a large, a long period of time. I mean, there are people who will go out and do six or seven in a day, but you’re not really getting anything out of training if you’re breezing through it” (P7). Participants clearly view training as highly valuable, but that still left a question as to how they view communication training.

The fifth research question asked how emergency responders view intercultural communication training. As I mentioned previously, I suspected that responders may view communication training or intercultural communication training as, if not unimportant, less important than other types of training. When I conducted the interviews, no participants mentioned communication training, intercultural communication training, cross-cultural preparedness training, or any type of training that would relate to developing intercultural communication competence. While this is not a definitive confirmation that the participants view intercultural communication as less important than other types of training, it suggests that it is not at the forefront of their mind when they think of training and what type of training is important for their work.

After asking about training and probing for additional types of training participants participate in, I prompted for intercultural communication training. At this
point, most participants did indicate that they have taken some type of cultural training. Some participants emphasized in great detail the value of intercultural training and cross-cultural preparation before deploying for a disaster response. Most of the participants who discussed intercultural training described it as security or safety training while deployed. While it is important not to minimize the potential security risks that responders face in a deployment, it is possible that when learning about another culture through the lens of “They might capture me,” “I might get attacked,” or “This area is not safe” could lead to less empathy or more prejudice on the part of the responder. While this is not a certainty, it is worth considering the possibility of training context negatively shaping responders’ perceptions. Training for intercultural interactions should emphasize processes to train responders to individualize and identify with specific individuals, rather than relying on stereotypes and generalities about a place or a people group. Information about a culture should inform interpersonal interactions, but not create unduly rigid expectations about all members of a culture.
After analyzing the interview data, it became clear that participants could be categorized by their level of cultural awareness and their perception of barriers to achieving goals while deployed. These two concepts are directly related to the intercultural communication competence model described in chapter three of this paper (see Fig. 1). Each of the two items is conceptualized as a rating system, which I describe below. The ratings are then entered into a larger model displayed in Figure 1 above that describes and attempts to explain intercultural crisis communication competence.
Cultural Awareness

The first system is a measure of knowledge and understanding of cultural values, norms, and expectations. There are three levels of awareness, which I have labeled apprentice, journeyman, and master. At the apprentice level, the individual is only aware of language as a barrier to communication in intercultural contexts. Individuals at this level know that they are or will be interacting with locals who do not share their language, but they have no specific knowledge of other cultural norms, values, or expectations. At the journeyman level, sojourners recognize not only that there is a language barrier, but also that there are certain “dos and don’ts” when interacting with someone from another culture. For journeymen, understanding culture is a matter of following a set of rules. The journeyman knows, for example, that it is inappropriate to give a Japanese person a business card he has just dropped on the ground, but the journeyman does not understand why it is inappropriate. At the master level, the individual has a nuanced understanding of language and culture. The master has internalized not only the what, but also the why. A master could tell you that the concept of face is highly important in Japanese culture and that when you give someone a business card you have just dropped on the ground, you are telling them they are not worth a new card. It is a direct insult to the other person’s value or worth. A master has also developed cultural flexibility that allows them to adapt across contexts, and ideally to see their own actions, values, norms, and beliefs as culturally bound in the same way that they understand the host individuals’ actions are also culturally bound.
Perception of Barriers

The second system involves individuals’ perceptions of cultural barriers to achieving organizational goals, or in this case, to achieving the goals of the taskforce or response team. This system is also divided into three levels, which are dismissive, optimistic, and pragmatic. At the dismissive level, the individual may or may not be aware of cultural barriers, but believes that the goal and the mission are great enough to overcome any obstacles or barriers. The optimistic individual is aware of challenges and is concerned about their influence or impact on the goal, but trusts that, in the end, the importance and shared understanding of the mission will overcome any barriers. The chief distinction between the optimistic individual and the dismissive individual is appreciation for the potential seriousness of cultural barriers. The pragmatic individual is aware of cultural challenges and acknowledges that there are times when cultural barriers simply cannot be overcome. The example of the barge that capsized just outside of the port, and of the participant who was deployed in a place where amputation is not allowed because a body must remain whole, are two vivid examples of times when no amount of dedication to the mission can overcome the challenge of a cultural barrier.

The Model

These two systems fit together as a proposed model to explain intercultural crisis communication competence. The model (Fig. 2) shows how cultural experiences, including language skill, time spent in other cultures, and number of times deployed internationally, pair with a responder’s level of training and result in a particular level of cultural awareness. The model also shows response experience, including amount of time...
in the organization and number of overall deployments, as well as a responder’s level of training can result in a particular view or perception of barriers to achieving the goal of a deployment. These factors together then point to a responder’s level of intercultural communication competence, which is captured in the model presented in chapter 3 (Fig. 1). This model is also shaped by the participants’ perceptions of crisis, which are described in the following section.

Participant Perceptions of Crisis

By reviewing Appendix A, the reader can see that the final question in the updated interview protocol asked whether or not taking part in disaster responses has changed participant views or definitions of “crisis,” and if so, how. Without exception, every participant indicated that their perception or perspective on what a crisis is has changed as a result of their experiences responding to disasters. The following section describes how participants defined crisis, how the scope and scale of disasters have impacted participants, and the effect those experiences have had on participants’ empathy in emergency situations.

Crisis Defined

The participants each had vivid stories and anecdotes to describe their personal shift in perspective on what defines a crisis. One of the Air Force personnel who works as a medical specialist offered this perspective:

For me, what I would have thought of as a crisis before I went in would be fairly miniscule in comparison to what I know now. A, somebody getting hit by a car,
um, would be a crisis. Whereas now that’s kind of a simple, I can treat that simply
in comparison to a bomb going off and wounding sixteen people. (P8)

When I asked him to define crisis, he replied that a “crisis would be an event that
overwhelms the resources available” (P8). This definition adequately describes and
captures the perspective of the other participants.

