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Comments from the Editors

In this issue Mark Peterson has organized discussions of a cross-cultural class exercise controversy that occurred in the USA last year.

Guest Editor's Comments: Stepping on Cultural and Religious Assumptions

Mark F. Peterson, Florida Atlantic University, USA, and Maastricht University, The Netherlands

THE SPRING OF 2013 found Florida Atlantic University (FAU) embroiled in a national controversy about a “Step on Jesus” exercise, a controversy that has implications for our assumptions when we do intercultural training. My purpose in introducing the present special issue about intercultural training that challenges cultural and religious assumptions is to first describe the controversy and my role in it, and then to identify three issues that it raises — the depth of training interventions, self-disclosure of hidden identities and voluntarism and consent. The first essay provides my own reflections about these issues. The other three essays are by colleagues who provide deeper analyses of these three issues.

The Event and Its Context

The “Step on Jesus” exercise is rarely controversial. It is one of many training tools that are designed to help students become aware of their unconscious assumptions about symbols and how they differ from the assumptions of others. The instructions read: “This exercise is a bit sensitive, but really drives home the point that even though symbols are arbitrary, they take on very strong and emotional meanings. Have the students write the name JESUS in big letters on a piece of paper. Ask the students to stand up and put the paper on the floor in front of them with the name facing up. Ask the students to think about it for a moment. After a brief period of silence, instruct them to step on the paper. Most will hesitate. Ask why they can’t step on the paper. Discuss the importance of symbols in culture” (Neuliep, 2011).

When the exercise was used in one class at FAU, one student suggested to the news media that the exercise showed anti-Christian bigotry. The university received several thousand e-mails, most of which supported the student’s view. The student’s objections generated national media attention. Florida Governor Rick Scott and Florida Senator Marco Rubio expressed outrage about the exercise. FAU’s President and Provost resigned as controversy raged about how this and several earlier issues had been handled.

As a senior cross-cultural management professor at FAU, I was invited by my business faculty colleagues to join a faculty committee to consider how the university had reacted. Other faculty and administrative groups dealt with what happened in the class session and how the university should act toward the instructor and student who were involved. To gain perspective on what I should do as a committee member, I asked for advice from several dozen colleagues throughout the world who do culture-related research and training. The present special issue does not deal with the particulars of this one case, but instead addresses basic issues that the situation raises for intercultural training.

Essays about Depth, Disclosure and Consent

My own essay suggests that we should think of ourselves not only as individual culture trainers but also as a commu-



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nity, and we should also think of our students both as individuals and as points of contact with larger cultural communities. As individual cultural trainers, we should reflect on our personal assumptions about why and how we challenge our students' most basic self-schemas and social identities. As a community of cultural scholars, we also should reconsider our professional norms. Are some of our own norms just as parochial and ethnocentric as those of many students? Our norms may sometimes direct us to unnecessarily stigmatize our students' cultural backgrounds and trigger undesirable, but predictable, responses from their cultural communities.

An essay by Martha Maznevski considers *how deeply* intercultural training probes into students' most basic social identity and self-image. She draws from literature about identity and self-image and from her long intercultural training experience, currently as a professor with the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne. Much of her discussion is about how a trainer can gradually build trust to provide a supportive context for deep self-awareness and questioning of one's assumptions. She addresses my concern that trainers should take care about intervening too deeply by providing a training process view. Rather than explaining how a trainer can anticipate what "too deep" might mean in advance, she explains how to judge when training touches on areas that their students are not prepared to consider and how to adjust training at such points.

Brent Lyons follows by using research about *identity management and disclosure* of religious identity in the workplace to carefully consider when such disclosure does and when it does not have constructive consequences. His essay addresses my concern about whether either we as trainers or our participants fully understand the potentially permanent implications of revealing hidden identities for themselves and their communities. His thoughts are informed by his own recent research about disclosure of Christian identity in the United States and Korea.

Finally, David Herst speaks to the problem of *consent* from a human resources and legal perspective. He considers whether norms about informed consent followed for medical procedures and research projects in the United States can be adapted to intercultural training. He does so using five issues raised in the medical and research ethics literatures: voluntarism, capacity, disclosure, understanding, decision.

These essays are intended to promote the same sort of reflection about our professional norms for training that we want to see our students show when reflecting on their own cultural assumptions. Has our assumption about the arbitrary quality of all symbols become so firmly taken for granted as self-evident truth that culture groups which take exception to this assumption generate more emotion than reflective thought on our part? Are we willing and able to work with students-in-cultural-communities who want to use our insights to help them engage in effective intercultural relations, or do we really want to change their social identity or their cultural community? Are we willing and able to do so without challenging the most basic schemas around which students' sense of self is organized and the social identities that shape their closest personal relationships, or without trying to change their cultural community? It is toward that sort reflection about our own personal views and professional norms in intercultural training that this special issue is offered.

