

## Chapter 7: Encountering other cultures

Communications professor John Baldwin (2015a) cites this story, emailed to him from a student participating in a study abroad experience:

*I found your email to be most practical and helpful. I've kept in touch with my family [in the US] and like you said even in short emails I noticed I've become more aware of a sense of frustration with American waste, greed, materialism, consumerism. I can tell especially with my brother and sister I'm going to have a hard time telling them about my experiences and cultural differences that I've been exposed to. In one of the emails I sent to my brother I was telling him how it's amazing to see the value change between the US and Ireland. In his response to this he asked me 'Did you get to see the Superbowl?' I haven't spoken to my family, well at least my brother, after his question.*

Encounters with other cultures can be life-changing experiences. They can also lead to frustration, as here, when our friends or family don't understand or are unwilling to accept the changes we have undergone, such as acquiring new interests or points of view. Intercultural encounters vary in scope, context, and outcome. We may have contact with a single individual in a brief exchange, or we might live and work in a new culture for an extended period of time. We will be discussing in this unit the range of experiences, as well as potential outcomes, including personal conflicts and culture shock. We will also look at mediated intercultural encounters, through news reports, stories and the Internet.

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### Personal encounters

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We discussed in a previous unit that meeting people we don't know often results in uncertainty and anxiety. That uncertainty is increased when we know little about the other person and have to make assumptions. We may act or speak based on those assumptions. That may prove not to be a problem, particularly if we are open to changing our perceptions, work to accommodate the other person's communication style, and adjust our speech and behavior accordingly. But it's also possible that the encounter leads to miscommunication, bruised feelings, and arguments. Misunderstandings and conflict occur all the time when human beings are involved, even among people we know well or are related to. The opportunity for conflict is all the more plentiful when different languages and cultures are involved.

In cross-cultural encounters involving different languages, there may be quite different interpretations of commonly used words or phrases. The [Cultura project](#), originating at the Massachusetts Institute of technology, connects students from different cultures with the aim of improving both language proficiency and cross-cultural understanding. The relationship between groups from different universities begins with the students completing on each side questionnaires in which they give their interpretations of particular expressions, such as "family" or "liberty". Some words have elicited quite different associations from groups in the

US and in France. The word "individualism" (French, *individualisme*), for example, among the US students was associated with positive qualities of the individual being independent, free and unfettered in thought and action. The French understanding was someone different; the word was associated most commonly with egotism and isolation. This led to some interesting online discussions between the two groups of students (see Furstenberg et al., 2001). If we assume word meanings carry accurately across languages – a misperception common among monolinguals – this has the potential to result in misunderstandings.

In some cases, particular words may be associated with political orientations. The Republican Party in the US, for example, is likely to see "freedom" as a major component of the party's belief system, associated in their case especially with the ability to bear arms unencumbered by laws and with the absence of government interference in conducting business transactions. A quite divergent view of the word "freedom" was recounted in Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) in which a Vietnamese woman explained why she felt she could not live in the US:

The meaning of any value, including freedom, differs across cultures. An old woman in Saigon told one of the authors that she felt that she could not tolerate the lack of freedom in the United States. In Vietnam she was free to sell her vegetables on the sidewalk without being hassled by police or city authorities. She did not have to get a permit to fix the roof on her house. She had the freedom to vote for a communist candidate if she wanted to. She believed that in the United States, where her children lived, people were expected to tell others what they thought. In Vietnam she had the freedom to remain silent. Her perceptions determined her behavior; she refused to immigrate to the United States to join her children (p. 84).

Adhering rigidly to one's own interpretation of a word with strong social significance can be problematic. The symbolic value of certain phrases may be incorporated into our belief system and form an essential element of how we see the world. There are particular phrases which trigger strong positive or adverse reactions. Countering someone advocating a very different interpretation of such a phrase may be

Printemps 1999 Spring Individualisme / individualism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• égoïsme</li> <li>• négatif, solitaire</li> <li>• indépendance</li> <li>• égoïsme</li> <li>• égoïsme, triste, seul</li> <li>• négatif</li> <li>• seul, égoïsme</li> <li>• seul, indépendant</li> <li>• solitude, égoïste</li> <li>• égoïsme</li> <li>• misanthrope</li> <li>• méfiance</li> <li>• égoïsme, solitude</li> <li>• solitude, autonomie, liberté</li> <li>• égocentrisme</li> <li>• seul, vide</li> <li>• solitude</li> <li>• égoïsme</li> <li>• misanthrope</li> <li>• méfiance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lonely, pride</li> <li>• front politically correct</li> <li>• freedom, strength, will</li> <li>• whatever</li> <li>• attractive, Ayn Rand</li> <li>• desirable in reasonable quantities</li> <li>• freedom, diversity, thought</li> <li>• me freedom</li> <li>• creative, self-actualization</li> <li>• independence, strength</li> <li>• tolerance, creativity</li> <li>• originality, creativity, inventiveness</li> <li>• good, necessity,</li> <li>• Hero</li> <li>• honor, self-respect</li> <li>• independence, nonconformist, comfortable</li> <li>• strange, punk</li> <li>• use 'I...' more than 1.000 times a day</li> </ul>

Word associations of individualism in the Cultura project



Coal miner in West Virginia

perceived as a personal attack, a denial of an aspect of the other's identity. A coal miner, for example, is likely to react quite differently to the phrase "global warming" than an environmental activist. Those views may center around potential unemployment, resulting in loss of income, family tension, and potentially a dramatic change in lifestyle. In such a situation, asserting the reality of global warming through environmental science, case studies, or climate statistics is likely to fall on deaf ears. Communication is likely to be impeded. As Alan Alda posits in a book on communication between scientists and the public (2017), one might in such circumstances try to find commonalities in other areas such as similarities in personal backgrounds, regional affiliation, or religion.

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## Conflicts and language

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Conflict can arise over differences of opinion regarding substantive issues such as global warming. On the other hand, they may derive from misunderstandings based on verbal or nonverbal communication tied to cultural norms and values. These can be minor – such as not performing a given greeting appropriately – or more serious – such as perceived rudeness based on how a request has been formulated. Missteps in most forms of nonverbal communication can typically be easily remedied (through observation and imitation) and normally do not pose major sources of conflict. Non-natives in most cases will not be expected to be familiar with established rituals. Most Japanese, for example, will not expect Westerners to have mastered the complexities of bowing behavior, which relies on perceptions of power/prestige differentials unlikely for a foreigner to perceive in the same way as native Japanese.

