Sensual Shock

Promoting the Study of Sentience in Theorizing Culture Shock

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Abstract

This theoretical essay examines the need for greater understanding of the cultural mind of sojourners by examining the role of embodiment and sentience in our theorizing of "culture shock" and cultural adaptation. Theoretical and empirical/experiential bases for treating sensual experiences as a basis and form of human discourse are provided, followed by a brief historical overview of the theorizing of culture shock and cultural adaptation. "Sensual shock" is advanced as sensitizing concept that serves as a corollary to existing theories of adaptation. A brief exemplar from previous research demonstrates the relevance of sensual shock to intercultural sojourns. Finally, the theoretical and practical benefits of this shift toward understanding cultural discourses in theorizing are explored.

Keywords: *Cultural Adaptation, Culture Shock, Sentience, Senses, Intercultural*

Confronting Our Epistemological Limitations

Culture infuses our theorizing. Although most intercultural communication scholars would agree with this assertion, academic literature has made only small steps in the direction of fully acknowledging the problem, let alone rectifying it. Min-Sun Kim (2009) suggests that theorizing suffers from both ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases. In the interest of promoting awareness of and rectifying this problem, some scholars, such as Ronald Gordon (1997), pinpoint domains Western communication theory has obscured or neglected. Four areas that Gordon cites are: a lack of full consideration of the "relational self"; "human emotion and the human 'body'", "'nature' and 'spirit'", and the "communal core" of communication.

The central focus herein involves the absence of the senses experienced by the human body in one domain of our theorizing. Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) describe how Western thinking has obscured the body and lived experience, carefully noting the epistemological traditions that deflect attention from embodiment. While most scholars would agree that the sensual life of individuals is culturally shaped in some ways, less consensus exists about the significance of the fact that the senses are culturally shaped. If we accept the propositions that Western thought is predisposed toward omitting careful consideration of embodied experiences and that these experiences play a vital role in the development and evolution of discursive practices, then the task of reintroducing the body in our theorizing must entail a mindful process of exploring influences that shape cultural life. One way of beginning the reintroduction of embodied experience is through shifting the theoretical terminology that scholars bring to the study of intercultural interactions.

This essay invites readers to confront the challenge of introducing human sentience and embodiment in the theorizing of "culture shock" or "cultural adaptation" for two main reasons. First, subtle elements of culture play a vital role in shaping expectations and rules for interaction. Second, the senses can be seen, as least on some occasions, as a form a cultural discourse in and of themselves. To begin, this essay reviews foundations (empirical, experiential, and theoretical) that provide a rationale for viewing sentience as a component of discourse. Subsequently, a brief historical overview of the theorizing of

culture shock will be presented. The notion of "sensual shock" as a sensitizing concept in the study of culture shock will be advanced, followed by a brief exemplar demonstrating its relevance. The essay will conclude with a discussion of the benefits and challenges associated with this proposed theoretical shift.

Empirical Foundations

To integrate the importance of embodiment in communication generally and cultural adaptation specifically entails tacking back and forth between embodied (i.e., empirical and experiential) and theoretical understandings. The process of embracing the integral nature of embodiment to understanding "discourse" stemmed from both lived experience and theoretical insights. I use a reflexive approach to understanding the development of the theoretical perspective presented herein. Years ago, I studied Asian Indians in the United States with the intent of learning about their experience of culture shock. This study was completed as part of my doctoral research. The research included sixteen in-depth interviews and one year of participant observation. The participant observation spanned a wide range of social scenes as I searched for evidence of struggles to adapt. To my great chagrin, however, the student sojourners did not exhibit or disclose about any significant stresses or feelings of culture shock. Their transition to a new and quite different culture was minimally stressful. Although I gathered a wealth of data, the analysis yielded insight into adaptive strategies, but nothing on "culture shock".