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Stepping on Cultural and Religious Assumptions

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THE “STEP ON JESUS” CONTROVERSY that emerged at Florida Atlantic University in the spring of 2013 (Peterson, 2014) reminded me that we as intercultural trainers have a professional culture of our own. The exercise’s point, that “symbols are arbitrary,” is difficult to gainsay from the scientific perspectives that are most legitimate in our scholarly culture. I also found discussions about its ethical implications to be largely individualistic. They rest on a strong distinction between an individual student and their cultural community and on personal choice. Reflecting the dominant social science culture of business studies, our professional culture shows the influences of individualism and the scientific basis of legitimate discussions (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Hofstede, 1996). When we act as researchers, these qualities of our professional culture often serve us well. The community controversy surrounding the exercise, however, reminded me that when we act as intercultural trainers, we should reflect on our own professional culture. When we control a class of students, we should see them both as individuals and as points of intercultural contact between our own and their cultural communities. Many such communities have religious and other assumptions about legitimate knowledge claims that differ from those in our professional culture.

Alternative Perspectives on “Arbitrary” Symbols

The tension that arose between the professional culture of intercultural trainers and some other cultures came from the point of the “step on Jesus” exercise that *all* symbols are arbitrary. This point rejects very deep, central elements of many cultures. From some religious standpoints, most symbols are created by people, but a few have been chosen by God. Within Christianity, one such symbol is the name *Jesus* when it refers to Christ. Within Islam, the name *Mohammed* when it refers to the Prophet has a similar status, as does *Yahweh* in Judaism. *AIB Insights* operates within our professional culture, so legitimate discussion about the truth of these religious claims is to either dismiss them as having no basis, or treat them as part of the culture of our audiences that we can describe but cannot evaluate. I will take the latter stance in the present essay. Beyond what happened in any specific classroom, the community reactions illustrate that what happens in our classrooms can challenge the basic belief systems not just of individual students in class, but of cultural communities outside of class. These considerations

include the centrality of training to self-schemas and social identity, the kind of self-disclosure we encourage and the place of individual consent.

Training Depth

Intercultural training necessarily surfaces students’ unquestioned assumptions. Training methods, including those about symbols, can target relatively superficial knowledge, somewhat deeper attitudes or very basic assumptions (Brislin, McNab, & Nayani, 2008). One concern in training is that challenging deep assumptions can generate so much discomfort in students that it spreads throughout the class and impedes learning (Du, Fan, & Feng, 2011). A second concern about deep training is with the personal and social implications of fundamental changes in our students’ sense of self and in the network of social relationships that sustain them. For example, do we have the ability and responsibility to deliberately use experiential exercises that encourage students to reject their cultural group and begin the process of replacing it with another? An even broader concern is with what happens when deep training affects cultural communities (Bhabha, 1985). Ordinarily, my own goal when doing culture-related work is to assume that my audience will retain their own social identity and learn how to better promote relationships between their own cultural group and others. Exercises in which students watch their colleagues under an instructor’s guidance dishonor basic elements of their own or another group’s culture may go deep enough that they may harm the student and my relationships with their cultural community.

Promoting Disclosure

Disclosure has been a central topic in social identity theory since its inception in Tajfel’s work (Turner, 1996). As a Jew born in Poland and fighting for the French during WWII, Tajfel was captured and placed in a German prisoner of war (POW) camp. To his captors, he was a **French** Jewish soldier. Believing that his life would be in greater danger were he known as a **Polish** Jew, he chose not to disclose his Polish identity. For much less life-threatening reasons, people routinely manage the impressions of others by choosing what hidden identities to disclose

(Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Disclosing stigmatized identities can produce anxiety and damage relationships (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Promoting disclosure in training can be destructive in some intercultural situations (Von Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004). Beliefs linked to religion can be sufficiently deep and potentially stigmatized that they are not casually revealed. People in work situations in the United States are often cautious about exposing their religious identity (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002). In many parts of the world, the relatively open and safe (for now) context of a training class can provide a setting for revealing identities that students may later regret. Exercises that promote disclosure of identities about religion, lifestyle, ethnicity and others, especially identities that are ordinarily protected in a student's societal context, have long term risks that can affect students and their cultural groups outside the classroom.

Consent

In my conversations about the "step on Jesus" exercise with colleagues, I found the view that students are not being forced to do anything was central to those who support its use. The instructions for the exercise make it clear that students need not comply with the exercise. Still, they are to remain in class to observe what others do. I did not encounter discussions about whether consent was needed about being present during the exercise. Most all discussions of consent rested on individualistic views of choice that includes a sharp distinction between acting and watching as well as distinctly Western views about the meaning of *adult*.