Similarly, non-natives will be forgiven making errors and speaking in areas of grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. Russians will not expect non-natives to have mastered the complex set of inflections that accompany different grammatical cases. Native Chinese will not expect a mastery of tones. Of course, if the errors interfere with intelligibility, there will be problems in communicative effectiveness. There may be, as we have discussed, some prejudice and possible discrimination against those who do not have full command of a language or who speak with a noticeable foreign accent. Conflict is less likely to come from language mechanics and more likely from mistakes in language pragmatics, most frequently in the area of speech acts, i.e. using language to perform certain actions or to have them performed by others. Native English speakers, for example, will typically qualify requests by prefacing them with verbs such as "would you" or "could you", as in the following:

"Could I please have another cup of tea?"

"Would you pass the ketchup when you're through with it?"

The use of the modal verb "could" or the conditional form "would" is not semantically necessary – they don't add anything to the meaning. They are included as part of the standard way polite requests are formulated in English. Asking the same questions more directly, i.e. "Bring me another cup of tea", would be perceived as abrupt and impolite. Yet, in many cultures, requests to strangers might well be formulated in such a direct way. Languages as different from one another as German and Chinese are both more direct in formulating requests. Non-native English speakers might will transfer those formulations from their native language word-for-word into English, leading to a possible perception of rudeness. This is known as pragmatic transfer, discussed in chapter four.

Confusion or conflict can arrive in some cases from differences in tone or intonation. Donal Carbaugh (2005) gives an example, based on work done by John Gumperz:

As East Asian workers in a cafeteria in London served English customers, they would ask the customers if they wanted "gravy" [sauce], but asked with falling rather than rising intonation. While this falling contour of sound signaled a question in Hindi, to English ears it sounded like a command. The servers thus were heard by British listeners to be rude and inappropriately bossy, when the server was simply trying to ask, albeit in a Hindi way, a question. In situations like these, one's habitual conversational practices can cue unwitting misunderstandings, yet those cues are typically beyond the scope of one's reflection. As a result, miscommunication is created, but in a way that is largely invisible to participants. Once known to them, communication can take a different form. (pp. 22-23)

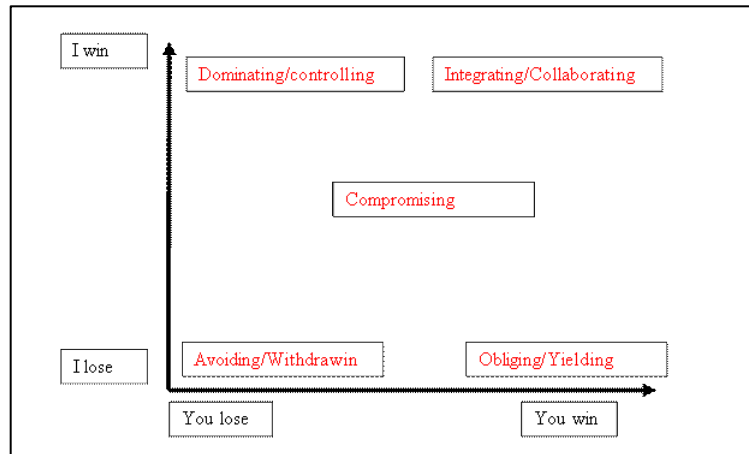
This source of conflict, a misperception of another person's actions or intent, here attributing rudeness to a difference in communication style, is one of the more common occurrences in both everyday interactions and in cross-cultural encounters. How such conflicts are resolved varies in line with the context and individuals concerned. Communication scholars have identified patterns in conflict resolution, discussed in the next section.

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## Conflict resolution

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**Conflict resolution styles** represent processes and outcomes based on the interests of the parties involved. These are often presented in the form of a grid, as in the following (Baldwin, 2015b):



If I am intent on reaching my own goals in an encounter, I use what's called a **dominating** or **controlling** style. This is most often associated with cultures labeled individualistic, as it involves one individual's will winning over another's. On the other hand, if I am content to allow others to get their way, I use an **obliging** or **yielding** style. This is often related to cultures deemed collectivistic, as it favors harmony over outcome. Stella Ting-Toomey (2015) has been a leading scholar in this area, with explorations of how to predict a given conflict resolution style based on national cultures. But she cautions, as do others, how dependent individual behavior is on the specific context and on the willingness and ability of the parties to be flexible and compromising. Flexibility and openness might lead to the adoption of an **integrating** or **collaborating** approach, seeking to find a solution that satisfies both parties. A **compromising** approach provides a negotiated outcome which necessitates each party giving up something in order to reach a solution that provides partial gains on each side. **Avoidance** or **withdrawal** may be appropriate if no resolution is likely, or there is not enough time or information to resolve the conflict.

Examples of conflict resolution styles associated with different cultural orientations are given in Markus & Lin (1999). They point out that in the US the predominate perspective traditionally has been that represented by European-American views: "Having one's own ideas and the courage of one's convictions, making up one's own mind and charting one's own course are powerful public meanings inscribed in everyday social practices" (p. 307). That tends to translate into the importance of asserting one's position in a conflict, rather than seeking compromise or accommodation:

Within a world organized according to the tenets of individualism and animated by the web of associated understandings and practices, any perceived constraint on individual freedom is likely to pose immediate problems and require a response. Typically the most appropriate response in a conflict situation involves a direct or honest expression of one's ideas. Indeed, it is sometimes the individualist's moral

imperative, the sign that one is being a "good" person, to disagree with and remain unmoved by the influence of others. The right to disagree, typically manifested by a direct statement of one's own views, can create social difficulties, but it is understood and experienced as a birthright (p. 308).

The authors point out that this perspective is far from being shared with the rest of the world, and in fact, is not universal within the US. Asian-American, African-American, and Hispanics are likely to have quite different views regarding conflict, identified by the author as an interdependent perspective: "From an interdependent perspective, the underlying goal of social behavior is not the preservation and manifestation of individual rights and attributes, but rather the preservation of relationships" (p. 311). In this approach, individual rights are superseded by group interest. Quick, decisive conflict resolution is not the ultimate goal, but rather an outcome that serves all parties and preserves harmony. In many communities that involves the use of mediators. In a study of "peaceful societies", Bonta (1996) describes how such figures play a key role in cultures in which violence is rare. As an effective approach for resolving conflict in cross-cultural situations, Markus & Lin (1999) advocate the use of face negotiation techniques, as outlined below.

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### The concept of face

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Ting-Toomey has been in the forefront in the development of a theory often applied to intercultural conflict, called **face negotiation theory** (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). This theory tries to explain conflict using the concept of **face**, often defined as a person's self-image or the amount of respect or accommodation a person expects to receive during interactions with others. Ting-Toomey actually differentiates among three different concepts of face:

**Self-face:** The concern for one's image, the extent to which we feel valued and respected.

**Other-face:** Our concern for the other's self-image, the extent to which we are concerned with the other's feelings

**Mutual-face:** Concern for both parties' face and for a positive relationship developing out of the interaction

According to face negotiation theory, people in all cultures share the need to maintain and negotiate face. Some cultures – and individuals – tend to be more concerned with self-face, often associated with individualism. Conflict resolution in this case may become confrontational, leading potentially to a loss of face for the other party. Collectivists – cultures or individuals – tend to be more concerned with other-face and may use strategies such as avoidance, the use of intermediaries, or withdrawal. They may also engage in mutual **facework** (actions to uphold face) such as negotiating, following up in a private conversation, or apologizing.

