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# Assertiveness as Communication Competence A Comparison of the Communication Styles of American and Japanese Students

*The present study investigated the influence of cultural factors on the communication styles of American and Japanese students. The investigation focused on the differences in American and Japanese students' attitude towards performing assertive behaviours and, in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. Data were gathered from college students in the US and Japan. The scores of American students in their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence were higher than Japanese students. Japanese students discriminated more between ingroup and outgroup members in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours. Both American and Japanese students exhibited gender differences in their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms of present and future intercultural communication research which considers multiple perspectives of interpersonal communication processes.*

**W**hile the interest in studying the influence of culture on communication processes dates back many decades, scholarly interest in this topic is on the rise. The increased mobility of people across national and cultural boundaries, and the push towards globalization of business, has made it especially important to be aware of and to understand communication processes between people of different cultures. A better understanding of the relationship between culture and communication can help reduce the possibility of conflict between individuals of different cultures.

In recent years, intercultural communication scholars have become

increasingly interested in communication competence issues. *Communication competence* represents the notion of appropriate and effective communication in an interpersonal interaction (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984). In intercultural settings, an appropriate communicative behaviour in one culture may not be appropriate in another culture. For example, eye contact is a sign of a competent communicator in the US, but does not convey the same meaning to Japanese people. Arabs, on the other hand, tend to engage in more eye contact than Americans (Samovar, 1991).

While assertiveness is associated with communication competence in the US (Zakahi, 1985), such is not the case in Japan. Consider what an American student, who was studying in Japan said (cited in Ramsey and Birk, 1983:238):

. . . . whenever I get into a group discussion with Japanese [people], the questions I ask and the timing of my statements seem to cause them to clam up. I am the only one left speaking, even when I sincerely try to encourage others to speak. . . . Apparently many Japanese people place a high value on non-assertiveness when speaking or writing. I, too, consider it rather rude to blatantly assert disagreements, or to boorishly assert my own ideas without regard for others. But to thoughtfully ask another person questions and to logically analyze their statements would seem to me not in the least bit selfish or assertive, but rather, it would be considered the heart and soul of intellectual discussion.

Clearly, the American student differed from his Japanese counterparts in his attitude towards performing assertive behaviours and in his perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence.

The purpose of the present study is to explore how cultural factors might influence communication styles of American and Japanese students. The study especially focuses on the differences between American and Japanese students' (1) attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours, and (2) their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence.

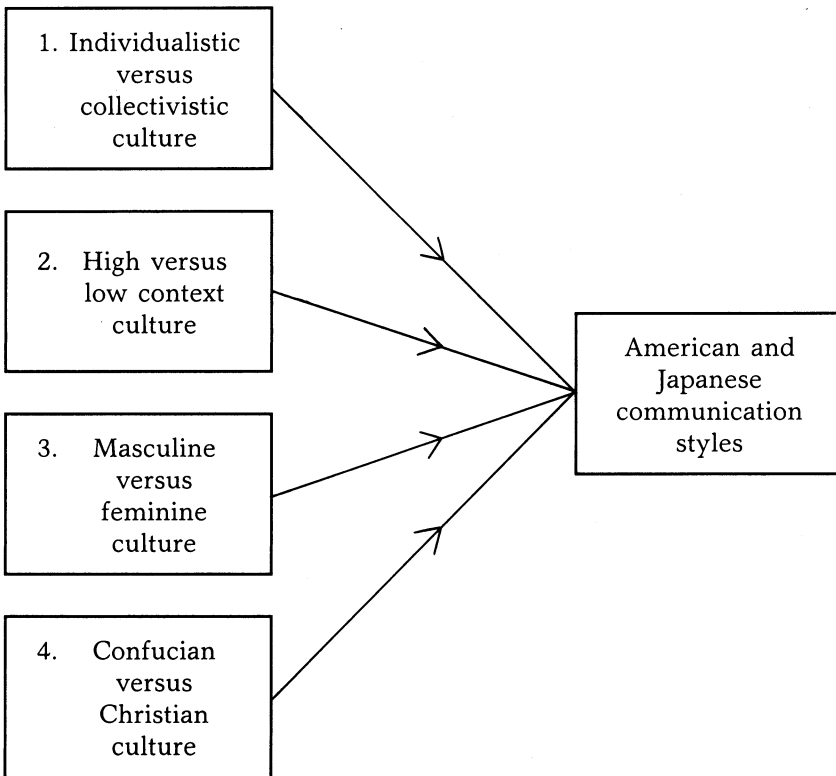
## ■ Culture and Communication in the US and Japan

In the past few decades, an increased number of tourists, students, and business people have begun to travel back-and-forth between the US and Japan. This increased intercultural interaction has encouraged both

American and Japanese people to pay more attention to the intercultural dimensions of interpersonal communication.