Lacking publications about informed consent for classroom exercises, the closest related literatures are about consent for human subjects research (Emanuel, Wendler, & Grady, 2000) and medical treatment (Applebaum, 2007). Both are in the context of the individualistic norms and rule-of-law orientation of the United States (Roberts, 2002). These literatures advocate providing patients and research participants with *information*, evaluating whether they are *competent* to understand it and ensuring that their participation is *voluntary* (Appelbaum, Lidz, & Klitzman, 2009). A few articles recognize that consent is shaped by participants' cultural and religious values (Roberts, 2002).

Consent occurs in a context. In the present example, this is a context of enforced legal protections, shared experiences and subgroup norms of students in the United States. US law protects various groups including religious groups as well as race, ethnic and gender groups. Many universities confirm such protection in their ethics statements. The Academy of Management's statement about ethical teaching indicates: "It is the duty of AOM members who are educators to show appropriate respect for students' feelings, interests, needs, contributions, intellectual

freedom, and rights to privacy" (Academy of Management, 2006, p. 3). US students, then, have reason to expect that professors will respect their basic religious beliefs, among other hidden identities. An informed consent process would need to ensure that students understand and feel unconstrained enough to waive these protections. The nesting of choices about university, major, courses and assignments raise a question about constraints on consent. In instructions that students do not need to take personal action to revile a particular racial, ethnic or gender group may not be sufficient, especially if the student needs to be present while others engage in that activity. Being present at such an event differs from reading or hearing about such an event (Graham, 1981).

The discussions that I encountered about informed consent to participate in class sessions that challenge students' own self-schemas and social identities and their cultural group's basic worldview were based on US views of students' personal maturity and stability. In the United States, the designation "adult" is typically used for someone once they reach age 18. Stage models of moral development, however, have long been available (Eisenberg, 2000; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977) which suggest that moral reasoning changes well into a persons' 20s. Recent

“Most all discussions of consent rested on individualistic views of choice that includes a sharp distinction between acting and watching as well as distinctly Western views about the meaning of adult.”

brain imaging documents the physiological brain maturation process that corresponds to psychological maturation (Tamnes et al., 2010). The legal argument that students have the right and responsibility to provide consent at age 18 may lead to different conclusions than does a maturity argument.

Reconsidering Personal Practice and Professional Norms in Intercultural Training

A substantial constraint on the license of US professors to do research as they see fit was imposed by Title II – Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research of the National Research Act of 1974. Psychological studies that revealed the inhumane behavior of people when placed in positions of authority caught the attention of legislators and of the public to pass this legislation. The "step on Jesus" exercise has certainly generated high-level government and public attention, although not yet of the same scope as these other examples. Apart from the threat of regulation, international business faculty need to ponder how we approach teaching a culturally diverse audience.

The “step on Jesus” controversy has left me with several thoughts that I now consider when doing intercultural training. One is to be cautious about encouraging students to engage in role play or watch others engage in role play that shows dishonor toward the basic self-schemas and social identities of themselves and those people in their main identity group. The lesson that symbols are arbitrary can be recast as indicating that they have no functional implications for anything in the physical world. Training can use real and hypothetical cases to make the point rather than re-enacting threats to the transcendental meaning of sacred words or religious symbols. Another thought is to take care when using an artificially safe, but transitory, training environment to overcome reluctance to disclose hidden identities. The long-term consequences of some disclosure may be better taken on by more permanent family members, close friends and cultural community leaders. The literature about medical and research consent leaves me more confident that I can explain discriminatory behavior that has happened outside the classroom than that I can ethically recreate it in the classroom. Consent by college students appears to be less adequately studied than have topics like ethical judgment and brain development.

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Managing Deep Intercultural Training Exercises

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IN THE “STEP ON JESUS” EXERCISE, the instructor asks students to write the letters J-E-S-U-S on a piece of paper, reflect, then step on the paper. The exercise is a powerful mechanism for demonstrating the relationship between physical artifacts, the symbolic meaning they develop and the importance of that meaning for social identity. Understanding this artifact-to-identity link is important for understanding the nature of culture and developing empathy with people from other cultures, two key aspects of effective international management.

At the same time, each learner’s social identity and relationship to the symbols being used to illustrate the lesson affect the learner’s openness to developing cultural knowledge and empathy. Exercises that illustrate the deep artifact–identity link, like the “step on Jesus” exercise, need to be selected and conducted with sensitivity to the environment and guided by social identity perspectives.

Cultural Basics: Artifacts Become Symbols with Formalized Meaning

The most important construct about the social context of international business is culture: the system of shared values and norms among a specific group of people. Culture is often analyzed at several levels (Schein, 1984) with artifacts being visible manifestations, and underlying values, norms and assumptions being less visible, even to the people in the culture. All people belong to multiple cultural groups with shared values, norms and assumptions. These groups may be related to nation, region, religion, school, profession, company, football team, music genre and so on. Usually, at any one time, one cultural context dominates a person’s norms, values and assumptions.