Face concerns can appear in all kinds of interactions, but mostly come to the



fore during conflicts of one kind or another. Ting-Toomey predicts that certain cultures will have a preference for a given conflict style based on face concerns. Individualistic cultures or individuals will prefer a direct way of addressing conflicts, according to the chart presented earlier, a dominating style or, optimally, a collaborating approach. The latter, however, requires that one address a conflict directly, something which particular cultures or people may prefer not to do. Collectivistic cultures or individuals may prefer an indirect approach, using subtle or unspoken means to deal with conflict (avoiding, withdrawing, compromising), so as not to challenge the face of the other.

Another way to view conflict styles resolution is through the **Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory** developed by Mitchell Hammer (2005). According to the theory behind the inventory, disagreements leading to conflict have two dimensions, an affective (emotional) and a cognitive (intellectual or analytical) side. According to Hammer, parties in a conflict experience an emotional response based on the disagreement, its perceived cause, and the threat they see it as posing. How the two parties interact he sees as dependent on how emotionally expressive they tend to be and how direct their communication styles are. This results in four different styles, **Discussion** (direct communication style while being emotionally reserved), **Engagement** (also direct but expressive emotionally), **Accommodating** (indirect communication style, emotionally relaxed) and **Dynamic** (indirect communication style, while emotionally involved). Hammer developed an instrument that measures these four styles and argues that being able to identify your own style and that of your counterpart can help better manage conflict.

One of the important ways to avoid conflict in personal encounters is to be attentive to what the other person is communicating, not just through the words spoken, but through body language and other nonverbal means. The process of active listening can be quite helpful. Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) outline some of the important factors in doing that:

Active listening consists of five steps: (1) hearing, or exposure to the message, (2) understanding, when we connect the message to what we already know, (3) remembering, so that we do not lose the message content, (4) evaluating, thinking about the message and deciding whether or not it is valid, and (5) responding, when we encode a return message based on what we have heard and what we think of it (p. 158).

Despite our best intentions as well as engaging in the

#### **What is conflict good for?**

Conflict has many positive functions. It prevents stagnation, it stimulates interest and curiosity. It is the medium through which problems can be aired and solutions arrived at. It is the root of personal and social change. And conflict is often part of the process of testing and assessing oneself. As such it may be highly enjoyable as one experiences the pleasure of the full and active use of one's capacities. In addition, conflicts demarcate groups from one another and help establish group and personal identities.

Deutsch, 1987, p. 38

techniques for optimizing cross-cultural encounters, conflict is sometimes unavoidable. Scholars of conflict resolution have in fact pointed to some positive aspects of personal conflict (see sidebar). Conflicts can illuminate key cultural differences and thus can offer "rich points" for understanding other cultures.

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## Cultural schemas

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When conflicts occur in personal encounters, an awareness of the dynamics of conflict resolution can be helpful in resolving issues. It is useful as well to have some awareness of the nature and origins of our social behavior. If we assume that the way our culture operates is the default human behavior worldwide, we are likely to reject alternatives as unnatural and inferior. In reality, what we experience as "common-sense" or "normal" behavior is socially constructed and learned. The kind of taken-for-granted knowledge of how things work becomes automatic, not requiring any conscious thought. We can think of such behavior as **cultural schemas** (set patterns of behavior and language) which are typically learned by observing others or performing an action once. Holliday, Hyde & Kullman (2004) describe how this works:

Knowing the cultural schema of events such as dancing a salsa or ordering a meal in McDonald's, is derived from empirical experience of that 'event'. It is reinforced each time that it serves as a useful guide for behaviour in that particular context or 'genre'. Of course the schemas of these different genres can be very different in different countries...The problem is that if we have a schema for an event already established in our national, regional or ethnic cultural milieu, we are likely to make the error of thinking that the event in the other culture should be the same – or similar. When expectations are upset one may experience a certain degree of shock that can perhaps translate into resentment, anger and perhaps negative judgement of the other culture. This is because expectations have not been fulfilled and one may therefore feel vulnerable and 'adrift' (pp. 197-8).

In our everyday lives in our own cultures, we carry out tasks routinely and without thinking. This leads to a sense that such behavior is universal. Being confronted with alternative models can be upsetting. The authors give an example in the contrast between visiting a pub in Britain and a bar in

### Drinking in a Spanish bar or an English pub: not the same

In Spain the schema may be: enter the bar and greet the people there with a general 'Buenos dias', go to the bar; see if there are any friends around; offer to get them drinks; order the drinks at the bar; drink and accept any offers of other drinks from others; when you want to go ask how much you owe, often clarifying with the barman/woman which drinks you are responsible for; make sure you say goodbye to everyone you know and to those you don't with a general 'Hasta luego.' A Spanish man greeting strangers in a bar in England would probably be disappointed in the lack of reciprocity of his greeting. The locals would be suspicious or amused; the Spaniard would feel the locals are perhaps unfriendly. He may be seen as dishonest or evasive if he doesn't offer to pay for the first drink he asks for upon being served that drink. An Englishman entering a Spanish bar may be seen as a little odd or ingenuine if he uses 'please' and 'thank you' all the time. These terms tend to be reserved for asking favours and for having rendered a favour, and are thus not used so 'lightly'.

Holliday, Hyde & Kullman (2004), p. 199



Spain (see sidebar). The example shows that we have to rebuild our schemas in different cultures, in order to navigate our way successfully through new cultural situations.

Sometimes the cultural schema relies on a sequence of actions, as in a British pub, or it may be primarily related to language use. Sharifian (2005) illustrates how a particular Persian cultural schema known as *sharmandegi* (sometimes translated as 'being ashamed') is rendered in a number of speech acts:

Expressing gratitude: *'You really make me ashamed'*

Offering goods and services: *'Please help yourself, I'm ashamed, it's not worthy of you.'*

Requesting goods and services: *'I'm ashamed, can I beg some minutes of your time.'*

Apologizing: *'I'm really ashamed that the noise from the kids didn't let you sleep.'*

(p. 125)

Sharifian suggests that in all cases, the *sharmandegi* schema "seems to encourage Iranians to consider the possibility that in the company of others they may be doing or have done something wrong or something not in accordance with the other party's dignity" (p. 125). According to the analysis by Bowe and Martin's introduction to intercultural communication (2007):

Sharifian relates the *sharmandegi* schema to a higher level 'overarching' cultural schema which defines a core value of culture related to social relations that he calls "adab va ehteram", roughly glossed as 'courtesy and respect' in English. He suggests that '(t)his higher-level schema encourages Iranians to constantly place the presence of others at the centre of their conceptualizations and monitor their own ways of thinking and talking to make them harmonious with the esteem that they hold for others'. (p. 42)

Another way to formulate this is that one needs to learn the special **discourse** of the cultural event or action. Discourse often refers to specialized language use (as in the discourse of airline pilots) but in postmodern use it often is used to go beyond language. J.P. Gee (1999) describes discourse as "different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language 'stuff,' such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities" (p. 13). According to Gee, discourses are embedded into social institutions and often involve the use of various "props" like books, tools, or technologies. One might need a whole host of resources in any given context to come up with an appropriate discourse strategy, involving use of an appropriate language register, expressing the correct politeness formulas, wearing the right clothing, using appropriate body language, etc.