The influence of cultural factors on the communication styles of American and Japanese people may be conceptualized along four general dimensions (Nagao, 1991) (Figure 1). First, communication styles may be influenced by the 'individualistic' or 'collectivistic' orientation of the culture. Western industrialized cultures are often characterized by a value of individualism, and Asian cultures by a value of collectivism. In individualistic cultures, 'people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only', whereas in collectivistic cultures, 'people belong to ingroups, that is, collectivities which are

**Figure 1**  
**Cultural Factors that Influence Communication Styles**  
**of American and Japanese people.**



supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty' (Hofstede and Bond, 1984:419). Collectivistic cultures value group goals over individual goals. The primary distinction between collectivistic and individualistic cultures is that members of collectivistic cultures make relatively clear distinctions between members of ingroups (groups to which they feel they belong) and outgroups (groups to which they feel they do not belong) than members of individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1986). Members of collectivistic cultures also perceive ingroup relationships to be more intimate than members of individualistic cultures.

The second cultural dimension which may influence communication styles of American and Japanese people is represented by Hall's (1976) classification of low and high-context communication. Hall (1976:7) explains:

A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which more of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite; ie, the mass of information is vested in the explicit code.

Verbal skills are more necessary and more highly prized in low-context cultures while nonverbal aspects of communication are more emphasized in high-context cultures (Okabe, 1983). Gudykunst and Nishida (1986) found significant differences between people of the US (a low-context culture) and Japan (a high-context culture) in the way they reduced uncertainty through the process of communication. The frequency of direct communication was found to be important for reducing uncertainty in low-context cultures, whereas indirect forms of communication such as shared communication networks, interaction with others' friends, and spending free time with others were more emphasized in high-context cultures.

Third, cultures may differ in their perceptions about such gender concepts as masculinity-femininity (Hofstede, 1980). Cultures high in masculinity differentiate sex roles clearly, whereas cultures low in masculinity (and high in femininity) tend to perceive sex roles more fluidly (Gudykunst and Nishida, 1986). The male dominance in Japanese society is derived from the old Confucian adage that 'a woman in youth should obey her father, in maturity her husband, and in old age her son' (Reischauer, 1988). This traditional spirit has led to the differentiation of sex-roles in Japan, making it a predominantly 'masculine' culture. In the US, the prevalent, 'politically correct' ideology stresses equality between men and women (Buck et al., 1984). Although the US is far

from being completely egalitarian about sex-roles, gender equality is relatively more valued in American culture than in Japanese culture.

Fourth, religious norms might influence the communication patterns of American and Japanese people. Japan has been greatly influenced by Confucianism, which provides a guiding philosophy for an individual's conduct in society. It emphasizes trust of others and respect for the elderly. Confucian philosophy influences the Japanese communication style, especially when communication is directed towards superiors: 'Respect for elders and superiors has influenced the expression of opinion in public. To avoid offending elders or superiors, dissenting opinions are more often than not withheld' (Chu, 1988:128). On the other hand, Christianity, an actively practiced religion in the US, encourages its members to more actively engage in exchanging opinions, even with elders and superiors.

In summary, past research suggests that American culture exhibits the following characteristics. It is generally:

1. individualistic,
2. low-context,
3. relatively low in masculinity, and
4. influenced by Christianity.

Japanese culture exhibits the following characteristics. It is generally:

1. collectivistic,
2. high-context,
3. relatively high in masculinity, and
4. influenced by Confucian ethics.

Further, in the US, a more verbal, explicit, and direct communication style is encouraged, regardless of the age-group across which communication occurs. In Japan, more nonverbal, implicit, and indirect communication patterns are preferred, especially when communicating with elders or superiors.