Theoretical Foundations for Viewing Sensual Experiences as "Discourse"

Key scholars in anthropology, communication and sociology have promoted greater recognition of the communicative value of the senses. Several anthropologists published ethnographic texts and programmatic prompts to include the senses in studying culture. One prominent figure in this movement, if it can be called that, is Paul Stoller (1997) who calls for a "sensual awakening" in academe. Acknowledging the historical potency of the Cartesian disembodied research perspective, he argues that "…discussions of the sensuous body require sensuous scholarship in which writers tack between the analytical and the sensible, in which embodied form as well as disembodied constitute scholarly argument" (xv). Stoller encourages ethnographers to take advantage of the embodied nature of their research.

Some anthropologists and sociologists recognize the correlation of sensual life to cultural life, and their scholarship has begun to yield insight into how the senses are diversely organized across cultures. Anthropologists Classen (1993), Howes (1991; 2005), and Stoller (1997) propose scholarship should transcend sight and sound and recognize that all human senses are culturally patterned and convey *meaning*. The kinds of meanings invoked are qualitatively different because "a perfume is not the same as a sentence – but they are still heavy with social significance" (Howes 2005, pp. 3-4). Classen (1993) also points to the ways in which words of sense infuse language, which we typically think of as purely "an auditory and visual phenomenon" (p. 50). These insights points to two communicative components of the senses: first, that the senses can become culturally encoded and meaningful, thus perform communicative functions parallel to words. Second, the importance of the senses is subtly acknowledged through language. To describe something emotionally charged as "touching", for example, references the powerful communicative force of physical contact. The potency of sensual influences was also noted by Sociologists Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk (2012) who suggest ways identity shapes and is shaped by "perceived sensations and sense-making practices" (85).

The above scholars assume a more systemic perspective in studying the correlation between the senses and culture with only occasional attention to communication. The argument advanced here is that we need to shift toward recognizing the senses as playing a role in *both* the underpinnings of a culture as well as an important form of cultural discourse that holds a more focal role than previously considered. The systemic connection between the senses, culture, and communication already shows roots in communication scholarship. Carey (1975), for example, distinguishes between "transmission" and

"ritual" views of communication, explaining that the much older ritual view attended more explicitly to recognition of communication as an embodied experience. While Carey finds both views useful, he notes that in recent years the transmission view has dominated "our" (e.g. Western cultural) thoughts about communication. Although the communication scholarship has shown an ongoing interest in nonverbal communication, much of the discussion is directed solely toward the message value of nonverbal cues more than the phenomenological implications or ontology of the cues. Nonverbal communication normally gets treated by scholars as a channel rather than as a lived experience.

As noted earlier, some have queried whether Communication as a discipline is "without a body" (Gordon, 2007, p. 96). Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) convincingly argue that "the excision of the body in Western thought has led to the reification of the products of the mind" (p. 250). Theorizing the diverse range of human ways of communicating have fallen victim to such reification. It is argued herein, however, that if we are to make progress in introducing the body to our theorizing, we must begin to identify specific theories that can be fruitfully expanded. This paper makes culture shock this focal point of theorizing.

Previous Theorizing of "Culture Shock" and Cultural Adaptation

The study of the stresses associated with traveling to a new culture has been continuously studied since the 1950's. Lysgaard's (1955) examination of Norwegian Fulbright scholars adjusting to the United States introduced an area of intercultural communication study that has received ongoing and enthusiastic attention ever since. The study of intercultural stress while sojourning took a greater foothold in the imaginations of scholars and became a part of everyday discourse throughout the United States when Kalvero Oberg (1960) termed the experience "culture shock." Following the lead of Lysgaard and Oberg, subsequent scholars sought to delineate the stresses experienced by the sojourners by proffering a series of stages (Lundstedt 1963; Smalley 1963). Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) extended the theory of culture shock to include stages that a sojourner experienced upon re-entry to her or his home culture. Reentry shock or "adjustment" has been a source of interest for communication scholars since (Isa 2000; Koester 1984; Martin 1984, 1986; Martin & Harrell 1996, Rohrlich & Martin 1991; Smith, 2001).