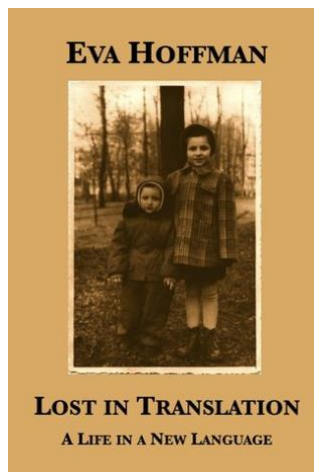
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## Mediated encounters

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Experiencing other cultures can happen through personal encounters or travel, but it can also be a mediated experience, in which we are experiencing new cultures vicariously or virtually. This might be at a fairly superficial level, through reading or watching news reports dealing with other countries. Of course, news from abroad is highly selective, often focusing on dramatic or disastrous events, inevitably filtered through the lens of the reporter's own culture. We tend to gain little insight into day-to-day lives through the nightly news. More in-depth information may be supplied by longer written pieces in serious newspapers/magazines or the Internet, or through TV or documentaries. We can't travel everywhere or have the opportunity to meet an endless number of people from diverse cultures. From that perspective, the second-hand information we obtain from mass media can provide basic knowledge and starting points for serious study.

More informed views come from first-hand accounts of encounters or from personal cultural trajectories. Of particular interest are what are sometimes called



language autobiographies, in which others recount their process of adapting linguistically and culturally to a new environment. An excellent example is Eva Hoffman's memoir *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989). She recounts her early life, moving with her family from Poland to the US when she was a child. One of the early significant cultural experiences she had was a change of her name and that of her sister from Ewa and Alina to "Eva" and "Elaine":

Nothing much has happened, except a small, seismic mental shift. The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us – but it's a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our

eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself...[They] make us strangers to ourselves. (p. 105)

The change may seem a small matter, but for Hoffman it represents a separation from how she sees her place in the world. She has become someone unfamiliar to herself, with a name she cannot even pronounce correctly. Eventually, she finds herself in a kind of linguistic and psychological no-man's land, between two languages:

I wait for that spontaneous flow of inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself...Nothing comes. Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences, they're not coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In

English, the words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private connection could proceed. (p. 107)

She has difficulty ordering and making sense of the events of her life. Slowly she begins a reconstruction of herself in English. Initially, this comes through listening and imitating:

All around me, the Babel of American voices, hardy midwestern voices, sassy New York voices, quick youthful voices, voices arching under the pressure of various crosscurrents...Since I lack a voice of my own, the voices of others invade me as if I were a silent ventriloquist. They ricochet within me, carrying on conversations, lending me their modulations, intonations, rhythms. I do not yet possess them; they possess me. But some of them satisfy a need; some of them stick to my ribs... Eventually, the voices enter me; by assuming them, I gradually make them mine. (pp. 219-220)

Step-by-step, Hoffman learns both the verbal and nonverbal codes, and can adapt to US cultural schemas:

This goddamn place is my home now...I know all the issues and all the codes here. I'm as alert as a bat to all subliminal signals sent by word, look, gesture. I know who is likely to think what about feminism and Nicaragua and psychoanalysis and Woody Allen...When I think of myself in cultural categories – which I do perhaps too often – I know that I'm a recognizable example of a species: a professional New York woman...I fit, and my surroundings fit me (pp. 169–170).

An account like that of Hoffman's provides a detailed, insider's story of cultural adaptation. Both fiction and nonfiction can supply insights into individual lives, which puts a human face on the theories of cultural encounters. This is true of films as well. Life stories convey the emotional turmoil that often accompany cultural transitions, something we sometimes lose track of in scholarly studies.

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## Experiencing a different culture

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Adjusting one's communication style and interactional behavior to a single individual or a small group from another culture can be stressful, but it pales in comparison to adjustments and difficulties one might encounter in spending an extended period of time living in a different culture. There are a variety of situations which might lead to such experiences. One might be an **immigrant**, moving permanently to another country, or a **refugee**, leaving one's home involuntarily due to adverse or dangerous conditions. **Asylum-seekers** leave their countries due to the threat of political or religious persecution. **Economic refugees** seek better working and living situations for themselves and their families. These situations all differ markedly from that of those who go abroad voluntarily to work or study with the expectation of returning home after a certain period of time. Those who stay for a longer time, such as 1 to 5 years, are often labeled **sojourners**. In comparison to those migrating involuntarily, sojourners tend to be

wealthier and better educated and thus to be in a more privileged situation in the host culture. Sojourners will often associate willingly with compatriots, forming an **expatriate**, or ex-pat, community.

Sojourners have a different experience from short-term visitors or **tourists**, the latter generally having a filtered exposure to the other culture, while traveling



Japanese members of a tour group in Rome, an example of mass tourism

in national groups largely isolated from native communities. Because of the short time frame and the lack of in-depth exposure to the new culture, tourists normally have an unproblematic relationship to the culture, often experiencing it in a positive light, if perhaps somewhat exoticized. On the other hand, some studies have shown that tourists may have ethnocentric views reinforced.

That may occur because tourists, living in an "environmental bubble" (Cohen, 1972), see only selected aspects of a culture. The aspects of the culture encountered (food, dress, festivals) do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the culture as a whole, as they represent outward manifestations of the culture, not its hidden values and beliefs. The result can be that tourists and representatives of the host culture do not see each other in their entirety as human beings:

The mass tourist travels in a world of his own, surrounded by, but not integrated in, the host society. He meets the representatives of the tourist establishment — hotel managers, tourist agents, guides —but only seldom the natives. The natives, in turn, see the mass tourist as unreal. Neither has much of an opportunity to become an individual to the other (Cohen, 1972, p. 175).

This applies to mass tourism. Cultural tourists, interested primarily in historical and artistic aspects of a country or region, may gain a fuller picture of the culture (Cohen, 1972). It's more likely in that case that the tourists will have prepared for the visit through some degree of study of the history and geography of the region. Optimally, that would include learning basics of the language as well.