## ■ Assertiveness and Communication Competence

There is a wide body of literature on assertiveness and assertiveness training. *Assertiveness* is defined as the practice of behaviours which enables individuals to act in their best interest, or stand up for themselves without undue anxiety, or to express their rights without denying the rights of others (Alberti and Emmons, 1970; Wolpe, 1969).

More recently, assertiveness has been viewed as a measure of social competence or as an indicator of interpersonal communication competence. *Communication competence* is defined as the ability of interactants to choose among available communication behaviours in order that they may successfully accomplish their interpersonal goals during an encounter, while maintaining the face and line of their fellow interactants within the constraints of their situation (Wieman, 1975). In the US, assertive behaviours are perceived as being more competent and attractive than unassertive behaviours (Cook and St. Lawrence, 1990; Henderson and Furnham, 1982; Rose, 1975); and assertiveness is viewed as a characteristic of a competent communicator (Zakahi, 1985).

As perceptions of assertiveness are influenced by such factors as the level of assertion, gender of the person, culture, and situational context (Cook and St. Lawrence, 1990), communication competence may also be perceived differently in different cultural contexts (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984). As assertive behaviours generally value individual events, beliefs, and feelings above those of groups, assertiveness is often regarded as more of an individualistic interpersonal-oriented behaviour as opposed to a collectivistic interpersonal-oriented behaviour (Shoemaker and Satterfield, 1977). Previous studies have reported that Asians are less assertive than Caucasians (Fukuyama and Greenfield, 1983; Johnson and Marsella, 1978); and the Japanese are less assertive than Americans (Thompson and Ishii, 1990).

Also, assertiveness is generally perceived as a masculine trait (Galassi et al., 1974). Assertiveness is considered as a sex-role violation for women, who are less positively evaluated for similar assertive behaviours than men (Gervasio and Crawford, 1989).

## ■ Rationale and Hypotheses

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the differences between American and Japanese students' (1) attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours, and (2) their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. While past research studies have focused on differences in the performance of assertive behaviours between people of different cultures, none have investigated the differing perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence.

As discussed previously, assertiveness is a behavioural social skill which is related to communication competence. However, since the perception of being competent is contextually-derived (for instance, between individualistic and collectivistic cultures), assertiveness can

be perceived as a characteristic of a competent communicator in a certain culture, and as aggressive and inappropriate in another culture.

The review of literature suggests that American people generally believe in behaving more assertively than Japanese people. Since their beliefs are derived from their socio-cultural norms, should Americans also rate assertiveness as communication competence more highly than the Japanese?

*Hypothesis one: American students will score more highly in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours than Japanese students, and American students will also exceed Japanese students in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence.*

While assertiveness is valued in individualistic cultures such as the US, such is not the case in such collectivistic cultures as Japan. Collectivistic cultures emphasize distinctions in behaviours between members of ingroups and outgroups. So one can hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis two: Japanese students will exhibit greater differences in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence between ingroup and outgroup members than American students.*

Assertiveness is generally considered more of a masculine trait rather than a feminine one. The extent of gender differences varies across cultures: For instance, the US is relatively a more egalitarian society (in terms of sex roles) as compared to Japan, which is relatively a more male-dominant society. More so than Christianity, Confucianism emphasizes a greater differentiation of sex roles between men and women. So greater gender differences can be expected among Japanese people (who hail from a 'masculine' and 'Confucian culture') than Americans in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours, and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence.

*Hypothesis three: Japanese students will exhibit greater gender differences in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence than American students.*

## ■ **Decision-Rule**

The decision rule to reject or fail to reject a hypothesis was set at  $p \leq 0.05$ . As all the hypotheses were directional, a one-tailed probability test was employed.

## ■ **Methodology and Data Collection**

A random sample of 118 American students was selected from a general

education class of 400 students at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio. The sample included 59 male and 59 female respondents. A random sample of 109 Japanese students was selected from two general education classes at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Kyoto, Japan. The Japanese sample included 55 male and 54 female students.