The study of culture shock took a more discursive turn as Communication scholars also became active participants in ongoing conversations and research. Culture shock began appearing in the Communication literature in the mid 1970's as Barna (1976) queried into culture shock's impact on communication. Subsequent scholars have questioned whether the focus might be more productively directed away from the label "culture shock" as this term may not aptly reflect the communication processes involved. Young Yun Kim (1988, 1995), for example, offered an alternative to the early linear models by proposing a cyclical model of "stress-adaptation-growth". Kim (1995) and Yum (1988) examined the pros and cons of compatriot networks and social support for sojourners. Gudykunst and Hammer (1988) began exploring the role of uncertainty in intercultural adaptation, and this exploration evolved into the Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst 1995; 1998) which is predicated on the notion that "anxiety and uncertainty are critical factors in understanding effective communication and intercultural adjustment" (1998: 228).

Young Yun Kim (2005) developed the most comprehensive theory of cultural adaptation, delineating various factors impacting the adaptation process in her integrated theory. This theory is impressive in its scope, and its examination of "the process of becoming intercultural" has influenced the way that the resolution of sensual shock is conceptualized herein. Despite its strengths, however, like other academic research on culture shock, it does not actively explore the role of embodiment. Although it may be possible to study the role of the senses using the existing theories outlined above, the scholarly tradition in which these theories are applied makes such study improbable.

Whether termed "culture shock", "transition shock", or "cultural adaptation" the topic of managing the stress of an intercultural sojourn continues to be a prevalent scholarly interest. Despite some debate about the validity of the label "culture shock," the term still resonates with laypeople and communication scholars alike. Academic and popular publications continue to refer to "culture shock" and contemporary

scholars continue to identify stages or phases of culture shock (Pederson 1994; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham 2001).

Cultural adaptation research has focused on areas of concern such as social support (Lin 2006; Ye 2006), language shock (Smalley 1963), role shock (Byrnes 1966), communication skills (Chen 1992; Kim, 2007), communication self efficacy (Milstein 2005), and acculturation and identity or "self shock" (Beavin, 2007; Zaharna, 1989). Perhaps the closest parallel to the present concept is the notion of "ecoshock", or the shock associated with transitioning to a "new ecology" (Fontaine 1997). Ecoshock is described as the necessity for the body to physiologically adapt to the new environment. Although Fontaine references factors in the environment to which one must adjust, such as new smells, Fontaine does not invite researchers to explore communicative meanings and meaning making processes associated with these sensual cues, nor does he examine how the senses constitute a part of one's cultural frame of reference.

Each theoretical development illuminates unique elements of the sojourning experience, but the failure to explicate the role of embodiment as part of a discursive process also leads to a *de facto* theoretical tendency to obscure the body, sentience, and possible communicative meanings that warrant attention. Consideration is now directed toward how sensual shock may be used as a sensitizing concept in the study of culture shock and cultural adaptation.

Sensual Shock as a Communication Concept

Having reviewed experiential and theoretical rationales for extending the body into the study of culture shock, "sensual shock" is provided as a concept to facilitate recognition of sensory data in the study of culture shock. Turner (1991) describes "sensitizing concepts" as those that "offer a general sense of what is relevant" and that enable flexibility in empirical research (p. 403). If we accept the assertions advanced regarding the tendencies for scholarship to obscure important points of analysis (Bennett & Castiglioni 2004; Gordon 2007; M. Kim 2009) then we must actively pursue avenues whereby we can overcome those cultural biases. The introduction of a sensitizing concept is not intended as a repudiation of existing theories, but as a means of overcoming some of theoretical limitations.

The Senses

Directing attention toward the senses necessitates elucidating what "senses" warrant study. As a disclaimer, the senses identified below are limited by my own reading and research foci. It is probable that further research would yield additional sensual categories for consideration.