One VATF-1 member shared the two examples below, comparing his change in
perspective from working initially as a member of the fire department, and then later as a
member of VATF-1:

[I] probably would have defined crisis as any event that did or had the potential to
lead to substantial loss of life, and by that I mean 3 or more, 4 or more. Sadly
enough, a double fatality car accident is not an uncommon occurrence. So while
that would count as a crisis for the people immediately involved, for us that’s not
a crisis. That’s almost, I don’t want to say routine, but it’s expected. I tend to
think of 3 or 4 lives or more being lost, that would count as a crisis event.

Whether it was a vehicle, hazardous material response, a fire, whatever – that’s
how I would gauge it – loss of life or potential for loss of life. (P4)

This definition, a loss of “3 or 4 lives or more” counting as a crisis, changed for P4 when
he became part of the taskforce:

When I [look] at it as part of an urban search and rescue team the definition of
crisis for us tends to lean towards the mass, hundreds of casualties, or a true
humanitarian crisis, something that disrupts the everyday way of life. A four-
person – sadly enough – a four-person house fire or building fire is not going to
disrupt the fabric of society. It’s going to have a ripple effect in a particular community. So I would say yeah, I guess wearing the different hat…it’s a different definition based on the view of the team versus the view of the municipal fire and rescue department. (P4)

Each responder was affected by having experienced disasters on a large scale, both domestically, in events such as Hurricane Katrina, and abroad, in events such as the earthquake in Haiti. The participants shared the impact of having been part of such large-scale disasters.

**Impact of Scale & Scope**

Disaster events are emotionally, psychologically, and physically straining for the individuals who respond to them. As mentioned previously, there is a psychological toll for members of emergency response teams. The following extended example provides more insight into the impact of a disaster as a result of the scale and scope of the event:

Where when we go on a deployment it’s on a larger scale it’s all around you. With an accident or a sick person it’s right in front of you, it’s isolated. Um, and for the most part, it can be somewhat dynamic, but when you go on a deployment it’s all around you and it is dynamic, it’s ever-changing by the second…Because we’re talking about something on a grand scale… There is no shelter, there is no more normalcy. It’s very challenging. You have to be prepared for the worst, especially when you’ve seen it, you’ve heard about it, and you’re trained to a higher level… It’s not going to be something you can handle within 10 to 15 minutes; you’re talking an ongoing operation. If you have a sick person, getting to
the hospital, if someone is having a heart attack, 10-15 minutes and the call is over. Even if someone is heavily entrapped in a vehicle, a vehicle accident, 30-40 minutes and the call is over, you’re done. You’re cleaned up and going back to the station. But if you go on a domestic or international deployment where you do have – let’s pick an earthquake because that is something we train heavily for – when you go to one of those deployments it’s not over in 20 minutes or 40 minutes, it will last 7 to 10 days. For those 7 to 10 days you’re just physically and mentally exhausted. So you’ve got to prepare for the long term and you’ve got to be ready. You never know what the next city block is going to hold for you. (P3)

For a large-scale event, 7 to 10 days is a conservative estimate. The team’s standard maximum deployment time is 14 days, and they extended that to 17 days for their response in Haiti (P3).

These types of events are occurring more and more frequently, and are also more likely to be what Quarantelli (2003) refers to as a “super disaster” or catastrophic disaster. Quarantelli (2004) describes events that count as super disasters: “In 1987, a powerful tornado created 14 toxic chemical sites around Edmonton, Canada;” an earthquake in California caused “one train to derail and spill sulfuric acid and diesel fuel; nine pipeline ruptures; 35 breaks in natural gas transmission lines; 717 breaks in distribution lines” as well as “15,201 natural gas leaks that resulted in three street fires, 51 structural fires, and the destruction of 172 mobile homes” (p. 217).

If these types of super disasters can cause such destruction in developed nations such as the United States and Canada, with arguably some of the best infrastructure in the
world, imagine how much more damaging these types of events are in countries such as Haiti where the infrastructure is comparatively weak. Even in Japan, where the population along the coast was prepared for flooding from tsunami, there was massive destruction:

We had a lot of structures still, but they were moved four blocks, five blocks, you know, six blocks from where they were at or you’ll have - we had a full size barge like a big boat was sitting like ten blocks inland where this water came in, and that’s where it left it sit, you know? (P17)

The local population thought they would be safe:

Because they had the flood walls up. Well, when that tidal wave came in, they had flood walls that were 20 feet tall. Well, that flood water came in at 38 feet. So people got behind this flood wall thinking hey, we’re safe, you know, and not so much when it came in. It just basically, and then it took everything out to sea. (P17)

The destruction in Japan certainly counted as a super or catastrophic disaster:

I mean there wasn’t houses - it was places like the size of [Burke, Virginia] and the college, [George Washington University], basically just wiped off the face of the earth. There was nothing left. It was just gone. And then, you know, you would find trucks on top of buildings like three story buildings, a tractor trailer sitting perched right on top of the building, so you’re saying that water came in pretty tight.
These types of events are devastating to the local, regional, and national populations that are affected, and carry far-reaching ramifications for the individuals who respond to help with recovery efforts. The participants’ comments and anecdotes caused me to wonder about the impact of disasters on responders’ capacity to empathize with disaster victims.

**Empathy in Emergencies**

Most of the participants indicated that they appreciate the need for empathy in a response situation, as the people affected are experiencing “the worst day of their life” (P14). One participant described the experience of working with local responders in Haiti and building a relationship with them over the course of the response:

> It put things in perspective, if the same things happened here, how our system and our resources would be taxed, you know, we’re there to assist them, so we kind of – we can kind of relate, we feel their heartache and everything. (P5)

Even when dealing with a routine auto accident or house fire while on duty as a member of the fire department, several participants indicated that it is important to maintain a certain level of empathy for the troubles of those affected by the accident.