Stereotypical images of a culture may be perpetuated through a desire on the part of the host country to accommodate tourist expectations. That may in fact be a practical necessity, if the tourist industry constitutes a major contributor to a region's economy. Hua (2013) provides the example of how topless dancing, a traditional aspect of Zulu culture, has been affected by the tourist industry (see sidebar). Tourism may have a complex relationship to a host culture, sometimes reducing culture to a commodity. Some scholars have pointed to positive aspects of tourism (Jack & Phipps, 2005), as at least one widely available means for cross-cultural contact. The [TED talk on tourism](#) by Aziz Abu Sarah argues that tourism can play a positive role in peace-keeping. Tourism, in fact, may lead to activism. Baldwin et al. (2013) give the example of the founding of the [TOMS One for One shoe company](#), which donates a pair of shoes to poor Latin-American families for each pair sold. The founder got the idea and incentive for the company while traveling through Argentina.

#### Topless Zulu dancers: Only for tourists?

Naidu (2011a, 2011b) investigates the 'topless' dance tradition of Zulu girls in a cultural village in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, and perceptions of indigenous cultural bodies in tourism. In the cultural village reported in Naidu's study, a small number of Zulu-speaking girls took part in a Zulu dance as 'ethnic' performers. As unmarried virgins, they wear no tops, only beaded skirts and some jewellery when dancing. However, although 'topless' has been a tradition for Zulu girls, things are very different now. As reported by two girls interviewed by Naidu (2011b), girls nowadays do not have to dance 'topless' to show that they are unmarried. Instead, they only do it at home and when there is a special celebration. Nevertheless, the girls feel that this is what tourists want to see and dancing 'topless' is a business exchange, despite the fact that they find it somewhat awkward when dancing in front of and posing along with tourists.

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## Cross-cultural adaptation

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Those who have the day-to-day experience of living in the culture are likely to have a quite different experience from tourists. This might involve learning and using a second language, coping with bureaucracies, finding out how things get done in that culture, making new friends, and a host of other issues and potential difficulties that everyone living in that culture – native or foreigner – experiences. This process of adjustment is often referred to as **acculturation**, the learning and adapting of at least some of the values, norms, and behaviors of the new culture. This may be an easy process, or long and difficult. That depends on many factors, including one's age, educational level, familiarity with the language and culture, reasons for relocating, support structures available (friends, family, coworkers), and the degree of difference between one's home culture and that of the new

residence. Acculturation can be fragmented; that is, one might adapt to some parts of a culture and not others. Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) distinguish between psychological adjustment (emotional well-being) and sociocultural adaptation (the ability to function day-to-day in the target culture). While psychological adjustment is largely dependent on personality and social support, "sociocultural adaptation, measured in relation to the amount of difficulty experienced in the performance of daily tasks, is more dependent on variables such as length of residence in the new culture, language ability, cultural distance, and the quantity of contact with host nationals" (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999, p. 424). While both forms of adjustment are present during initial contact with the new culture, normally sociocultural problems steadily decrease over time. Psychological adjustments are more variable.

The process of acculturation can vary as well depending on the purpose of the contact, such as colonization, trade, evangelism, or education. It can also depend on the length of time the contact lasts. A scholar who has studied acculturation extensively, John Berry, has identified four principal modes of acculturation (Berry & Sam, 1997). **Assimilation** is the loss of one's original cultural identity by acquiring a new identity in the host culture. The goal is to become indistinguishable from other people in that culture. Adapting to the host culture but maintaining the identity from one's native culture is **integration**. This kind of bicultural identity is likely to provide the most successful and satisfying acculturative experience. In some cases, individuals prefer no close contact with the host culture. In this mode, **separation**, the individual maintains his or her native identity with minimal adaptation to the host culture, although the individual may choose for practical reasons, such as employment, to adopt particular aspects of the host culture (speech, dress). The fourth mode of acculturation is **marginalization**, in which individuals have a weak identification with both host and native cultures. This can lead to alienation and a sense of abandonment. An additional mode of acculturation was identified by Richard Mendoza (1989). He labeled this **cultural transmutation**, in which an individual chooses to identify predominately with a third cultural group, such as youth culture or gay/lesbian groups.

At the opposite end of the travel spectrum from tourists are those who are forced to leave their home countries, whether that be because of adverse living conditions (famine, war, civil unrest) or due to the need to find gainful employment for oneself and one's family. The book *Global Woman* (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003) describes how millions of women migrate in order to support their families, moving from the global south (Philippines, Sri Lanka, India) to the north (North America, Europe and Middle East) to work as domestics:

Mexican and Latin American women are the domestics for U.S. women; Asian migrant women work in British homes; North African women work in French homes; Turkish women in German homes; Filipinas work in Spain, Italy, and Greece; and



Filipino, Indian, and Sri Lankan women travel to Saudi Arabia to work (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 311).

Such migrations raise many troubling issues. In addition to the main issue of social injustice and cultural loss, Ehrenreich & Hochschild point to the ironic fact that often women in such situations are forced to leave their own children in the care of others while they tend to the children of their employers.

Added to the emotional toll these women endure from being separated from their families and cultures, they may not find social acceptance in the host communities. Typically, domestic or manual migrant laborers are treated differently from intellectual workers or business professionals. Migrants from the same country might be treated differently in the host culture:



Filipina nanny in Canada

Class issues often enter into the picture. Sometimes immigrant workers are seen as necessary but are not really welcomed into the larger society because of their class (which is often fused with racial differences). And sometimes the discrimination and class issues result in conflict between recent migrants and emigrants from the same country who have been in the host country for a long time. (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 339).

In the US, for example, Mexican workers who have achieved middle class status, and therefore some degree of acceptance in mainstream white US society, may take a dim view of the arrival of undocumented Mexicans, since their arrival may

#### Old & new immigrants: not always a good mix

Mexicans have come in increasing numbers to work in the carpet plants in the Southeast [USA] and in the meatpacking plants in the Midwest. This has led to tension between those Latinos/as, who have worked hard to achieve harmony with whites and to attain middle-class status, and the newcomers, who are usually poor and have lower English proficiency. The older Latinos/as feel caught between the two—ridiculed by whites for not speaking English correctly and now by recently arrived Mexicans for mangling Spanish. This resentment between old and new immigrants has always been present in America—from the arrival of the first Europeans.

Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 339

jeopardize their own standing (see sidebar). A crucial factor that affects social acceptance is not just the identity and status of the migrants, but as well their numbers. The large influx of refugees to Europe from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern and some African countries in 2014 through 2016 contributed to the backlash against immigrants that led to protest movements and the rise of anti-immigrant political parties in Denmark, France, Germany and other countries.

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## Refugees

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In addition to those leaving their home country in order to better themselves and their families economically and socially, many migrants leave in order to

escape regional or national danger or deprivation. Some leave to escape discrimination due to their ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. In some cases, migration may be limited to individuals, families, or small groups, as may be the case with political activists or members of small religious denominations. In other cases, there may be mass immigration due to extreme conditions of hardship or widespread political or religious persecution. In the 19th century, for example, large numbers of Irish families migrated to the US due to the potato famine, as did many Germans to escape political prosecution after the failed 1848 revolution.