### ■ *The instrument*

A modified version of the College Self-Expression Scale, developed by Galassi et al. (1974), was employed to measure American and Japanese attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours and their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. The reliability and validity of the College Self-Expression Scale to measure assertiveness was established by Galassi et al. (1974). The test-retest reliability coefficients for the Self-Expression Scale for two samples were found to be 0.89 and 0.90 (Galassi et al., 1974). The scale correlated positively and significantly with various measures that typify assertiveness: Self-confidence, achievement, dominance, exhibition, and autonomy.

Of the 50 questions in the original scale, 15 were carefully selected to fit the purpose of the present study. The selected questions focused on interactions with members of ingroup, outgroup, and superiors. The questionnaire was structured in two parts: Part one measured the attitudes of respondents towards performing assertive behaviours in certain communication situations, including interactions with friends (ingroup), strangers (outgroup), and superiors/elders; part two measured their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence in similar situations.

For part one, respondents were asked to rate their attitudes toward performing assertive behaviours by choosing a five point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) never or rarely, (2) seldom, (3) sometimes, (4) usually, to (5) always or almost always. Examples of questions included: 'If a friend who has borrowed \$5.00 from you seems to have forgotten about it, would you remind this person?'; and 'Do you call attention to the person who barges in front of you when you are standing in line?'; and 'If you were in a small seminar and the professor made a statement that you considered untrue, would you question it?'

Questions in part two were repeated from the first part. However, in part two, the wording of the questions was modified such that the respondents were being asked how they would perceive a competent communicator. For example, the same questions of part one became: 'Competent communicators should remind a friend if that person who has borrowed \$5.00 from them seems to have forgotten about it'; and



'Competent communicators should call attention to the person who barges in front of them when they are standing in line'; and 'Competent communicators should question a professor if they were in a small seminar and the professor made a statement that they considered untrue'. Responses ranged from: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) undecided, (4) agree, to (5) strongly agree. A total score for the scale, ranging from 15 to 75, was obtained by summing all worded items. In order to eliminate ordering effects in the respondents' answers, the questions in part one and two were randomly reordered.

The questionnaire was carefully translated into Japanese, pretested on a small sample (N=20) of Japanese students at Ohio University, before it was administered to the students in Japan. The pretest was highly useful: The respondents provided suggestions about how to better convey the implicit meanings of certain questionnaire terms.

## ■ Results

### ■ *Scale reliability*

Since the scale used in this study was a modified version of the original Self-Expression Scale, Cronbach's alpha was computed to measure its reliability. The reliability of the 15-item scale used to measure students' attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours was found to be 0.82. The reliability of the 15-item scale used to measure students' perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence was found to be 0.79.

### ■ *Respondents' characteristics*

Both the American and Japanese respondents were similar in age and education: Some 86 per cent of American respondents and 91 per cent of Japanese respondents were less than 21 years of age. Some 53 per cent of American students and 83 per cent of Japanese students were first-year college students.

### ■ *Tests of hypotheses*

A t-test was employed to test hypothesis one: *American students will score more highly in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours than Japanese students, and American students will also exceed Japanese students in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence.* The average scores for American students on their attitudes towards

performing assertive behaviours were higher than that of Japanese students (Table 1). The t-test showed a significant difference between the two groups in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours ( $t=7.89$ ,  $df=223$ ,  $p \leq .00025$ ,  $w^2 = .21$ ).

The average scores for American students on their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence were higher than Japanese students (see Table 1). The t-test showed significant difference between American and Japanese perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence ( $t=3.22$ ,  $df=191.48$ ,  $p \leq .0005$ ,  $w^2 = .04$ ) (see Table 1).

In addition to determining significance,  $w^2$  scores were estimated to measure the extent of differences between American and Japanese students in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours, and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. The difference between American and Japanese students' attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours ( $w^2 = .21$ ) was found to be much greater than that of their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence ( $w^2 = .04$ ).

A gain score approach was employed to assess hypothesis two: *Japanese students will exhibit greater differences in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence between ingroup and outgroup members than American students.*

The average gain score of American students was less than that of Japanese students in their attitudes towards performance of assertive

**Table 1**  
**Cross-cultural Attitudes and Perceptions of Assertiveness**

<i>Cultural group</i>	<i>Attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours</i>		<i>Perception of assertiveness as communication competence</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
American students	57.2	7.0	58.2	5.5
Japanese students	49.2	8.2	55.3	7.6
T-value	7.89*		3.22*	
Significance	0.00025		0.0005	

\*  $p \leq .05$  (according to decision-rule)

behaviours (Table 2). The t-value showed a significant difference between American and Japanese respondents in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours in front of ingroup and outgroup members ( $t = -6.29$ ,  $df = 223$ ,  $p \leq .00035$ ,  $w^2 = .15$ ) (see Table 2). The Japanese students discriminated more between ingroup and outgroup members in their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours than did the American students.