There is also, perhaps, a risk for responders to have trouble empathizing or identifying with individuals who are experiencing grief or stress following what, when compared with a disaster, could certainly be considered a simple or routine accident. One participant shared this example:

> Just, like, the auto accident here in town. You know, they’re completely distraught over it. My perspective is it’s a car, you can go buy another one. The person beside you is still alive. The airbags did what they were supposed to, you
know, crash protection did what it was supposed to. The car collapsed like it was supposed to. You guys walked out of it. They’re completely just, you know, distraught about it, and everything else. It’s a piece of machinery that you can slide to the side and go get another one. (P17)

While P17’s perspective is both rational and understandable, there is a risk that this attitude could extend to other response contexts. What becomes the measure for what counts as worthy of “being distraught?”

I do not include this example to criticize the participant’s perspective, but only to caution that perhaps responders would benefit from training in expressing empathy to affected individuals even when they do not feel particularly empathic. What types of tools or skills would be useful for helping responders reflect on their crisis perspectives? What training would help responders not become callous with regard to “everyday” crises? The findings from this question, and from the interviews as a whole, suggest a model of empathy following experiences in disaster response. A responder who takes part in major disaster responses will tend to either become more aware of the impact of disaster events on the lives of others, and therefore more empathic; or, the responder will tend to become less empathic because of their experience in major disaster responses.

Individuals in the first group will be more willing or able to exhibit empathy for those affected by more “routine” crises, while those in the second group will find it difficult to show empathy for events falling outside of major disaster situations or accidents resulting in death.
Considering the potential impact of crisis experiences on responders’ level of empathy and the impact of empathy on intercultural communication competence, it makes sense to add the impact of responders’ experiences on their level of empathy, which directly influences their enacted intercultural communication competence. The resulting model (Fig. 3) is a proposed model for intercultural crisis communication competence (ICCC).

Figure 3. Intercultural Crisis Communication Competence Model
Argument for Expanded Intercultural Training

Emergency responders face a wide array of challenges, such as psychological stress, extreme working conditions, language barriers, cultural barriers, and limited resources on the ground. Their training equips them to manage most of these challenges, and other challenges are best handled once they have gained experience and learned to navigate difficult cultural contexts. We can learn from them about ICC, and we may be able to enhance their effectiveness with education in intercultural communication processes. Cargile and Giles (1996) presented a model of cross-cultural training effects (See Fig. 4).

Figure 4. A General Model of Cross-Cultural Training Effects (Cargile & Giles, 1996, p. 412)
This model seems complicated at first, but is actually quite logical. Cargile and Giles (1996) argue here that training technique, which is affected by a person’s attention level, affects a person’s awareness, knowledge level, and skill set. The individual being trained then evaluates the new information based on their attitudes and stereotypes, and decides whether or not and how much of the information to accept. This information then influences a person’s new responses in intercultural contexts. A trainee’s behavior is also shaped by the context they are in, their identity, and the influence of “old ‘automatic’ behaviors.” While this is an excellent model for understanding the training process, I believe the model should be extended to include the effects of training on a person’s intercultural communication competence (ICC) level, and the influence of their ICC on their future behaviors. The new model would look something like this (Fig. 5):
In this model, ICC represents the entire ICCC model displayed in Figure 3. Each part of that model would influence the outcomes in the current model. It will be necessary for future research to test this model and continue to refine and revise it as researchers learn more about ICCC and how training affects its growth and development.

**Limitations and Summary of Key Findings**

The following section presents the limitations of the study. I then review and summarize key findings of the study.

**Limitations**

There are three key limitations to this study that I discuss in the following section: sample size, sample diversity, and limitations of time and scope.
First, the sample size of this study is much smaller than I had initially hoped it would be. It is not at all unusual for a qualitative study to be based on 19 interviews between 30-60 minutes in length. I began detecting saturation in my interview data between the eighth and twelfth interviews, and by the time I reached interview 19, I was adding depth, not breadth, to my analysis. The final five interviews did not yield new insights into the research questions, but they did provide additional stories which enhanced my understanding of the population, their experiences, and how to answer the questions posed in the study.

Second, the sample was not as diverse as I had planned. When I began gathering data seven months ago I had contacts in three organizations that seemed promising for producing interview participants. Of those, only VATF-1 produced participants. By engaging in snowball sampling I made connections with the three participants who are not part of VATF-1. Their insights were invaluable, and helped to confirm the conclusions I had begun to make based on my interviews with VATF-1. In the future, I will conduct further work with members of other organizations and will push for a more diverse sample.

Additionally, this study was limited by only having access to the responders’ perspectives. I was not able to visit the locations of the disaster events or to deploy with the team in order to conduct interviews with those affected by the disasters. In future research, perhaps I will be able to conduct participant observations and travel with the taskforce when they deploy.
Lastly, this study was limited by its own time-frame and scope. When I proposed this project to my committee, it was a two-part study: first, qualitative interviews, and second, surveys built from the findings of the qualitative study. It became clear as time progressed that seven months is not enough time to conduct a thorough qualitative study as well as a thorough quantitative study. With an additional six months to one year I would have pursued the second study as part of this dissertation, but instead the quantitative study will become a follow-up study to explore next steps in this research.

**Summary of Key Findings**

The participants in this study do not represent the average workplace, and they do not work in an average work environment. They are pioneers, striking out into extreme situations and dangerous environments to pursue their mission. By engaging in work that keeps them constantly at the edge, they maintain a high level of discipline and are constantly improving and learning. Fortunately, most of us will never be faced with the kinds of extreme environments that emergency responders face on a regular basis. However, we can still learn from their experiences.