Discrimination towards minorities, leading in some instances to **ethnic cleansing**, can lead to mass migration. Large numbers of Rohingyas, Muslims from Rakhine State have left Myanmar (Burma) to escape mistreatment.

The Rohingyas have sought refuge in Bangladesh and Thailand, countries located nearby. This is the normal pattern for refugees, that they tend to relocate to areas close by their home countries. This is for practical reasons, namely ease of migration and likely cultural similarities. Many refugees prefer to stay close to home in the hope of repatriation after a short period away. In other cases, families may be separated and want to stay close to enable family reunification. Sadly, hopes that refugees' stay



Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

will be temporary are often disappointed. Many temporary refugee settlements become semi-permanent. Displaced Palestinians, for example, have lived in refugee settlements since the Six Days War in 1967. Long-term refugees can be found in many other regions, particularly in Africa. The quality of life in refugee camps varies considerably. Generally, however, available services will be significantly inferior to those available to permanent residents of the country. Schools may not be available, and there will often be substandard health care. Refugees are not usually permitted to work. Given the adverse conditions, it's not surprising that refugee settlements often become sites of strife and hopelessness.

The relationship between refugees and permanent residents is often problematic. The local populace may resent public resources being used to support groups of refugees. There may be fears that frustrated refugees will resort to crime. Occasionally, there are rumors about refugees bringing in diseases. In recent years, a new worry has emerged, namely that refugees are harboring terrorists in their midst. In some cases, backlashes against refugees have led to local protests or discriminatory actions, such as not allowing refugee children to attend public schools. Sometimes, refugees are exploited as cheap labor, or women are tricked into working in the sex industry. In recent years there has been violence directed

against refugees in some countries. In Germany, for example, built or designated refugee homes have been set on fire by arsonists.

Organized efforts to help refugees exist in many countries. In some cases, these are organized by national governments, often in cooperation with international groups such as the international Red Cross or the UN Refugee Agency. The help may come in the form of food, clothing, and housing. Occasionally, social and medical services may be offered. Educational and cultural resources are provided less often. As it is uncertain how long refugees will be present, there is often no long-term planning for their possible integration into the host country. At a minimum, one should expect to have schools available for all children. Ideally, training should be provided to enable future employment either in the host country, or wherever the refugee may end up living. Training in English, for example, is crucial in virtually any country, for use as a lingua franca in the host country, but also as an important factor in employability.

Some governments and NGOs have come up with innovative ways to provide language and cultural training. Today, phones provide a lifeline for many refugees. They provide a vital way to connect to families and friends in the home country as well as those in the host country or on their way. A report from the European Union Institute for Security Studies stated:

Migrants are linking up online to cross borders and meet their basic needs. They are using smartphones to share tips and geo-positional data as they cross North Africa. They rank and rate Afghan people-smugglers, trying to hold the criminals accountable for the safe transport of family members. On Google they share tips, such as to avoid exploitative Istanbul taxi drivers or evade new EU border controls. (Parkes, 2016, p. 1)

The kind of device that migrants use will vary with the individual and place of origin. One account has shown that of young Syrian refugees, 86% owned a smartphone (Parkes, 2016). A number of mobile apps have been developed by NGOs and government agencies to help migrants in a variety of areas, including language learning, cultural integration, and practical day-to-day living. Some apps aid in the process of migrants making their way through intermediate countries to their final destination. InfoAid helps refugees in Hungary, while Gherbttna is aimed at Syrians newly arrived in Turkey. The Mobile Legal Info Source helps navigate Turkey's legal system. The Crisis Info Hub offers support for new arrivals in Greece.

Mobile devices can provide tools and services which can ease the transition into the culture, but they can only go so far in helping the adjustment process. Ultimately, the situation of refugees depends on the reception they receive in the host country, the living conditions provided, and on the opportunities available for living a healthy and meaningful existence. For refugees eventually granted asylum and permanent residence, the struggle is not necessarily over. Individuals will need to go through a process of transitioning into the new culture, not always a smooth,

easy, or quick process.

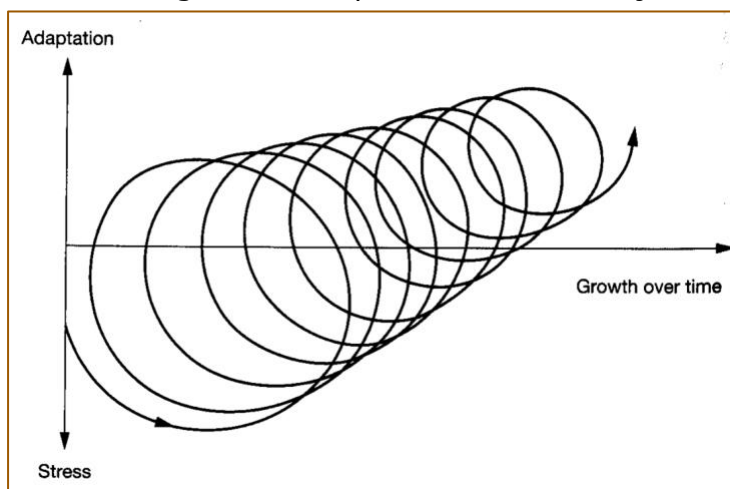
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## Culture Shock

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Some people tend to be more flexible and adaptable than others, able to suppress, at least temporarily, some aspects of their ego, developing a new way of thinking and behaving in accord with the other culture. Others, due to personality, attitude or contextual factors have a more difficult path to satisfactory acculturation. Those who have a difficult time with the adjustment process are said to be experiencing **culture shock**. This could manifest itself in different ways depending on the individual, but the common experience is a sense of disorientation, a feeling of loss of control over one's life, leading to sadness, grief, or anger, and in some cases even to psychosomatic or real disorders. The process of experiencing culture shock and eventually adjusting to the new environment has traditionally been described using the image of a U-curve, which suggests that travelers go through three distinct stages. This starts with a positive experience, at the top of the U, then a period of difficulty, representing the bottom of the U, before an ultimate period of adjustment and return to the top of the U. The initial period is often called the **honeymoon stage**, during which one is excited by the newness of the experience. The second period, often called the **crisis stage**, is when the newness has worn off and one is confronted by the difficulties of adjusting linguistically, socially, and psychologically to a new and different way of life. Assuming one is willing to stay the course, the **adjustment stage** follows eventually, with a growing confidence in one's ability to integrate into the new culture. Culture shock can be seen as a subcategory of experiences all humans encounter, namely life changes. Janet Bennett (1977) has suggested that culture shock and adaptation should be viewed in the context of other adult transitions such as going off to study, getting married, or moving to a different region of the country. As such, it can be viewed as a normal inevitable component of everyday life in all cultures