Artifacts take on symbolic meaning when a group repeatedly uses them in the same situation, and they denote meaning beyond their objective characteristics. For example, certain Greek letters symbolize one thing to physicists, another to philosophy scholars and something else to members of sororities and fraternities in US universities. Like all aspects of culture, their meaning is passed on from generation to generation.

People within a culture are often unaware that a symbol meaningful to them is not meaningful in another cultural context, and vice versa. The link between artifacts and symbols can seem arbitrary when viewed from the outside, but it is highly meaningful to a group’s members. If

managers are to be able to work effectively in multiple cultures, they must understand and empathize with the nature of this link.

The “step on Jesus” exercise is intended to demonstrate this link. It directs students to reflect on how the cultural context shapes the meaning that someone gives to the symbol, and the effect of that symbol on members of their culture. It asks learners to question their taken-for-granted assumptions about the links between artifacts and symbols.

So far, so good.

Enter Identity

If culture were only about an objective, dispassionate mapping of artifacts to symbols such exercises would never raise controversy.

However, culture also creates identity. Individuals feel a bond with others in their cultural group and define themselves according to the group. When group identity is strong, members are willing to follow the norms of the group and sacrifice for the group. In return, the group provides social meaning and support to its members, ranging from physical survival to emotional support.

Self-identity is a cognitive schema of knowledge about oneself. Social identity is the aspect of this cognitive schema associated with belonging to cultural and other groups. Social identities both reduce uncertainty (cognitive aspect) and increase self-esteem (motivational aspect). Social identities differ in salience, distinctiveness, and prestige (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). A strong (deep) identity is highly salient, distinctive, and prestigious.

A salient identity is readily accessible to aid interpretation and action. National or religious identities may be accessible most of the time, while an identity with a sports team may be accessible only when the team is playing. An identity is distinctive when it is unique. A technology engineer in a services firm may have a stronger professional identity than the service providers do. An identity is prestigious when it has — in the beholder’s eyes — high status. For people in Canada or the United States, cultural identity with Western Europe is often seen as more prestigious than cultural identity with other parts of the world.

Beyond linking artifacts with symbols, the “step on Jesus” exercise illustrates the nature and power of social identity from culture: for most

people who have a strong Christian identity (i.e., for whom Christianity is salient, distinctive and prestigious), stepping on Jesus goes against the norms, values and social commitment associated with Christianity. The feeling of discomfort powerfully demonstrates that this identity is not only related to objective links of artifacts to symbols, but is also deeply emotional for some people. The empathy required to see this lesson is very important for cross-cultural management. The “step on Jesus” exercise helps students learn the entire artifact–identity connection and its implications for different groups.

Okay, more complex, but still so far, so good.

Threats to Identity Can Block or Negate Learning

When we face a situation that is interpreted negatively by our identity schema, we feel a threat to our sense of self. At minimum, this threat decreases our self-esteem. Handling multiple identities increases psychological work (Fitzsimmons, 2014), so if we cannot resolve conflicting identities, we are tempted to reject identities that threaten ones we hold deeply.

As international business professors, we may argue that understanding such an identity threat is a very important point of this lesson. However, the catch is this: *learning under identity threat hinders learning in general* (Sherman et al., 2013). The stronger the identity threat, the more it hinders learning. If we take a look at the “step on Jesus” exercise as a social identity threat, we start to see how it can be damaging.

The exercise threatens a particular social identity: Christianity. For many Christian students, this is an identity that is salient, distinctive and prestigious. It is salient because it covers so many aspects of life and was likely developed during a very formative period of the student's life. It is distinctive because it dictates a set of norms and values that

two important social identities: an academic identity with a set of norms dictating that the student comply with the professor's instructions to “step on Jesus” and a Christian identity with a set of norms dictating that she or he comply with the church's norms to respect and hold sacred “Jesus.” Managing multiple identities takes a psychological toll (Fitzsimmons, 2014). Therefore, if both identities are felt strongly, the situation could become volatile. There would be a strong need to resolve the uncertainty, and the most likely way of doing this is to segment the identities, for example by exiting the situation.

Facilitating Learning about the Artifact–Identity Link

In order to develop as international managers, students must learn about the deep and powerful relationship between artifacts and cultural identity. The research on cognition and identity provides advice about how to help students learn this concept.

First, the general environment in the class and the educational institution should support multiple identities. It should be “okay” for people to belong to different groups, and students should be encouraged to learn about each others' identities. Professors, too, should be aware of their own scientific subculture, and reflect upon the assumptions implied within this subculture and its potential unintended consequences for students' learning. All students — and professors — will experience identity threats from time to time; however, an environment of self-affirmation (“I may disagree with you, but I still think you're a good person”) gives students the strength to manage the threats without them blocking learning.