From responses to the first research question, we gained insight into how emergency responders manage the language barrier, report coordinating and collaborating with teams and groups from other cultures, and work to respect culture while working toward specific goals. Additionally, we learned what types of psychological strains emergency responders face, and how perspective-taking and team camaraderie seem to help responders manage difficult intercultural situations. From responses to the second research question we confirmed what we see in the literature regarding intercultural
communication regarding effective intercultural communication practices. We were also reminded that victims are often first responders, and that it is important for emergency responders to develop methods for working effectively with locals. We also gained insight into the importance of empathy and building relationships while working with individuals from other cultures. While this seems straightforward, anyone who works as part of a highly trained team dedicated to a specific goal should appreciate the difficulty in balancing cultural appropriateness with mission effectiveness. From responses to the third research question arose the idea that perhaps the taskforce and teams like it would benefit from institutionalized intercultural training procedures to help team members develop cultural awareness and flexibility. Lastly, reviewing research questions four and five confirmed that emergency responders in this study value training very highly and take it seriously. It also raised the question about the security and safety focus of existing culture training and whether teams might benefit from a focus on training in cultural norms and values as well as training in safety and security. These findings, paired with the review of the impact of disasters on enacted empathy in future emergencies yielded a proposed model for intercultural crisis communication competence.

As mentioned at the outset of this study, while this population is a narrow and specific group of individuals who face extreme conditions, their sensemaking about their experiences allows insight and question development about ICC in general. Individuals who work as law enforcement personnel, healthcare workers, social workers, emergency responders, and those who work in international business are only a few examples of people who may benefit from this study. To make the most of this study, more research
needs to be conducted. The following section applies the findings to consider implications for future research. A number of follow-up studies and next steps are proposed.

**Implications for Future Research**

Since intercultural crisis contexts require in-the-moment decision-making under stressful conditions, I speculate that research is needed in at least four areas. First, to begin applying lessons from this study to other contexts, it will be useful to conduct more in-depth research with this population and similar populations. For example, it will be useful to conduct survey research to test and expand the findings of the current study. By developing a survey that can measure the concepts and relationships presented in the model, it will be possible to begin generalizing these findings to other populations. By studying and testing these relationships we can begin to ask whether “masters” score higher on ICC than “apprentices,” and whether or not training results in higher levels of ICC. Future research can also test whether being “pragmatic” is positively related to ICC. A preliminary survey has been developed to test the concepts that arose from the interview data (see Appendix B & Appendix C). Conducting this research with additional groups will allow me to begin to determine what types of training people need to effectively negotiate in intercultural crises. This will also enable researchers to explore methods for training responders and individuals in similar contexts to see and make sense of intercultural communication dimensions within crisis contexts.

Second, research is needed on the types of simulations, desk top exercises, and role plays that assist emergency responders, healthcare professionals, police, and military
officers in communicating effectively when crises occur. Military organizations routinely use simulations to drill and develop expertise in a variety of skills essential for effectiveness when an enemy is engaged. According to interviews with emergency responders, simulations are also essential in enhancing the effectiveness of emergency responders. For example, one emergency responder indicated simulations are important because they “keep everyone’s skills sharp” and they “fill a void” of experience between deployments (P5). By determining what types of training exercises are most effective, it will be possible to develop training regimes that incorporate more intercultural communication concepts and build on intercultural crisis communication competence. In addition to determining what types of training procedures are most effective for producing deep-learning and long-term retention of training procedures, it will be important to continue to improve on training content for intercultural crisis communication situations. The “dos and don’ts” system that teams currently rely on is limited and inadequate for a team that seeks to be highly competent and culturally flexible.

Third, since intercultural crisis situations demand respectful and mindful communication “in the moment,” it follows that heuristics, or sets of questions professionals can ask themselves to analyze novel situations, would be especially important for effectiveness in intercultural crisis situations. Traditionally, crisis spokespersons learn heuristics such as the “5 Ws” from journalism; that is, after a crisis, a spokesperson is expected to explain to media and stakeholders what happened, to whom, when, where, and, if possible, why. According to Rowan et al. (2009), people want such
spokespeople to explain what happened, what officials are doing to respond and protect affected parties, and what people can do to protect themselves. More research is needed on the types of heuristics that would assist in intercultural crisis contexts. By training responders to develop their own heuristics for action in intercultural crisis situations, it may be possible to help individuals in these contexts develop cause maps (Weick, 1988) to make sense of the intercultural enacted environment.

Fourth, intercultural crisis communication is an arena where qualitative research on how professionals define what counts as effective intercultural communication and what they perceive as their training needs is of considerable interest. In preliminary work, I learned that what communication scholars view as intercultural communication is often cast as information about “security” or “safety” in briefings given to emergency responders. If this pattern is widespread in emergency response and military contexts, it would be interesting to learn how casting intercultural communication information as “security information” affects responders’ capacities to interact effectively with people of differing cultures.

Conclusion

Intercultural emergency events are occurring more and more frequently, and intercultural crisis communication is a rich and challenging domain for further inquiry. There is much to learn from these crises, about the ways in which stakeholders in these contexts perceive these painful and dramatic events, and about ways in which communication scholars can improve the education and training available to those who risk life and limb to assist those affected by major disaster events.
The purpose of this study was to present a rationale for pursuing research in the area of intercultural emergency communication, and to begin exploring the gap by learning more about how emergency responders in intercultural emergency contexts perceive intercultural communication challenges and processes. There is a substantial gap in the crisis communication literature with regard to intercultural communication, and the research presented here can help narrow that gap. I presented the problem, which is a lack of research in the area. I then reviewed the relevant literature and defined crisis communication, intercultural communication, and intercultural emergency communication. I provided the findings of a pilot study which is foundational to the study I presented here. With the insights gained from the pilot, I presented a model for intercultural communication competence. I then described the proposed methodology for conducting the study. Lastly, I discussed the results of the study, the limitations, and implications for future research.