Predictably, exploration of the "senses" begins with the five senses commonly associated with sensual life (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell). Furthermore, fieldwork data and research prompt the inclusion of two additional categories; the more generalized notions of "physical sensations" and "sensing." The term "physical sensations" addresses those "feelings" and that sentience experienced by the body while proceeding through the world. There are physical sensations associated with specific situations, such as waiting in line, driving in traffic, or anticipating a holiday. This term also includes the kind of deeply felt quality that we have about the meanings within one's culture. The term also includes environmental issues such as temperatures and feeling a breeze. These physical sensations are an integral part of the cultural "setting" of a group. For example, anticipating a holiday occurs within a cultural context in which that specific holiday has a history, widely understood meanings, and oftentimes shared cultural rituals about the performance of the holiday traditions. Those deeply embedded cultural meanings provide the experience of the sensation of anticipation.

The latter term, "sensing" has to do sensory awareness that is not directly derived from the five senses. For example, "sensing" occurs when someone "feels" a presence or senses being looked at, despite not having necessarily seen, heard, smelled or touched another person. Sheldrake (2003) reviewed evidence that suggests the experience of feeling the gaze of another is highly common among people and is even a sensitivity associated with other animal species. Similarly, researchers have studied the "sense of presence" experiences as a part of the larger research program of studying After Death Communication

(ADC). Research by Steffen and Coyle (2011) examines interview data from people reporting experiences of sensing the deceased. The experiences included smelling trademark aromas associated with the loved one, feeling a physical touch, feeling a presence, and even seeing the deceased loved one. One of the prominent themes that emerged in their data was the tendency of those experiencing the presence to assign hopeful meanings to the experience regarding their potential of seeing their loved on in the afterlife. The "sensing" plays an important role in sense-making. Depending upon the context, sensing a presence can signal danger or offer comfort.

While one might dismiss the experience of sensing as an intrapersonal communication process in which the person who experiences the sensing internally makes meaning of an interaction that never occurred, such a conclusion would indicate preemptive cultural biases. Again, in a culture highly dependent upon the visual "seeing is believing" creed, and wherein a mechanistic world view dominates, accounts of one's experiences of sensing may be readily dismissed. Experientially, however, most people have likely experienced a feeling is though they are being looked at or feel comfort at the feelings of presence of another person (physical or otherwise) that coalesce with the term "sensing". When the experience of sensing involves the perception of meaning conveyed from another person, it becomes a possible form of interpersonal communication.

Configuration of Senses in the Home Culture

Seven sensual categories (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, physical sensations, sensing) have been presented as heuristics for sensual scholarship on cultural adaptation. In applying the cultural significance of the senses to an intercultural context, we must first understand the importance of the sojourner's sensual configuration of her or his home culture. Geertz (1983) used the term "common sense" to refer to a cognitive phenomenon whereby members of a culture do not just use their eyes and ears but "use them judiciously" (76). Although Geertz's quotation falls prey to privileging only sight and sound, it successfully foregrounds the cognitive processes of sense-making. Rather than simply experiencing through the senses, people create and derive meaning from shared and patterned sensual experiences.

Senses are experienced and interpreted through a cultural lens. Part of a culture's "common sense" involves the sense derived from sharing sensory phenomena. Quite simply, cultures often experience similar kinds of sensual stimuli which then informs cultural practices and interplays with cultural discourses. These shared stimuli are 'food' for cultural organizing. For example, people living in a hot and humid geographic region experience a far different set of physical sensations than do those living in a cold climate with a fierce wind chill. Residents of different regions may expect seasonal changes that appeal to many different senses. For example, when climate changes occur, seasonal fruits and vegetables are more commonly prepared and consumed. Homes begin to look, smell and "feel" different as heaters are turned on or fireplaces come alive. Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) acknowledge the proposition that the senses are experienced through a cultural lens through their use of the term "embodied ethnocentrism." This term acknowledges the role of the senses by recognizing "ethnocentrism is a physical state as well as a psychological disposition" (p. 261). Embodied ethnocentrism bridges the theoretical gap between body and mind. Physical experiences of the world are linked to feelings and sensations.