Second, the professor should sequence a series of artifact–identity exercises from ones that are likely to be less strong for students, to ones that are stronger. For example, the professor could start with the relationship between artifacts and identity for Greek letters as discussed above. These cultures are typically learned later in life and are weaker than religion, while still being strong enough (e.g., both prestigious and distinctive) to evoke emotional responses and the realization that others

may not hold the same assumptions. The bank HSBC has a popular series of advertisements that illustrate these relationships well. Students therefore learn the basic lesson about the relationship between artifacts and identity, before having their own strongest identities threatened.

Whenever teaching about the relationship between artifacts and identity, the professor should ensure there is enough time for a thorough discussion and should be prepared to lead this discussion carefully, using language and processes that validate students' identities. The links among artifacts–symbols–culture–identity should be drawn out explicitly. Different individuals' emotions should be surfaced and

“In order to develop as international managers, students must learn about the deep and powerful relationship between artifacts and cultural identity.”

are different from mainstream society. And it is prestigious because it identifies a sense of worthiness not just in this life but also in a life after. If the identity is very deep and strong, then a threat to the identity is also deep and strong, and raises a large barrier to learning.

Moreover, the request to “step on Jesus” comes out of the norms of another potentially strong culture — the academic culture. For an undergraduate, this identity could have high salience (especially during class sessions), distinctiveness (universities are set aside from the rest of society) and prestige (a university education is considered aspirational). A Christian student in this exercise could easily feel conflict between

shared, demonstrating that artifact–identity links vary among individuals. This discussion is *not* the time to disagree with students’ values, or to allow students to disagree with each others’ values. The discussion should keep the focus on helping students understand the link from artifacts to identity and their implications in different cultural groups.

Finally, the professor should have a “Plan B” and be prepared for things to go wrong and become volatile. Wars break out between and within countries, companies’ international customer relationships and cross-border alliances dissolve because of lack of understanding each others’ symbols and identity. In the classroom, this kind of misunderstanding usually manifests itself in more simple fight (arguing with each other) or flight (leave the class, avoid the class) behavior, so it is not usually dangerous; however, it is certainly a missed opportunity for learning. When the professor feels that the discussion is heading into a danger zone, the first thing to do is acknowledge this explicitly, and pause for reflection, e.g., “Let’s pause for a minute before we go further down this path. Please take a moment individually, and write down exactly what you are feeling right now and why you feel it.” This allows students to reflect on their own identity and how it is related to the current situation. Then the students can take a few minutes to discuss in pairs or small groups their reactions; this facilitates self-affirmation and a more supportive environment for managing identity threat. The professor should then validate the controversy by linking it to the artifact–identity relation, e.g., “I know this discussion is emotionally charged right now, and you are feeling many different things. This is a good illustration of exactly what we are learning about today – that culture is not just about how you hand over business cards, it goes much deeper. Let’s try to understand why this discussion is so difficult, and that will help us understand culture better too.” The professor should be prepared to abandon the rest of the exercise and instead focus on debriefing the volatile situation. In fact, the volatile situation is more “real” than the exercise and provides an even better illustration of the artifact–identity link.

“Step on Jesus”: Dangerous but Important Territory

Exercises that help students learn the profound relationships among artifacts, symbols, culture and identity are extremely important in the international business class repertoire. Without them, students may miss key self-awareness and empathy lessons that are critical for effective international work. Rather than avoid these exercises, professors should apply conceptual rigor to preparing and discussing them appropriately. Preventing severe identity threat and facilitating the development of new knowledge about alternative artifact–identity relationships turns such exercises into powerful learning experiences.

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Issues in Uncovering Hidden Identities in Intercultural Training

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INTERCULTURAL TEACHERS considering exercises that delve into sensitive topics, such as religion, need to consider that such exercises can often lead students to make disclosure decisions and that disclosure decisions have important implications. Similar to sexual orientation and political affiliation, religious identity is concealable in that religion cannot be identified simply based on appearance, and thus religious students may face disclosure decisions about whether they should openly talk about or actively conceal their religious worldview. Some students may be hesitant to talk about their religion because of potential stigmatization, but other students may be compelled to talk about their religion to take advantage of benefits associated with expressing oneself in an authentic way. This predicament has been referred to as the “disclosure dilemma.” The disclosure dilemma refers to how individuals with concealable stigmatized identities attempt to balance the risks and benefits of disclosure when making decisions about how, when and to whom to disclose their identity (Goffman, 1963). A decision process in the face of threat, disclosure dilemmas can involve high cognitive resources, time and effort (Kahneman, 2003). Disclosure dilemmas are a significant source of stress for members of stigmatized social groups (Jones & King, in press). Intercultural teachers can do much to affect students’ disclosure decisions by managing