This line of research will only become more relevant over time, as emergency events are on the rise and the world continues to grow smaller with each passing year. This type of research could benefit individuals in a vast array of fields, from medical and emergency medical services, to law enforcement officials, to political officials and diplomats. Studying intercultural emergency communication and emergency responders who work in extreme contexts provides a window into contexts that allow researchers to make sense of fundamental communication problems. By working with emergency responders, researchers can make sense of how to function in the most extreme
circumstances. These lessons can then provide insight into how communication processes can be improved upon in a wide array of other contexts.
APPENDIX A

Intercultural Emergency Communication Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about an emergency response accomplishment – something you are proud of in a response you took part in.

2. Tell me about an emergency response challenge you have faced or about something that has bothered you in a response you were part of.

3. Have there been times when you have worked with individuals from other cultures or who speak different languages than your own?

If yes:

4. Tell me about an accomplishment or something you are proud of in an emergency response involving individuals from a different culture than your own.

5. Tell me about a challenge you have faced or about something that has bothered you in an emergency response involving individuals from a different culture than your own.

Revised Interview Protocol

Demographic Questions:

1. Please indicate your age:

2. Please indicate your gender: M/F/Prefer not to answer

3. Please indicate how you identify your own race/ethnicity:
4. Please indicate your highest level of education: Less than high school, High school diploma/GED, Some college, College degree, Graduate degree

5. How many years have you been in your current job?

6. What is your current title/position?

7. How many times have you traveled internationally?

**Study Questions:**

8. Would you describe your job task and work experience in this field? (For VATF1 – How does someone become a part of this team? For ANG – Why did you decide to join the ANG?)

9. Tell me about an emergency response accomplishment – something you are proud of in a response you took part in.

10. Tell me about an emergency response challenge you have faced or about something that has bothered you in a response you were part of.

11. Have there been times when you have worked with individuals from other cultures or who speak different languages than your own?

   **If yes, then:**

   12. Tell me about an accomplishment or something you are proud of in an emergency response involving individuals from a different culture than your own.

   13. Have you met difficulties related to communication in different cultures?

   14. What strategies did you use to overcome those cultural difficulties?

   15. Can you identify some qualities or aspects of people who are competent in intercultural communication?
16. Can you identify some specific individuals whom you think are particularly competent in intercultural communication and say why you perceive them as such?

17. Before taking part in a response what did you think counted as a crisis?
Survey Instrument: Version for Investigators

Part 1: Intercultural Scenarios

The following scenarios are followed by open-ended questions to gauge the responses of participants in hypothetical intercultural emergency situations.

1. Muslim woman with male responder

You are the leader of a team responding to an emergency. The emergency medical technician on your team is a White male. You enter the home of an Iranian Muslim family and discover a young woman in need of immediate medical assistance. It will be necessary to remove some of the young woman’s clothing to provide her with adequate treatment.

1. What do you say to the family members in this situation?

2. Why will this be effective?

2. Language barrier

You are responding to an emergency in a country where you do not speak the native language. You are conducting an ongoing search for anyone who may be trapped in rubble. There were not enough translators available so you are working without any means of verbal communication with the locals. Someone approaches you and begins talking and gesturing, trying to get you to go with them.
1. How do you respond to this individual?

2. Why will this be effective?

3. **Working with dogs to search for survivors, population scared of dogs**

You have been given approval to work with a canine team to conduct search and rescue operations in a country where dogs are not kept as pets. One of the dogs initiates a bark alert indicating they have found someone, but the members of the host culture become very upset as a result of the dog barking. They will not come close to help and begin shouting and pointing at the dog.

1. How do you respond?

2. Why will this be effective?

**Part 2: Scale of Ethnocultural Empathy** (Gerstner & Pastor, 2011; Wang, Davidson, Yakushko, Savoy, Tan, & Bleier, 2003). This scale examines four factors: Empathic Feeling and Expression, Empathic Perspective Taking, Acceptance of Cultural Differences, and Empathic Awareness. These questions will be answered on a Likert-type scale, with six items ranging from “1 = Strongly disagree that it describes me” to “6 = Strongly agree that it describes me.” Items marked with (*) are reverse coded.

*Empathic Feeling and Expression*

30. When I hear people make racist jokes, I tell them I am offended even though they are not referring to my racial or ethnic group.

21.*I don’t care if people make racist statements against other racial or ethnic groups.

16.*I rarely think about the impact of a racist or ethnic joke on the feelings of people who are targeted.
23. When other people struggle with racial or ethnic oppression, I share their frustration.

14. I feel supportive of people of other racial and ethnic groups, if I think they are being taken advantage of.

12. I share the anger of those who face injustice because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds.

26. I share the anger of people who are victims of hate crimes (e.g., intentional violence because of race or ethnicity).

11. When I know my friends are treated unfairly because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, I speak up for them.

15. I get disturbed when other people experience misfortunes due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

3. I am touched by movies or books about discrimination issues faced by racial or ethnic groups other than my own.

22. When I see people who come from a different racial or ethnic background succeed in the public arena, I share their pride.

17.*I am not likely to participate in events that promote equal rights for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

9. I seek opportunities to speak with individuals of other racial or ethnic backgrounds about their experiences

13. When I interact with people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, I show my appreciation of their cultural norms.
18. I express my concern about discrimination to people from other racial or ethnic
groups.