In measuring the perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence, the average gain score of American students was less than that of Japanese students (see Table 2). However, the t-value did not show significant differences between the American and Japanese students in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence ( $t = -1.18$ ,  $df = 173$ ,  $p \leq .121$ ,  $w^2 = .001$ ) (see Table 2). Thus hypothesis two was only partially supported.

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine hypothesis three: *Japanese students will exhibit greater gender differences in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence than American students.*

The results of the two-way ANOVA assessing attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours indicated that there were main effects for both culture ( $F = 64.17$  [1,221],  $p \leq .00025$ ) and gender ( $F = 6.35$  [1,221],  $p \leq .006$ ). The cell means in Table 3 indicate that cultural differences and gender differences were found among both American and Japanese students in their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours.

**Table 2**  
**Cross-cultural Differences for Ingroups and Outgroups**

<i>Cultural group</i>	<i>Attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours</i>		<i>Perception of assertiveness as communication competence</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
American students	0.48	3.05	0.65	2.47
Japanese students	3.25	3.55	1.18	3.98
T-value	-6.29*		-1.18	
Significance	0.00025		0.121	

\*  $p \leq .05$ , (according to decision-rule)

**Table 3**  
**Cell Means for Cross-Cultural Gender Differences**

Cultural group	Attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours		Perception of assertiveness as communication competence	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
American students	57.83	56.53	62.05	62.27
Japanese students	51.07	47.21	58.50	60.25

Japanese respondents exhibited greater gender differences than American respondents. However, no significant culture and gender interaction ( $F=1.63$  [1,221],  $p \leq .102$ ) were found (Table 4).

In measuring the perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence, there was a main effect for culture ( $F=10.64$  [1,221],  $p \leq .0005$ ) but no effect for gender ( $F= .80$  [1,221],  $p \leq .186$ ). The cell means indicate that the size of the cultural differences were somewhat greater than the gender differences (see Table 3). Also, female respondents in both

**Table 4**  
**Cross-cultural Gender Differences**

Source	Attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours			Perception of assertiveness as communication competence		
	DF	F-value	P	DF	F-value	P
Main Effects	2/221	35.17*	.0005	2/221	5.73*	.002
Culture	1/221	64.17*	.0005	1/221	10.64*	.0005
Gender	1/221	6.35*	.006	1/221	.80	.186
<i>Two-way Interaction</i>						
Culture X Gender	1/221	1.63	.102	1/221	.40	.263

\*  $p \leq .05$  (according to decision-rule)

American and Japanese cultures obtained relatively higher scores on their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence compared to their male counterparts. However, no significant culture and gender interactions ( $F = .40 [1,221], p \leq .263$ ) were found (see Table 4).

## ■ Discussion

The present study investigated the communication styles of American and Japanese students, especially focusing on the differences (1) in their attitudes about performing assertive behaviours, and (2) in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence.

Significant differences were found between American and Japanese students' attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours. This result is consistent with Thompson and Ishii's (1990) study that American students are generally more assertive than their Japanese counterparts. Significant differences were also found between American and Japanese students' perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. For instance, Japanese students perceive it to be inappropriate to question a professor if they disagreed with a professor's statement (at least more so than American students). The Japanese communication style is geared to maintaining group harmony. Differences of opinion must not be openly stated, especially in front of elders and authoritative figures (Austin, 1975; Chu, 1988). On the other hand, American culture encourages its members to actively engage in exchanging opinions.

A wider gap was observed between the American and Japanese students in their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours than in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. A possible explanation for this finding might be that even though Japan is a collectivistically-oriented culture, it has no doubt been somewhat influenced by Western individualism (Ito, 1989). So while Japanese students might hold as an 'ideal' certain tenets of individualism (such as assertiveness), they in reality still feel uncomfortable about performing assertive behaviours.