Classroom pressures to disclose a potentially stigmatized identity can be threatening and, as such, students may engage in deliberate, effortful and cognitively taxing decision processes (Kahneman, 2003) about whether or not they want to disclose. Disclosure decisions usually result from weighing anticipated risks and benefits to disclosing a stigmatized identity (Goffman, 1963). Students who fear that openly expressing their religious worldview may make them susceptible to interpersonal derogation and discrimination may choose to conceal their religion. Students who anticipate that disclosure of their religion would allow them to authentically express themselves and share ideas in a safe environment may choose to disclose their religion. Although concealing may reduce the likelihood of derogation and discrimination, concealing is also costly for students because keeping a secret can be anxiety-provoking, potentially negatively affecting social relationships and school performance (Goffman, 1963). Further, openly expressing oneself reduces anxiety around keeping a secret and allows students to express themselves in line with their self-concept (Jones & King, in press). In a recent cross-nation study conducted in the United States and South Korea (Lyons et al., in press), Christian-identified employees were more likely to conceal their religion (and less likely to disclose) when they perceived higher risks to disclosure and when their organization

was not open to diverse religious expression. They were more likely to disclose their religion (and less likely to conceal) if they perceived that the risks of disclosure were low and that their organization was open to diverse religious expression. The authors also found that concealing religion was related

“Intercultural teachers can do much to affect students’ disclosure decisions by managing the risks and benefits associated with disclosure within their classroom.”

the risks and benefits associated with disclosure within their classroom. However, before choosing to implement sensitive exercises teachers need to carefully consider the broader social context including aspects of their classroom, university and societal contexts that students are likely to share, as well as the potentially different subcultures of particular students. With the social context in mind, teachers also need to manage the social relations within their classroom, fostering a climate of openness, support and respect, while being careful not to inadvertently manipulate students into disclosing hidden identities. Without doing so, teachers risk furthering the anxiety and even potential harm of those students whose identities are being challenged.

to negative outcomes for the employees, including higher turnover intentions and reduced job satisfaction and well-being, whereas the outcomes for disclosure were generally positive. As the results of Lyons and colleagues’ suggest, disclosing religion has generally beneficial outcomes and concealing has generally negative outcomes. Findings like these that suggest the consequences of concealment and benefits of disclosure (also see research on the disclosure decisions of lesbian, gay and bisexual employees: Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007) might easily be over interpreted to support the view that teachers should focus their efforts on encouraging students to disclose hidden identities.

Teachers, however, need to recognize differences in audience and context. The results of the above-mentioned research do not suggest that teachers should blindly encourage or expect disclosure from their students. The experiences of adult employees who are not being pressured to disclose a hidden identity may not generalize to the experiences of students. Further, teachers need to consider the broader social context of the classroom, university and cultural differences in communication before adopting activities that may lead to sensitive disclosure decisions. Classroom activities that challenge the religious worldview of students may induce conflict and, if the conflict is not managed properly, lead to derogation and discrimination of those whose views are being challenged. This conflict can occur inside the classroom itself where the teacher has an opportunity to intervene, but it can also occur outside the classroom. In such contexts, the risks of disclosure may override the benefits and students may decide to conceal their religion (Lyons et al., in press). Further, as noted earlier, concealing an identity is associated with several psychological, interpersonal and performance costs, and by implementing a disclosure exercise in a non-supportive environment teachers may indirectly exacerbate stigmatization. Sensitive exercises in unsupportive contexts may also inadvertently manipulate students into making quick decisions about disclosure rather than allowing them the time and possible need for advice from others in their subculture to make such decisions. As such, the “step on Jesus” exercise may be more appropriate for students at a Catholic university where students may be more open to discussing their religion because they anticipate support for their religious worldview. The same may not apply to the context of state universities like Florida Atlantic University (Peterson, 2014) where such support may not be assured and students may reasonably fear stigmatization.

The “step on Jesus” exercise draws attention to disclosure of religion as a hidden identity in the United States, but the Academy of International Business certainly needs to consider other hidden identities besides religion, such as sexual orientation (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007), and other societal contexts besides the United States. Regarding other societal contexts, Lyons and colleagues (in press) found national differences between the United States and South Korea in tendencies to conceal and disclose religion. In the United States, where individuality and self-interests are valued, open disclosure of religion was more common than it was in South Korea. In South Korea, where the suppression of self-interest relative to collective goals is especially valued (Hofstede & Minkov, 2012), concealing was more common than in the United States. This difference in national context suggests that in classrooms composed of students with diverse cultural backgrounds, teachers need to consider how communication norms about self-expression can affect disclosure decisions. In such contexts, disclosure of religion and other stigmatized social identities may be more sensitive for some students (like the South Koreans) than for others (like the students from the United States).