The interplay of a community and their physical and social environment begins to form a sensory "world." This world is inhabited by the coupling of both collective and individual meanings of the senses. First, at the collective level, we experience certain shared patterns in sentience. On Thanksgiving Day, for example, homes across the United States evidence *cultural patterns* that are deeply felt by many of the participants. During meal preparation, common smells include pumpkin pies baking and turkeys roasting, followed by similar patterns of taste. Participants often tend to over-eat, followed by shared physical sensations of feeling "stuffed" and perhaps a bit drowsy. In addition to cultural patterns in what senses people experience, there are also *shared meanings* for the sensual experience. For many, "it just wouldn't be Thanksgiving" without turkey. The feasts combined with the bringing together of people serve as cultural markers of the bountiful blessings for which one should feel thankful. Different cultures have different climatic, environmental, and traditional configurations of sensory experiences that meet Carbaugh's (1988, p. 39) criteria for cultural patterning; being deeply felt, commonly intelligible, and widely accessible. Just as human action is culturally patterned, so are the senses.

The experience of Sensual Shock, however, draws on both cultural and personal phenomena. The sojourning experience involves the configuration of senses in both the home and the host cultures and integrates how the sojourner's cultural and personal identity come into play in making meaning of and adapting to a different sensual world. Just as verbal symbols can be uniquely interpreted by individuals, so too can the senses. The senses also get lived and interpreted through a personal lens wherein individuals have unique interpretations of the sensory world. For example, a vegetarian on Thanksgiving may feel repulsed by turkey smells. Some may eagerly anticipate the gathering of the family while others dread it. Disliking elements of one's own culture may factor into the decision to sojourn to another culture.

Sojourners who move from one culture to the next bring their sensual frame of reference. That frame of reference includes the configuration of the sensory worlds in their home culture, the cultural expectations stemming from that configuration, and their individual likes and dislikes of the sensual experiences of their home culture.

Configuration of the Senses in the Host Culture

In examining sojourning as an embodied experience, entry into a new culture inherently involves new sensory experiences. Central to understanding sensual shock, however, is *how* these new sensory cues are experienced and interpreted by the sojourner. Also germane to the sojourner's experience is that sensory information that the sojourner deems notably absent in the host context. The lost sensory experiences, as a meaningful part of the sojourners life, can be missed just as patterns of familiar speech can be missed.

A person living in a different cultural environment may experience points of incongruence or even conflict between familiar "home" sensual cues and meanings and those of the host culture. Inhabiting a new culture promptly immerses the sojourner in a world of new sights, sounds, patterns of touch, tastes, smells, physical sensations, and notions about "sensing." Like the home culture from which one has traveled, the new environment has its own cultural patterning and distinctive meanings. No matter how carefully a person studies beforehand, the nuances of the pattern and meaning of the sensual cues in a new culture cannot be immediately apprehended. Whether sensory input is deemed delightful or awful, it can create a kind of sensory overload as it is a sensual experience that calls attention to itself in ways that staying at home would not. Strongly positive sensual experiences can prompt sensual shock although they may not be seen as hampering adaptation. Strongly negative experiences can be more readily recognized as prompting sensual shock and feelings of distress that hamper adaptation.

The new sensual environment can trigger both enjoyment and distress. Early theorists described the early part of culture shock as an exciting "honeymoon phase." Certainly, some initial responses to a new world of sensory input may invoke excitement, particularly when the sojourner is not burdened with expectations to be aware of or responsive to the cultural meanings that others associate with that sensory data. By the same token, however, distressing sensual experiences can occur soon after arriving in the host culture and throughout the sojourn.

Seemingly obscure sensual experiences can cause significant cross-cultural misunderstandings and discomfort from the outset of the sojourn. Small sensory cues can also serve to simply make a person feel "out of sync" with their host culture over the long term. For example, a Chinese student once expressed to me her disappointment that no one around her was excited about Chinese New Year. I have since made an effort to wish Chinese students "Happy New Year" at the appropriate time of year as a small gesture to recognize their cultural background.