_Empathic Perspective Taking_

19. It is easy for me to understand what it would feel like to be a person of another racial
or ethnic background other than my own.

31.*It is difficult for me to relate to stories in which people talk about racial or ethnic
discrimination they experience in their day to day lives.

28.*It is difficult for me to put myself in the shoes of someone who is racially and/or
ethnically different from me.

4. I know what it feels like to be the only person of a certain race or ethnicity in a group
of people.

6. I can relate to the frustration that some people feel about having fewer opportunities
due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

29.*I feel uncomfortable when I am around a significant number of people who are
racially/ethnically different than me.

2.*I don’t know a lot of information about important social and political events of racial
and ethnic groups other than my own.

_Acceptance of Cultural Differences_

10.*I feel irritated when people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds speak their
language around me.

1.*I feel annoyed when people do not speak standard English.
5. I get impatient when communicating with people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, regardless of how well they speak English.

27. I do not understand why people want to keep their indigenous racial or ethnic cultural traditions instead of trying to fit into the mainstream.

8. I don’t understand why people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds enjoy wearing traditional clothing.

*Empathic Awareness*

25. I am aware of how society differentially treats racial or ethnic groups other than my own.

24. I recognize that the media often portrays people based on racial or ethnic stereotypes.

20. I can see how other racial or ethnic groups are systematically oppressed in our society.

7. I am aware of institutional barriers (e.g., restricted opportunities for job promotion) that discriminate against racial or ethnic groups other than my own.

**Part 3: Motivation to be Nonprejudiced Scale** (Legault, 2009; Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung, 2007). This scale examines six factors: Amotivation, External Regulation, Introjected Regulation, Identified Regulation, Integrated Regulation, and Intrinsic Motivation. These questions will be answered on a Likert-type scale, with nine items where “1 = Does not correspond at all” to “5 = Corresponds moderately,” and “9 = Corresponds Exactly.”

*Prompt:* there are several reasons why we would want to refrain from prejudiced attitudes. On a scale from 1 – 9, please rate the extent to which the following reasons
correspond to your own personal reasons for withholding racial or cultural prejudice.

Please answer carefully, honestly, and truthfully. Note: egalitarian here means “belief in the equality of all people.”

Why do you inhibit/suppress cultural prejudice? ***Please note: you are NOT rating the extent to which you simply agree or disagree with these statements, but rather the extent to which they represent your ultimate reasons for avoiding prejudiced attitudes.

Intrinsic Motivation

2. For the satisfaction of discovering new and interesting individuals or groups

3. For the interest I feel when learning about others

12. For the joy I feel when relating to new people

20. For the pleasure of being open-minded

Integrated Regulation

4. Because I appreciate what being understanding adds to my life

14. Because overcoming prejudice is part of who I am

18. Because I am tolerant and accepting of differences

21. Because striving to understand others is part of who I am

Identified Regulation

7. Because tolerance is important to me

11. Because I place importance on having egalitarian beliefs

16. Because I admire people who are egalitarian

23. Because I value nonprejudice

Introjected Regulation
1. Because I feel that I must refrain from stereotyping
6. Because I would feel bad about myself if I were prejudiced
15. Because I would feel guilty if I were prejudiced
22. Because I would feel ashamed if I were prejudiced

*External Regulation*

8. Because racist people are not well-liked
9. Because I don’t want people to think I’m narrow-minded
17. Because I get more respect/acceptance when I act in an unprejudiced fashion
24. So that people will admire me for being tolerant

*Amotivation*

5. I don’t know; it’s not a priority
10. I don’t know; I don’t really bother trying to avoid it
13. I don’t know why; I think it’s pointless
19. I don’t know, inhibiting prejudice is not important to me

**Part 4: Mindful Attention Awareness Scale** (Brown & Ryan, 2003). This scale measures dispositional mindfulness. These questions will be answered on a Likert-type scale, with six items ranging from “1 = Almost Always” to “6 = Almost never.” Items marked with (*) are reverse coded.

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1 – 6 scale (1 = almost always, 2 = very frequently, 3 = somewhat frequently, 4 = somewhat infrequently, 5 = very infrequently, and 6 = almost never), please indicate how frequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really
reflects your experience, rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later
2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else
3. *I consistently stay focused on what is happening at the present
4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way
5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention
6. *When someone tells me their name for the first time I remember it
7. It seems I am “running on automatic,” without much awareness of what I’m doing
8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them
9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I’m doing right now to get there
10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing
11. *When I am speaking with someone they have my full attention
12. I drive places on “auto pilot” and then wonder why I went there
13. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past
14. *I usually pay close attention to my current task
15. I snack without being aware that I’m eating
Part 5: Tolerance for Ambiguity Scale (Herman, Stevens, Bird, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 2010). This scale measures tolerance for ambiguity on four factors: Valuing Diverse Others, Change, Challenging Perspectives, and Unfamiliarity. These questions will be answered on a Likert-type scale, with five items ranging from “1 = Strongly Disagree” to “5 = Strongly Agree.” Items marked with (*) are reverse coded.

1. *I avoid settings where people don’t share my values
2. I can enjoy being with people whose values are very different from mine.
3. I would like to live in a foreign country for a while.
4. *I like to surround myself with things that are familiar to me.
5. *The sooner we all acquire similar values and ideals the better.
6. I can be comfortable with nearly all kinds of people.
7. If given a choice, I will usually visit a foreign country rather than vacation at home.
8. A good teacher is one who makes you wonder about your way of looking at things.
9. *A good job is one where what is to be done and how it is to be done are always clear.
10. *A person who leads an even, regular life in which few surprises or unexpected happenings arise really has a lot to be grateful for.
11. *What we are used to is always preferable to what is unfamiliar.
12. *I like parties where I know most of the people more than ones where all or most of the people are complete strangers.