Contexts where teachers may be unsure about the supportiveness of students’ social context or cultural differences in communication norms about disclosure require special caution. It is ill advised in such contexts

to implement exercises that could lead to disclosure decisions that students make hastily or that carry the potential for further stigmatization that students lack the skills or experience to accurately anticipate. Perhaps intercultural teachers could draw upon less sensitive and less culturally biased exercises that still challenge important attitudes, yet avoid stress associated with personal disclosure and concealment and also allow students to be authentic to their worldview. If other exercises are not as effective and teachers choose to adopt sensitive exercises, teachers need to foster classroom environments that are conducive to safe and supportive discussion among culturally diverse students. Managing risks and benefits of disclosure within the classroom will go a long way in ensuring the effectiveness of sensitive intercultural communication exercises.

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Informed Consent for Cross-Cultural Classroom Exercises: Teaching Tool or Wishful Thinking?

David E. L. Herst, Florida Atlantic University, USA

PROMOTING THE KIND OF VOLUNTARISM that is typically considered to be an ethical necessity when making personal choices is challenging in situations involving intercultural training. Both the need for and process of obtaining informed consent that promotes norms of voluntarism under conditions that occur in medical treatment and research situations is well recognized (Carmen & Joffe, 2005). The parallel need for and process for obtaining informed consent in the post-secondary classroom is considered less often. Under some circumstances classroom exercises could be deemed unethical, particularly when they push for high levels of self-disclosure, violation of social or group norms and/or the questioning of core values and beliefs (Peterson, 2014). Ethical concerns are particularly important to instructors of cross-cultural coursework, which often includes experiential learning (role play, behavior observation, etc.). Experiential exercises require active thinking by students, which potentially leads to higher-order learning. Experiential exercises often use self-discovery to encourage students to consider alternatives to their core values and beliefs.

“Cross-cultural classroom exercises resemble some medical and social science research, particularly research that involves attitude change.”

Cross-cultural classroom exercises resemble some medical and social science research, particularly research that involves attitude change. Furthermore, instructors may use some level of deception if they withhold information about what the participant will do or experience. This deception in turn may cause unintended harm. For instance, Baumrind (1985) noted that in Milgram's study on obedience participants had not known that they were capable of shocking an individual to the point of injury or worse. Baumrind questioned whether the insight brought on by the experiment was unethical because the subject was not given the choice of fully understanding what they

would experience. This “inflicted insight” may be both difficult for individuals to absorb or even erroneous. The same could occur in cross-cultural classroom exercises that are conducted without full disclosure of what will be done and/or what students may experience. The potential for harm suggests the ethical need for informed consent by participating students.

Informed Consent

Both the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) insist that certain requirements be met before medical procedures can be ethically performed or research can be ethically conducted (APA, 2010a; AMA Code of Medical Ethics, 2014; The Belmont Report, 1979). Chief among these is informed consent.

Principles of informed consent are rooted in respect for an individual's autonomy and consist of five elements (Meisel, Roth, & Lidz, 1997, in Carmen & Joffe, 2005; Eyler & Jeste, 2006). *Voluntarism* means that a

patient or research participant is free to make choices without coercion and “unfair persuasions and inducement” (Carmen & Joffe, 2005: 637). *Capacity* means that a person is able to make a choice, understand a situation and rationally process information. *Disclosure* means providing enough information for a person to understand a procedure. *Understanding* is whether or not the patient

or subject comprehends “the information given and appreciate(s) its relevance to her individual situation” (Carmen & Joffe, 2005: 637). Finally, *decision* is the point when a person actually consents.

Patient or Student?

Medical and research models provide a useful starting point for analyzing the use of informed consent in intercultural instruction. Following the five elements of informed consent, to at least some degree, students attend universities and classes on a voluntary basis (volun-

tarism); demonstrate capacity by making the choice to take specific courses (capacity); are given information about a class and its requirements (disclosure); have in principle the opportunity to ask instructors and other students for clarification should they lack understanding (understanding); and ultimately make the decision to participate, to attend a different class or request alternative assignments (decision). Yet the question remains: Is the general fulfillment of consent norms sufficient?