Sometimes the conflicting sensual configurations are much more prominent. The patterns and meanings associated with various senses may heighten the sensual shock of new experiences, such as when someone from a strict religion enters a culture in which media show graphic sexual images. In addition to the home culture's patterns, individual opinions about whether their home culture was too repressive may influence how the new experiences will be interpreted.

In addition to coping with new sensual experiences in the host culture, the sojourner may also experience sensual shock for what is missed from one's home. Sojourners may be able to re-create some sensual

aspects of their home in the midst of the host culture. For example, home decorations, attire, and music may be imported. Depending on where one has come from and where one resides, a sojourner may be able to purchase ingredients for their favorite foods. The extent to which a sojourner gets to "sense" the excitement of others around them regarding holidays recognized in their home culture may depend on whether they have other sojourners from their region with whom to interact. Of course, the more meaningful, deeply felt, and central to the sojourner's identity that the home sensory data are, the more significant their presence or absence becomes.

Sensual Re-Configuration and Adaptation

At this juncture, consideration turns to how sensual shock may correspond to adaptation. It seems reasonable to suggest that one important aspect of successful cultural adaptation involves achieving a "comfortable" sensual environment. Part of the comfort factor is derived from living in a setting where important sensual preferences are met and where the sensual experiences have tolerable individual and cultural meanings. In other words, one cannot have things that are achingly absent or painfully present to reach the kind of equilibrium that one typically associates with "successful adaptation."

The extent to which preferred sensual experiences from both the home and host cultures become integrated into a sojourner's life plays a role in "successful" cultural adaptation. This reconfiguration process deserves attention in communication scholarship because it involves the creation of new cultural patterns and meanings. Kim (2005) surveys the process of "intercultural transformation" whereby new identities emerge, better psychological health and functional fitness are achieved, and third cultures are built (pp. 347-349). I would add to Kim's list that a satisfying configuration of embodied sensual experiences is achieved. The forms that this sensual reconfiguration will assume will be diverse and will likely be informed by both one's culture of origin and one's local host. By better understanding how sensual information is reconfigured, important means of facilitating cultural adaptation will be promoted.

Sensual Re-entry Shock

Once a sojourner has reconfigured sensual expectation to meld with daily life in the host culture, returning to one's home country can also trigger sensual responses. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) argued that reintroduction to one's home culture could trigger re-entry shock. As with other theories of adaptation, however, the role of the senses in this re-entry process is not explicated. After living in Hawai'i for a number of years amidst considerable ethnic diversity, I returned to the mainland and found several surprises among re-entry, including a poor tolerance for cold, a sense of surprise at seeing so many *haoles* or 'white people', and a complete disdain for the texture of some "fluffy" rice prepared on the mainland. Sojourners to a new culture must re-acclimate to their original sensual environment once again after a lengthy departure.

The introductory conceptualization offered herein is intended to prompt intercultural communication researchers to explore the embodied implications of intercultural contact. The aim here is *not* to discount any existing theories of culture shock, but to explore new possibilities. While the experience of sensuality is universal, the meanings associated with sensory information are not. Systems of culturally coded meanings infuse one's experience of sentience just as potently as they infuse one's language. One does not see, hear, taste, touch, smell, experience sensing and physical sensations without assigning meanings, both personal and cultural, to those experiences. Although these sensual data are not presently prominent within intercultural communication studies, the sensitizing concept of sensual shock is an invitation to broaden the scope of future research. Everyone who sojourns to another culture can identify meaningful ways that one's senses are engaged or offended in new, sometimes unexpected ways. This can certainly be said of my own research.