Part 6: Demographic Questions

The following questions are demographic questions:

1. Please indicate your age:
2. Please indicate your gender: M/F/Prefer not to answer

3. Please indicate how you identify your own race/ethnicity:

4. Please indicate your highest level of education: Less than high school, High school diploma/GED, Some college, College degree, Some graduate work, Graduate degree

5. What organization do you currently work for?

6. How many years have you been in your current job?

7. What is your current title/position?

8. How many times have you traveled internationally in the last 5 years?

9. If you are an emergency responder, how many international deployments have you been on?

10. Is training important for your job? Why?

11. List the types of training you receive:

12. Do you have regular communication training?

13. Do you have regular training related to intercultural communication training?
APPENDIX C

(Survey Instrument: Version for Participants)

Communication Questionnaire

Part 1

Please read the following situations and answer the questions which follow. When you answer the questions, please write the words you would say if you were in the situation.

1. Medical Emergency

You are the leader of a team responding to an emergency. The emergency medical technician on your team is a White male. You enter the home of an Iranian Muslim family and discover a young woman in need of immediate medical assistance. It will be necessary to remove some of the young woman’s clothing to provide her with adequate treatment.

1. What do you say to the family members in this situation? Write those words here:

2. Why will this be effective?

2. Language barrier

You are responding to an emergency in a country where you do not speak the native language. You are conducting an ongoing search for anyone who may be trapped in rubble. There were not enough translators available so you are working without any
means of verbal communication with the locals. Someone approaches you and begins talking and gesturing, possibly trying to get you to go with them.

1. How do you respond to this individual? Write exactly how you would respond:

2. Why will this be effective?

2. Canine Team

You have been given approval to work with a canine team to conduct search and rescue operations in a country where dogs are not kept as pets. One of the dogs initiates a bark alert indicating it found someone, but the members of the host culture become very upset as a result of the dog barking. They will not come close to help and begin shouting and pointing at the dog.

1. What do you say to the upset individuals? Write the words you would say here:

2. Why will this be effective?

Part 2

Please answer the following questions indicating what you usually experience (1 = Strongly Disagree that it describes me, 2 = Disagree that it describes me, 3 = Moderately disagree that it describes me, 4 = Moderately Agree that it describes me, 5 = Agree that it describes me, 6 = Strongly Agree that it describes me):

1. I feel annoyed when people do not speak standard English.

2. I don’t know a lot of information about important social and political events of racial and ethnic groups other than my own.

3. I am touched by movies or books about discrimination issues faced by racial or ethnic groups other than my own.
4. I know what it feels like to be the only person of a certain race or ethnicity in a group of people.

5. I get impatient when communicating with people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, regardless of how well they speak English.

6. I can relate to the frustration that some people feel about having fewer opportunities due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

7. I am aware of institutional barriers (e.g., restricted opportunities for job promotion) that discriminate against racial or ethnic groups other than my own.

8. I don’t understand why people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds enjoy wearing traditional clothing.

9. I seek opportunities to speak with individuals of other racial or ethnic backgrounds about their experiences.

10. I feel irritated when people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds speak their language around me.

11. When I know my friends are treated unfairly because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, I speak up for them.

12. I share the anger of those who face injustice because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds.

13. When I interact with people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, I show my appreciation of their cultural norms.

14. I feel supportive of people of other racial and ethnic groups, if I think they are being taken advantage of.
15. I get disturbed when other people experience misfortunes due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

16. I rarely think about the impact of a racist or ethnic joke on the feelings of people who are targeted.

17. I am not likely to participate in events that promote equal rights for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

18. I express my concern about discrimination to people from other racial or ethnic groups.

19. It is easy for me to understand what it would feel like to be a person of another racial or ethnic background other than my own.

20. I can see how other racial or ethnic groups are systematically oppressed in our society.

21. I don’t care if people make racist statements against other racial or ethnic groups.

22. When I see people who come from a different racial or ethnic background succeed in the public arena, I share their pride.

23. When other people struggle with racial or ethnic oppression, I share their frustration.

24. I recognize that the media often portrays people based on racial or ethnic stereotypes.

25. I am aware of how society differentially treats racial or ethnic groups other than my own.

26. I share the anger of people who are victims of hate crimes (e.g., intentional violence because of race or ethnicity).
27. I do not understand why people want to keep their indigenous racial or ethnic cultural traditions instead of trying to fit into the mainstream.

28. It is difficult for me to put myself in the shoes of someone who is racially and/or ethnically different from me.

29. I feel uncomfortable when I am around a significant number of people who are racially/ethnically different than me.

30. When I hear people make racist jokes, I tell them I am offended even though they are not referring to my racial or ethnic group.

31. It is difficult for me to relate to stories in which people talk about racial or ethnic discrimination they experience in their day to day lives.