The U-model of culture shock corresponds to what many people tend to experience in terms of struggling to make adjustments to life in a new environment. Most experience stress, which can lead to feelings of alienation and frustration. The U-curve model also points to the reality that the adjustment often takes time and that it's not realistic to expect a quick and easy transition. At the same time, there are so many individual variations in situations that generalizations, including the U-curve model, will often be wrong. It may be that most travelers experience the range of experience represented by the model but not necessarily in the same order. Some scholars have suggested other models for describing the process. Young Yun Kim (2005) sees adjustments happening in a cyclical pattern of **stress – adaptation – growth**. She sees stress as useful for an individual's growth and prefers "cultural adjustment" over "culture shock". It's also



Diminishing stress-adaptation-growth over time; Kim, 2001, p. 59

the case that acculturation is not just within the power of the individual. It also depends on the willingness of the host culture to accept (or not) the individual. A physician or engineer from abroad coming into a new country will likely be given a much better reception than poor immigrants; this can have a significant impact on the adjustment process. It can be the case as well that the co-

cultures in the new country may be welcoming to the new arrival, if there are similarities which make acculturation smoother, such as national origin, sexual orientation, or professional affiliations. Adjusting to a new culture is facilitated by the presence of linguistic or cultural resources linked to the home culture, such as food markets, schools, clubs. Hua (2013), citing Neuliep (2006), lists a number of strategies one might use to manage culture shock (see sidebar).



The return to one's home culture is an experience many people will anticipate with high expectations, as did the student at the beginning of this chapter, looking forward to sharing one's experiences with those back home and demonstrating the personal growth one may have experienced during the stay. Sometimes those expectations are not realistic and may not be fulfilled, resulting in what's sometimes called

#### Strategies for managing culture shock

- Study the host culture, including searching websites, and interviewing friends who have travelled or lived in the culture.
- Study the local environment and familiarize yourself with the new system.
- Learn basic verbal & non-verbal language skills.
- Develop intercultural friendships.
- Maintain your support network actively.
- Assume the principle of difference and be aware of your perceptual bias.
- Anticipate failure events and manage expectations

Hua, 2013, p. 79

**reentry culture shock.** In contrast to culture shock, which may be anticipated, reentry culture shock may come as a surprise. It may be as serious a problem of adjustment as was the experience abroad. Baldwin (2015a) points out that a large number of business professionals leave their companies within a year of returning from assignments abroad, given the difficulty of readjusting and the lack of appreciation and understanding of their experiences. The return home does not necessitate any kind of socio-cultural adjustment, as we are already familiar with the culture, but rather a psychological adjustment. Some have suggested that the return home is another U-curve experience, with a similar pattern of high expectations, followed by a feeling of being underappreciated and misunderstood, with a final period of readjustment. Sometimes the two U-curves are put together to form a W-curve, illustrating graphically the kind of roller coaster ride such experiences can prove to be.

The concept of culture shock itself is not universally accepted. It rests on the assumption that individuals have a single "culture" and that the same holds true for the host country. It also involves a wholesale take-it-or-leave-it approach to cultural adaptation. In reality, individuals may well adopt certain elements of the culture, but not others. In some cases, individuals might choose to resist the new culture and maintain aspects of their home cultures. The situation becomes more complex for immigrants who represent established minorities in the new culture. Latinos migrating to the US, for example, will have different experiences depending on where they locate, the presence of family members, and the availability of resources for immigrants such as bilingual schools. In some cases, Latinos coming to the US may not be adjusting to mainstream US culture, but to Hispanic American culture, which has its own distinctiveness and multiple varieties, all different from the cultures of the home countries.

The concept of culture shock has been criticized for oversimplifying a complex situation. However, it is a widely known phenomenon and one, which as Ulf Hannerz points out (1999), has led to an industry devoted to helping travelers



deal with cultural adaptation:

I mentioned above the concept of 'culture shock', diffusing widely in the late 20th century as a way of referring to the kind of emotional and intellectual unease that sometimes occurs in encounters with unfamiliar meanings and practices. Rather facetiously, I have also occasionally referred to the growth of a 'culture shock prevention industry'. The proper term for its practitioners, I should quickly note, is 'interculturalists' – a new profession of people working commercially as trainers and consultants, trying to teach sensitivity toward cultural diversity to various audiences through lectures, simulation games, videos, practical handbooks and some variety of other means. From an academic vantage point one may be critical of certain of the efforts – they may seem a bit trite, somewhat inclined toward stereotyping, occasionally given to exaggerating cultural differences perhaps as a way of positioning the interculturalists themselves as an indispensable profession. (p. 394).

Much of this kind of training necessarily focuses on typical experiences, painting with a quite broad brush. In reality, individual case histories are much more nuanced and personal.

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## Study abroad

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Erasmus exchange students in Sweden from 7 countries

Culture shock has been studied extensively in connection with study abroad programs (see Kinginger, 2008; Salisbury, An & Pascarella, 2013). Large numbers of students internationally go to study at a university in a different country for a time ranging from a short-term summer or winter program (4 to 6 weeks) to a semester or longer. Students may participate as part of a group, through an exchange program, or independently. The European

Erasmus Exchange Program has enabled large numbers of students from European countries to study and receive university credit at other universities in Europe. The kind of experience one has through study abroad varies considerably depending on the manner in which it is organized. Going abroad with a group from one's own culture, and attending special university classes together, limits the exposure to the target culture and its language. Organizing independent study abroad experience is more difficult, as one must arrange oneself for university registration, selection of courses, and housing. In the process, however, one is likely to gain greater socio-cultural competence and more integration into the target culture and language. On the other hand, independent students lack the support system available to groups.

Whether one engages in study abroad independently or as a member of a group, individual disposition/personality and the local context will determine the degree of success and personal satisfaction. Hua (2013) points out that many study abroad experiences result in an increase in oral proficiency in the target language and in intercultural understanding and competence. However, that varies tremendously depending on the individual. One might have the kind of limited exposure described here:

Her daily routine included attendance at required classes, after which she would go immediately to the study abroad center sponsored by her home university where she would stay until closing time, surfing the English language Internet and exchanging emails and Instant Messages with her friends and family in the U.S. Outside of service encounters, framed in various ways in her journal as threats to her well-being, she made little effort to engage speakers of French, limiting her use of the language to her courses. (Kinger & Belz, 2005, p. 411)

In fact, the issue of technology in study abroad is controversial. Some have advocated a restricted use of technology while abroad, so as to maximize real-life contact with the members of the target culture (Doerr, 2013). Some programs go so far as to forbid use of phones while participating in the program (Godwin-Jones, 2016). On the other hand, online access to home communities can be a tremendous help in psychological adjustment and in recovering from culture shock. Maintaining a blog, diary, or reflective journal provides a mechanism for sharing the experience and reflecting on what one discovers, as described in the last section of this chapter.