The Challenge of Informed Consent in Cross-Cultural Instruction

The challenges in obtaining fully informed consent in a cross-cultural course are eerily similar to obtaining informed consent from a patient or research participant. This starts with context, in this case of the classroom and enrollment in post-secondary education. Being part of a class in a university comes with the understanding that potentially uncomfortable concepts and beliefs that can promote self-reflection and self-criticism are likely to be presented. Universities often codify this as a norm in their mission statements. For example, the mission statement for Florida Atlantic University (FAU), where the “step on Jesus” exercise became controversial (Peterson, 2014), clearly states that the organization is to promote “academic and personal development, discovery, and lifelong learning” (Florida Atlantic University, 2005). Yet FAU policy also states that students can be excused from coursework to participate in religious observation (Florida Atlantic University, n.d.). Thus FAU, like many other academic institutions, finds itself balancing potentially conflicting goals. In classroom exercises, particularly in cross-cultural coursework, the academic mission may overshadow religious protection in the minds of instructors and students.

Context expectations and norms are well researched (Trueblood, 2012; Weistein, 1991), and classroom expectations are not lost on students or instructors. Therefore, is a student’s choice truly without undue influence when social expectations and norms of remaining in a classroom persist? Even with the option of exiting an exercise, are equivalent learning options really available to students without leaving the course? How does an instructor determine when student requests for alternative assignments are valid and when they are disingenuous?

The cultural background of the individual may also influence informed consent. Carmen and Joffe (2005) note that medical decisions in some cultural groups may reside in family members other than a patient. In the classroom, consent norms arising from the dominant US culture may be hard to apply when a student comes from a background where people are more likely to focus on group well-being above individual needs (Hall, 1976; Punnett, 2012). How can informed consent be obtained for students who come from a background where refusing to participate in a group exercise may not even be considered an option?

Other issues with using informed consent persist. Peterson (2014)

questions whether young adults are self-aware enough to make decisions that may change or alter their self-conceptions and core beliefs. Research into self-determination in medical decisions would appear to answer in the affirmative (Weihorn & Campbell, 1982), particularly when the health implications are serious (Scherer & Repucci, 1988). However, there is no equivalent research using research consent or course-based exercises. So what happens when the context is a classroom, where the consequences for physical health and survival are lower, but where harmful personal and social implications are possible?

Concerning the element of disclosure, many social scientists fear that by divulging too much during informed consent the participant will alter his or her behavior, even in studies that do not have deception-based designs (Crow, Wiles, Heath, & Charles, 2006). Similarly, cross-cultural instructors who promote higher-order learning may not mention the expected feelings an exercise is designed to elicit in the hopes that the student will learn by “experiencing” a new perspective. How can instructors provide true informed consent when doing so involves divulgence at a level that may short-circuit this process?

Lastly there is the element of understanding. The issue here may be quite simple: if the purpose of an exercise is to help an individual understand a concept, then attempting to get them to understand the exercise in advance would appear to make the exercise itself redundant. Why even conduct the exercise if understanding can be achieved in another way that does not pose the threat of inflicted insight? Hence, it may be impossible to meet the criterion of understanding as part of an informed consent process when doing classroom exercises.

Addressing Inflicted Insight in Classroom Exercises

Inflicted insight as a consequence of classroom exercises can be addressed *in part* by using a two-pronged approach. As in psychological research, *in addition to* obtaining informed consent, adequately debriefing students during post-exercise discussion is important. Guidelines for debriefing could be adapted from those put forth for psychological research (APA, 2010). Yet the point is moot if informed consent cannot be reliably obtained. By applying the medical and research models for meeting informed consent requirements to the needs related to cross-cultural instruction, we can gain a better insight into these difficulties and consider appropriate solutions.

Summary and Conclusions

Classroom instructors of cross-cultural topics often find themselves administering exercises that are designed to elicit attitude changes and self-awareness. However such exercises may be unwelcome or have unintended consequences for students (Baumrind, 1985). The one-two punch of informed consent and post-exercise debriefing would appear to satisfactorily address this issue. Yet questions persist regarding

whether informed consent is even possible. Specifically:

- The context of a classroom creates unavoidable pressure on students to complete assignments even when they find them disagreeable.
- Students from high-context cultures may be especially reluctant to opt out of exercises, or even voice concerns.
- Providing informed consent requires that instructors be properly trained in applying its principles.

Given these issues, informed consent does not appear to be either practical or even possible in a classroom setting. What, then, is a cross-cultural instructor to do?

1. *Consider the audience.* Executives, senior government administrators and military officers as students may have different intercultural experiences and job requirements than traditional students.
2. *Use less invasive exercises.* Evaluate whether an exercise is specifically designed to invoke feels around core beliefs, norms and expectations rather than less central aspects of self. Modify or replace accordingly.
3. *Use informed consent and post-exercise debriefing procedures as exercises unto themselves.* By involving the students in analyzing cultural and contextual issues surrounding informed consent, instructors may be able to invoke a new set of norms for the classroom.
4. *Avoid using deception as a teaching tool.*

Studies of how informed consent is viewed and best utilized in cross-cultural coursework could not be located. Yet ethically we must approach the subject of inflicted insight with great caution, at least until we better understand how it may be managed in a classroom setting.

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