**Part 3**

Prompt: there are several reasons why we would want to refrain from prejudiced attitudes. On a scale from 1 – 9, where “1 = Does not correspond at all” to “5 = Corresponds moderately,” and “9 = Corresponds Exactly,” please rate the extent to which the following reasons correspond to your own personal reasons for withholding racial or cultural prejudice. Please answer carefully, honestly, and truthfully. *Note: egalitarian here means “belief in the equality of all people.”*

**Why do you inhibit/suppress cultural prejudice?** ***Please note: you are NOT rating the extent to which you simply agree or disagree with these statements, but rather the extent to which they represent your ultimate reasons for avoiding prejudiced attitudes.***

1. Because I feel that I must refrain from stereotyping.
2. For the satisfaction of discovering new and interesting individuals or groups
3. For the interest I feel when learning about others
4. Because I appreciate what being understanding adds to my life
5. I don’t know; it’s not a priority
6. Because I would feel bad about myself if I were prejudiced
7. Because tolerance is important to me
8. Because racist people are not well-liked
9. Because I don’t want people to think I’m narrow-minded
10. I don’t know; I don’t really bother trying to avoid it
11. Because I place importance on having egalitarian beliefs
12. For the joy I feel when relating to new people
13. I don’t know why; I think it’s pointless
14. Because overcoming prejudice is part of who I am
15. Because I would feel guilty if I were prejudiced
16. Because I admire people who are egalitarian
17. Because I get more respect/acceptance when I act in an unprejudiced fashion
18. Because I am tolerant and accepting of differences
19. I don’t know, inhibiting prejudice is not important to me
20. For the pleasure of being open-minded
21. Because striving to understand others is part of who I am
22. Because I would feel ashamed if I were prejudiced
23. Because I value nonprejudice
24. So that people will admire me for being tolerant

Part 4

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1 – 6 scale (1 = almost always, 2 = very frequently, 3 = somewhat frequently, 4 = somewhat infrequently, 5 = very infrequently, and 6 = almost never), please indicate how frequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience, rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

16. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later

17. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else

18. I consistently stay focused on what is happening at the present

19. I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way

20. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention

21. When someone tells me their name for the first time I remember it

22. It seems I am “running on automatic,” without much awareness of what I’m doing

23. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them

24. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I’m doing right now to get there
25. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing
26. When I am speaking with someone they have my full attention
27. I drive places on “auto pilot” and then wonder why I went there
28. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past
29. I usually pay close attention to my current task
30. I snack without being aware that I’m eating

Part 5
Please answer the following questions indicating what you usually experience (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree):

1. I avoid settings where people don’t share my values
2. I can enjoy being with people whose values are very different from mine.
3. I would like to live in a foreign country for a while.
4. I like to surround myself with things that are familiar to me.
5. The sooner we all acquire similar values and ideals the better.
6. I can be comfortable with nearly all kinds of people.
7. If given a choice, I will usually visit a foreign country rather than vacation at home.
8. A good teacher is one who makes you wonder about your way of looking at things.
9. A good job is one where what is to be done and how it is to be done are always clear.
10. A person who leads an even, regular life in which few surprises or unexpected happenings arise really has a lot to be grateful for.
11. What we are used to is always preferable to what is unfamiliar.
12. I like parties where I know most of the people more than ones where all or most of the people are complete strangers.

**Part 6**

14. Please indicate your age:

15. Please indicate your gender: M/F/Prefer not to answer

16. Please indicate how you identify your own race/ethnicity:

17. Please indicate your highest level of education: Less than high school, High school diploma/GED, Some college, College degree, Some graduate work, Graduate degree

18. What organization do you currently work for?

19. How many years have you been in your current job?

20. What is your current title/position?

21. How many times have you traveled internationally in the last 5 years?

22. *If you are an emergency responder, how many international deployments have you been on?

23. Is training important for your job? Why?

24. List the types of training you receive:

25. Do you have regular communication training? Please briefly describe.

26. Do you have regular training related to intercultural communication training? Please briefly describe.

Thank you for completing the survey.

(Submit)
## Past Missions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typhoon Haiyan</td>
<td>Tornado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2013</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Moore, Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typhoon Haiyan</td>
<td>Tornado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2013</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala City, Guatemala</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Earthquake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2012</td>
<td>October 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: AST</td>
<td>Type: IST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Sandy</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Earthquake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>October 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: Heavy US&amp;R</td>
<td>Type: Type 1 US&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Tomas</td>
<td>Hurricane Isaac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>Alexandria, Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Hurricane Irene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Chile EQ MEDIUM</td>
<td>Outerbanks N.C. / New Jersey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: Medium US&amp;R</td>
<td>Type: Type 1 US&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Hurricane Irene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti - Medium Team - USA 5</td>
<td>Virginia / New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: Medium US&amp;R</td>
<td>Type: IST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Hurricane Earl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti - Heavy Team - USA 1</td>
<td>Boston, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: Heavy US&amp;R</td>
<td>Type: IST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Flooding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>Fargo, ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: UNDAC</td>
<td>Type: IST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Collapse</td>
<td>Presidential Inauguration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>January 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petionville, Haiti</td>
<td>Virginia/Washington D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: Medium US&amp;R</td>
<td>Type: Type 1 US&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Hanna</td>
<td>Presidential Inauguration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>January 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type: AST</td>
<td>Type: IST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Type</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclone Hagip</td>
<td>Burma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Felix</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>South Asia / Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsunami</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>At-Hocima, Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Re-entry</td>
<td>USA, Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danube River Flooding</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Maputo, Mozambique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Duzce, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Touliu, Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Izmit, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombing</td>
<td>Nairobi, Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balkan Food Drop</td>
<td>Pescara, Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Armonia, USSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNC National Security Event</td>
<td>Boston, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-8 National Security Event</td>
<td>Sea Island, Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Isabel</td>
<td>Eastern Seaboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS Columbia Disaster</td>
<td>Eastern Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympics Standby</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, Utah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>The Pentagon, Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Fran</td>
<td>Topsail, North Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympics Standby</td>
<td>Atlanta, Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Marilyn</td>
<td>St. Thomas, Virgin Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Luis</td>
<td>San Juan, Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombing</td>
<td>Oklahoma City, Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Northridge, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Emily</td>
<td>Tidewater, Virginia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


CURRICULUM VITAE

Andrew S. Pyle graduated from Mountain Home High School, Mountain Home, Arkansas in 2005. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Ouachita Baptist University in 2009. He received his Master of Arts from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2011.