Intercultural Sensitivity Development Through Flow Using Media to Stimulate Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

Intercultural Sensitivity Development Through Flow: Using Media to Stimulate Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

Lucius Von Joo

ABSTRACT

Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi founded positive psychology in 1999 in the pursuit of looking at the positive features that make life worth living. In the past psychology mostly focused on the deficiencies of humans. One of the theories that led to Positive Psychology was Flow. Flow is characterized by a person's complete absorption in an activity and is often referred to as the optimal experience. In this study participants were exposed to unfamiliar cultures using films and online media in an attempt to create optimal experiences while learning about the unfamiliar. These optimal experiences would be a component for Parasocial Contact Hypothesis exposure. Contact Hypothesis is the idea that people become closer and care if they are exposed to an unfamiliar individual or group through non-threatening experiences. Participants were exposed to seven different cultures throughout the study and kept journals of their encounters. These journals were coded and rated using the Bennet Scale which measures Development of Intercultural sensitivity when encountering experience of difference.

INTRODUCTION

Many schools that teach second language and culture have mission statements that target learning language and multicultural awareness or sensitivity. The former has many tests that are respected in multiple settings whereas the latter usually remains unmeasured. This makes an imbalance of how the two mission goals are represented in curriculum design. This paper is an explorative case study which attempts to measure and discuss participants' level of cultural sensitivity development.

Can you remember a time when talking with a friend and found that instead of ten

minutes passing it had been an hour? Some would describe this feeling "as being in the moment." You are not only in the moment but you are also getting constant feedback from what you are interacting with. Each expression, sound, or gesture your friend gives you is another point of measure for you to react. Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990; 1998) describes this phenomenon as being in a state of Flow. Flow, also known as an optimal experience, is generally defined as a complex and positive state characterized by deep involvement and absorption, supporting personal growth, well-being and optimal functioning in daily life. The channel of Flow is seen as entered when a high level of skill is called upon to attempt with an equal level of challenge (Figure 1).
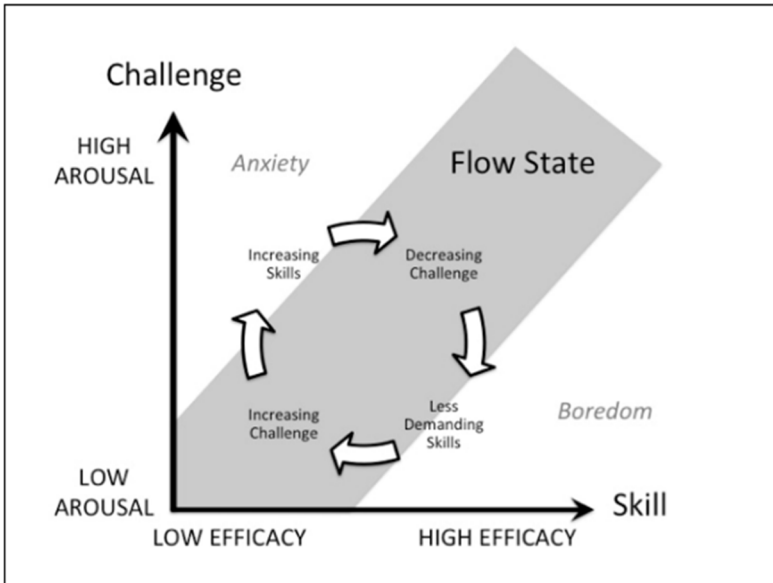

Figure 1. The channel of flow greyed out to show the direction an individual goes in to reach a Flow State.

While in a Flow State the individual is intrinsically motivated to keep doing whatever it is that got them there. It is no wonder many education researchers have investigated when and where the flow state occurs for learners. Flow can occur in many different settings. In this research the course in which I was basing my case study was focused on film and online media samples. The course content made me particularly drawn towards research that focused on media interaction which facilitated a Flow State. Sherry (2004) argued that elements of flow occur when we interact with media poses an equal challenge with our level of understanding. The state of flow was connected to an individual's ability to interpret messages conveyed by the media they are interacting with. Shin (2006) further analyzed flow in the virtual world of online interactions. Shin's study found characteristics of flow when students' were able to adjust their own challenge by having control of the media they were interacting with.

Sociology, anthropology, and foreign language courses often use media to expose learners to new situations and cultures that they are unfamiliar with. This vicarious atmosphere of experiencing the unfamiliar gives learners a chance to have contact while remaining in their comfort zone (Harwood & Vincze, 2011). However these moments of exposure are not guaranteed to lead to intercultural development (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010). In the past social psychology has observed the occurrence of prejudice against those outside intergroup relations. The individual or group can be perceived as an outsider for any number of arbitrary differences. Social neuroscience has recently supported these findings through neuro mapping studies. Individuals connected to Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) exhibited prejudice within microseconds of being shown images of outsiders (Fiske, 2008). For example, when participants were shown images of homelessness or drug addicts their fMRI showed stimulus of the insula which is usually reserved for inanimate objects that emit a reaction of disgust. In short participants were dehumanizing the subject in the photo

within milliseconds. There were also comparable findings with other photos that showed subjects with a different ethnicity from the participant. In this case, many of the MRI showed activity in the amygdala, which is the fight or flight section of the brain. However, Fiske found that this does not always have to be the case. If the situation is slightly altered the participants MRI were significantly different. When participants were asked to consider what the subject's favorite food was in the photo the MRI had no clear indication of prejudice. The insula and amygdala activity spikes were not observed and instead sections of the brain that are associated with empathy were recorded.