In addition to study abroad, there are other avenues for university-age students to have meaningful longer-term encounters with a foreign culture. There are opportunities to engage in volunteer services abroad, through government agencies, NGOs, or religious groups. One method that has a long history, particularly in Europe, is to serve as an "au pair", living with a host family and helping with childcare and other light domestic work. Working abroad in other capacities is possible as well, although finding appropriate jobs and obtaining necessary work permits, depending on the country, may be difficult. All these options carry with them the advantage over being a tourist or student that they tend to offer more complete integration into the everyday life in the foreign country. Living with a host family or entering into a working environment automatically supplies contacts with members of the culture. Particularly attractive are internships abroad, which, in addition to supplying cultural and work experience, offer the possibility of future employment.



Columbian working as an au pair

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## Achieving intercultural competence

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Learning about how a different culture enacts and talks about habitual actions can ease communication. This can help significantly in being able to speak and act appropriately. According to Spitzberg & Cupach's work (1984) on developing intercultural competence, *appropriateness* is one of the two major components of intercultural communication competence, the other being *effectiveness* in communication, i.e., being able to understand and speak confidently and intelligibly. That does not mean just being able to speak a second language, but also how to relate to others through adjusting communication styles and nonverbal behaviors. One might be able to be effective in a job setting, for example, able to get the work done sufficiently, but not necessarily be doing it in a culturally appropriate manner.

Other researchers argue in favor of different components for intercultural communication competence. In some cases, this may be a quite extensive list. Spitzberg (1994), for example, gives an example of intercultural skills, abilities, and attitudes containing 45 elements. Such long checklists may not be the most effective way to categorize competence, as Spitzberg (1994) comments:

While each study portrays a reasonable list of abilities or attitudes, there is no sense of integration or coherence across lists. It is impossible to tell which skills are most important in which situations, or even how such skills relate to each other (p. 380).

Spitzberg suggests a more productive approach through an integrative model of intercultural competence that sees competence as an interconnected set of competences using the same three categories discussed in the initial chapter of this book:

- Knowledge (cognition)
- Skills (behavior)
- Motivation (emotion)

*Knowledge* involves not only having concrete information about the history, geography, worldview, and other components of a target culture and its representatives, but also how to go about locating new knowledge. That includes knowing which media and online services tend to supply reliable information. The knowledge needed is not just about others, but also about ourselves. Enhanced self-knowledge, and self-confidence, come from having a perspective outside of ourselves.

*Skills* involve the ability to speak a language intelligibly, as well as having achieved pragmatic and strategic competence – how to use appropriate expressions in different contexts and disentangle oneself from communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. That includes nonverbal behavior. Also important is the ability to build relationships; how to use the appropriate and effective verbal and

nonverbal resources depending on both the individual and the circumstances.

*Motivation* means becoming empathetic as well as being open to new ideas and perspectives. Highly desirable is a willingness to engage in new experiences and relationships. That can translate at times into risk taking, or at least venturing outside of one's normal comfort zone. These experiences can be person-to-person or online. They might involve, as discussed in the next section, experiences mediated through personal stories.

Through encountering and adjusting to a new culture, we gain new thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, adding a new second language/culture persona to our identity. That process in turn makes us more adaptable to future encounters with different cultures. This kind of intercultural transformation provides us with more life choices and opportunities.

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### **Technically speaking: Reflective writing**

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For Eva Hoffman, the diary she kept chronicling her new life in the US was a crucial factor in making sense of her experiences and in recovering her own voice. It's significant that she did this in written form; she expresses her new English self in this format. Writing provides her the opportunity to reflect on her experience, as she needs to put down in words what it is that she is experiencing. This can be a valuable tool for anyone struggling with identity issues or trying to make sense of life experiences. It can be of particular importance for those studying or working abroad, as there is often a need to explore the meaning of experiences, analyze how they fit in to previous experiences, and what they might mean for continuing to develop our cultural and linguistic repertoire.

In addition to writing for one's own self, it may be helpful to share one's thoughts with others. Today, the Internet supplies a host of options for doing that. Blogging about one's experience provides an easily accessible mechanism. Including pictures and videos can provide others with more concrete representations of one's experiences. Smartphones allow that to be done in any location and without the forethought and equipment that used to be necessary. Services like *Twitter* or *Instagram* offer those opportunities as well. Using online communication options can supply a continuous channel of contact between the sojourner and the friends and family back home. This can be instrumental in allowing others to share in one's personal development, thus potentially mitigating the sense on returning that no one can understand or appreciate what one has experienced and learned. In her model of cross-cultural adaptation, Young Yim Kim (2001) advocates continued communication with people from one's own culture, as they can serve as a bridge between the two worlds. She also stresses the importance of media, with one's own culture media serving also as a bridge and as a resource upon return to reduce reentry culture shock. Paying attention to host media can also help in the adjustment process.

If traveling abroad as a student, one might consider other ways to document one's experience abroad. One way to do that is to create an online portfolio in which one includes written reflections, as well as media and cultural artifacts. There is increasing interest in the academic and professional worlds in documenting not just formal learning from in-school experiences, but also informal learning. Maintaining a portfolio is one way of doing that. One of the available tools for that purpose is the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, developed by the Council of Europe, which enables input from a variety of possible sources; it is in the process of adding a companion tool for incorporation of visual media. A portfolio has the benefit of showing development over time.

### **From theory to practice...**

- *Practice active listening and mindful observation.* That includes watching out for tones, gestures, body language, and facial expressions. Pauses or silence may be sending a message. Hearing the other person out "gives face", showing that you respect that person and his/her views.
- *In intercultural encounters, be prepared and willing to have your ego bruised and your worldview challenged.* It's difficult for many people to be open to alternative views in particular areas, such as lifestyle, politics, or religion. Successful intercultural encounters do not require you to change your views and convictions, but they do require a willingness to accept that others have a right to different beliefs. It's helpful to keep in mind that worldviews are socially constructed.
- *Have realistic expectations of both traveling and returning home.* Imagined journeys often have little relationship to the lived experience. Knowing the language of the host culture can be a tremendous boost in adjusting, but it won't necessarily provide a seamless transition. You may well find that the language you learned in the classroom is quite different from what's spoken on the streets. Upon your return, you shouldn't expect friends and family to be as enthusiastic as you about aspects of the culture you have experienced. Be prepared for indifference.
- *Be as informed as possible about the host country (i.e. customs, geography, politics), but also about your own country.* When abroad, others will see you as an informant when it comes to your own culture and expect you to have knowledge about cultural institutions, politics, sports, etc. They may well expect you to have an opinion about current events they have read about or seen on the news. Before you leave, it's good to learn basic facts about the physical and cultural geography of the country you are visiting, such as largest cities, major transportation networks, regional differences.



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