Triandis (1986) argues that members of collectivistic cultures make relatively clearer distinctions between members of ingroups and outgroups than members of individualistic cultures. In the present study, Japanese students reported that they were more likely to behave assertively among friends than in front of strangers, whereas American students reported that their assertive behaviours were likely to be more consistent, regardless of whether or not they were with friends or strangers.

This Japanese communication style can be understood by considering their twofold structure of consciousness: *Omote* is the pattern one would

show to others, and *Ura* describes those private intimate thoughts that are generally not to be shown to others, that is, to be shown only to intimate friends (Ramsey and Birk, 1983). *Omote* is related to a formal front acceptable to others for the sake of group harmony regardless of one's real feeling. *Ura* is related to the honest and private feelings about a matter. While Doi (1973) admits that these are universal traits, he stresses that they are more highly emphasized in Japanese culture than in any other culture.

The concepts of *Omote* and *Ura* can shed further light on why the Japanese respondents rated perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence more highly than their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours. Japanese students ideally understand that a competent communicator should display assertiveness, but in their own behaviour, they are careful not to be assertive. This Japanese response may be explained by their distinctive attitude called *Honne* and *Tatemae* which are related to *Ura* and *Omote*. *Honne* is the real feeling or intention expressed only in informal settings, and *Tatemae* is the official stance shown in formal or unfamiliar situations (Midooka, 1990). Japanese students' *Honne* is to perceive assertiveness as a desirable behaviour, but their *Tatemae* is not to break group harmony, that is, not to make other people lose face by actually being assertive.

Hypothesis three was not supported by the results of the present study. While it is possible that a type II error might have occurred, the power of the statistical test for the interaction indicates that a type II error is unlikely. The power of this test, determined from tables provided by Cohen (1988), was approximately 0.80, given a moderate effect size at an alpha level of 0.05. There are several possible explanations for rejection of this hypothesis. First, the absence of interaction effects between culture and gender does not necessarily preclude the presence of some additive effects. College students are generally more aware of egalitarian gender roles than are subjects of other populations. While still far from being egalitarian, Japanese society has been steadily moving towards gender equality. Women students in Japan are especially sensitive to this matter. This fact may point to the presence of additive effects from Japanese women respondents in regard to their attitudes towards the performance of assertive behaviours, which perhaps resulted in no interaction effects between culture and gender.

Another explanation might lie in the nature of the instrument used in the present study. Each question measured attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours in a certain social situation. There might be situations other than the 15 covered by our questionnaire under which women tend to be more assertive than men or vice versa.

Communication competence is contextual and situational (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984). It may vary from situation to situation depending on the man or woman. Although the results showed that there was no interaction between culture and gender, the means of each group showed that a somewhat greater gender difference existed between Japanese men and women than their American counterparts.

The results of this study indicate the need for further investigation of assertiveness as a measure of communication competence in intercultural settings. First, observation of assertive behaviours in naturalistic settings should be employed in order to compare assertiveness of American and Japanese groups in their actual behaviours. In the present study, American students obtained much higher scores than Japanese students in their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours, and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. However, a gap might exist between attitudes about performing assertive behaviours and the actual performance of assertive behaviours. Observation of assertive behaviours in naturalistic settings can provide additional insights.

Second, respondents from non-college populations should be used. Japanese students rated perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence more highly than their attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours. American students did not show as large a gap as the Japanese students between their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence and their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours. College years are highly influential in shaping people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours related to assertiveness. Non-college populations might yield additional insights.

Finally, situational matters should be considered. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) suggest that communication competence is contextual. Ayabe (1971) found that Asian Americans displayed differential assertiveness depending on the specific situation at hand. The present study showed that American students scored higher than Japanese students in their attitudes towards performing assertive behaviours and in their perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. Perhaps under certain social situations, Japanese students would have scored higher.

While a number of intercultural communication studies compared one perspective of assertiveness across cultural groups, the strength of the present study lies in that it compared two perspectives: (1) attitudes towards performance of assertive behaviours, and (2) perceptions of assertiveness as communication competence. Future intercultural communication studies need to consider multiple perspectives of interpersonal communication processes.

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