Sensual Shock among Asian Indian Sojourners

As we continue tacking back and forth between the embodied/experiential/ empirical and the theoretical, attention now turns to consideration of one exemplar from my research that demonstrates the value of sensual shock as a sensitizing concept. In interviewing an Asian Indian student during my doctoral

research, he described his first days in the U.S. Before arriving, he had received a letter from the Indian Student Association that included a telephone number. Upon arriving in the town where the university was located, he called the number and stated that he had arrived and needed a place to stay. He was collected by an Indian and was taken to a home where several Indians were staying. He estimated that in the first couple of days, he met 50-100 other Indians. Others noted that this large Indian network introduced them to Asian supermarkets and opportunities to find Indian housemates so that they continued to live around other Indians.

The sensual repercussions of the availability of an immediate and extensive Asian Indian community became apparent as I conducted participant observation. Although the notion of "participant sensing" had never occurred to me at the time, the role of sensing was potently evident one evening when I attended a dinner party at the home an Indian friend. The gathering was large, and many guests helped by cooking or bringing music and entertainment. As with most of the social events I attended as a participant sensor, I was the only non-Indian present. As I approached the apartment unit where the dinner party was held, I quickly realized that I did not need to know which apartment my friend lived in to find the party – it quickly became apparent. They were not a loud or raucous, however, I could clearly distinguish the unique, high-pitched sound of a woman singing Hindi music. As I neared the door, the smells of a variety of curry *masala* blends simmering in the kitchen were easily distinguishable.

When the door opened, the music sound was louder, the curry smell stronger, and the first thing that I saw when I looked inside was a sofa with some guys sitting on it. I recall feeling surprised at what I saw. The large sofa held about five to six males. Given the cramped conditions of many guests in a small apartment and few seats, the crowding itself can be seen as "normal." What I found disconcerting was that the males were sitting very close together, some with an arm draped around the shoulders of the guy sitting next to him. This sight was unusual to me because I had not seen heterosexual men engaging in this kind of casual touching (in the U.S., such touching among men can be associated with homosexuality). I could also see that I was the only one who found this scene unusual. The men looked completely at home.

As time to eat approached, every Indian who had been helping with the cooking tried to assure me that they had not made the curry "too spicy". They recognized that while the masala blends were commonplace in their diet, that it was not an everyday part of my diet. After consuming a wonderful array of a variety of Indian mainstays, the group decided to watch a Hindi movie. The movies often featured more of the Hindi music I had been hearing, beautiful Indian people and clothes, and, in the romantic movies, a tendency for a man and a woman to gaze at each other while peering around the sides of a tree trunk. I didn't really understand the cinematic choice to show a couple looking around the tree trunk at each other, but was assured that this is a recurrent theme throughout Indian movies. After leaving that gathering, I later reflected that I was experiencing more cultural adaptation in studying the Indians than they were experiencing as a result of living in the U. S.

The extent of the reproducing the configuration of familiar senses from India in the United States became evident while I was interviewing one man about his experience of adaptation. I asked what had changed most about him since coming to the United States. He responded that he had not changed, but the "only thing I think I'm eating more spicy food." His housemates tended to make more spicy food than his mother had.

While completing my dissertation, I took a temporary position at a university with a very, very small Asian Indian population. While teaching I had mentioned my dissertation topic, and soon thereafter found that one of my students who was Asian Indian began making regular visits to my office. Each week he would come to my office to ask questions about class, and would stay longer to talk about my dissertation and some of the things he missed about home. He finally abandoned the pretense of querying about class and asked if he could come to see me just to talk about India and Indians. He shared how isolated he felt in the absence of other Indians, and that he enjoyed talking about familiar things. He disclosed that he had an Indian friend in town that shared his small apartment with a roommate, but that his friend would let him come over to his house and sleep on the floor by his bed.

When a person has always had another person with whom to share a bedroom with, the "sensing" of the presence of another human being becomes ordinary. The choice to leave one's own home and bed to sleep

on the floor next to someone else, to me suggests the importance of this kind of sensing and its meaning of feeling connected to others. In contrast to the students who enjoyed an extensive Indian community with whom to associate, the Indian student who lacked the social network and all of the sensual opportunities that network implies described his sojourn far more stressful. In reflection, my own disdain for sharing a room as a college student could be considered part of an embodied manifestation of an individualistic cultural orientation whereas this Indian student's welcoming the opportunity to share a room could be considered part of an embodied manifestation of collectivism.

Concluding Remarks

The above example demonstrates how the senses can potently shape the cultural predispositions of a group. The unique configuration of sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, physical sensations, and sensing creates an atmosphere that is recognizable, even to an outsider, as an Indian scene. The reconfiguration of this sensual environment in a new host culture plays a role in the experience of cultural adaptation as valued experiences and feelings from home are "imported" to the host setting.

The example also demonstrates the communicative value of specific senses. Growing up in the United States, prolonged male to male touch suggests homosexuality; thus, straight men in this country are not inclined to sit with their arm around the shoulders of a friend. Similarly, cinematic uses of men and women peering around a tree at one another to symbolize romance are visually communicative only in a specific, culturally defined setting. One must be familiar with cultural codes to make cognitive sense of some uses of the embodied senses.

Foregrounding the senses and embodiment in the adaptation process promises both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, new conceptual apparatus can help to fill the void in examining the role of sentience in adaptation. "Sensual shock" is proposed as a sensitizing concept that narrows the focus to those stresses that are associated with loss of a familiar configuration of sensory input and the loss of the system of meaning that accompanies that configuration. By exploring the ways that a host culture encourages or discourages the incorporation of different cultural symbols, whether foods, clothing, etc. can be informative about the power relations experienced between those two cultures and the particular points of differences in meanings associated with those sensual symbols. This embodied cultural system embedded within sensual experiences and practices provides a foundation upon which intra- and inter-cultural communication occurs. Locating different meanings associated with the senses provides richer insights into cultural conflicts and difficulties in adapting.

There are practical benefits to a shift in theorizing. If one accepts the premise that the senses are culturally informed and imbued with sense-making processes, then understanding the senses is tantamount to understanding culture and communication in general. The goal of much research on intercultural adaptation is to better understand the experience of intercultural sojourning and to mitigate the stresses associated with the sojourn. Stress is a bodily reaction that stems from multiple sources. The argument in this essay is that familiar and unfamiliar bodily senses and meanings play one role in the experiences of stress and comfort for sojourners.

Acquiring the benefits of studying culture from a more embodied perspective, however, demands a shift in current cultural adaptation theorizing. Concluding this essay with the theme of tacking back and forth between the experiential and the theoretical, I point to the challenges inherent in including "sensual shock" in the theorizing of adaptation. When discussing this sensitizing concept of with numerous intercultural communication scholars, most of whom are Caucasian American, I have encountered two consistent reactions. First, the most common immediate response is to eagerly relate sensual recognitions experienced in her or his travels. From an experiential standpoint, they "get it". They have experienced the kinds of sensual reactions to cultural differences described herein.

The second most common reaction has been resistance. Some state that existing theories do not preclude an analysis of the senses. Others question whether this approach detracts from the primacy of studying the spoken word as discourse. I see both responses as deriving from a particular cultural background that, as

previous scholars have argued, obscures the body in the study of culture and communication. The literature on culture shock and current understandings of the meaning and assumptions guiding "discourse" demonstrates that examinations of the link between the senses and cultural communication remain rare.

To achieve the practical benefits described, we need to more actively draw attention to variables in communication that Western scholarship has habitually neglected. First, we need to recognize that the sensual world plays a role in the communication and overall experience of culture. Second, we need to recognize that, in some instances, sensual stimuli can sometimes serve as discourses of their own. Smells, colors, and patterns of touch can hold their own form of cultural communication, just as silence can be seen to hold communicative value (Braithwaite, 1990).

By more fully seeking and integrating cross-cultural comparisons of sensual meanings and rules surrounding the senses across cultures, training programs can be enhanced, study abroad programs can be better informed regarding student needs, and international business transactions can be facilitated. Studying the role of the body in cultural adaptation also brings us a step closer to two of the common goals of intercultural communication study: humanizing culturally diverse peoples and better understanding the bases upon which people interact.

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