In the right circumstance individuals can connect with a person outside their perceived inner group (Allport, 1954). These circumstances should be free of classification if possible. Fiske found that whenever the brain was required to classify a stranger in an image stress was recorded. This occurred with any form of classification. For example, when participants were asked to classify whether a subject in an image was under or over the age of 18 they exhibited the same stress in the amygdala as when exposed to ethnicities they had less exposure to. Which suggests classifying other people can stimulate circumstances of prejudice. These findings further support the concept of contact hypothesis. If we have the opportunity to be exposed to unfamiliar people in non-stressful situations we can connect and care for a previously perceived outer group or individual. Therefore the argument for non-stressful situations that encourage a state of flow is a starting point for researching an individual's level of intercultural sensitivity. Contact hypothesis has many proven cases of success, one significant longitudinal example of this would be school integration (Pettigrew, 2003).

Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) also argued that the effects of contact hypothesis do not have to be exclusive to local contact. Circumstances in which people can learn an unfamiliar group can lead to Parasocial Contact Hypothesis (PCH). These are situations in which individuals are interacting with media in an interpersonal way and grow to connect

with the subject of said media. If individuals are in fact able to develop a higher level of intercultural sensitivity through PCH this would be another measurable argument for language schools. Therefore it is the interest of this case study to investigate the following two questions.

- Is it possible to get a clear measure of students' level of cultural sensitivity?
- Does the level of parasocial contact hypothesis occur equally across cultural cues?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this study participants were exposed to seven different cultures. The first culture was selected by the instructor and the remaining six were chosen by participants as a group. After viewing media samples portraying the different cultures participants kept journals of their reactions. These reactions were coded and rated using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS; Bennett, 1993; 2011), also known as the Bennet scale.
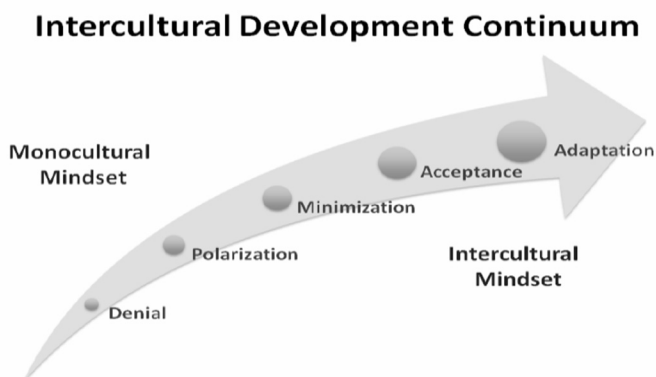

Intercultural Development Continuum

Monocultural Mindset

Denial

Polarization

Minimization

Acceptance

Adaptation

Intercultural Mindset

Figure 2. A simplified illustration of the stages in the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Participants:

Participants were 35 undergraduate students enrolled at Kanda University of International Studies at the Junior and Senior class level. The class sampled for this case study was an elective course that students received a letter grade based on a developed blog and final presentation on and mini-ethnography developed by the student. All students participating in the course had achieved a minimum TOEIC score of 650 as a prerequisite. The course used for this case study was titled Subcultures in Film and Online. This case study was conducted by the instructor of the course. Of the 35 students there was 23 Female and 12 Male. 2 of the students identified as Japanese, 2 as Korean and 1 as Japanese-American. All participants kept journals and responded to all seven cultures, if the participant was not present in a class in which a new culture was introduced they were given the media samples to observe outside of class.

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

After the course concluded all reflections were collated and then randomized to avoid coder bias. Each reflection was then coded under using the rubric in Figure 3. If a reflection had components that fit into two different bands it was coded twice. For example, a participant's introductory section in their reflection could fit in the Defense level however if the remainder of that same reflection fit more into the Adaptation band it was split apart and coded into both.

Ethnocentric stages:

Ethnocentrism assumes that "the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality"

Denial	Defense	Minimization
DENIAL of cultural difference: 1. Isolation: I live isolated in my homogeneous group, and I am uninterested in experiencing difference. 2. Separation: I intentionally separate myself from cultural difference to protect my own worldview.	DEFENSE against cultural difference: The world is organized into "us and them." My own culture is obviously the best, which is why 1. Denigration: I denigrate other cultures. 2. Superiority: My culture is superior to other cultures 3. Reversal: My adopted culture is superior to my own original cultural. I went native.	MINIMIZATION of cultural difference: 1. Physical Universalism: We humans have all the same physical characteristics: we must eat, procreate, and die. These common biological features dictate behavior that is basically recognizable across cultures. 2. Transcendent Universalism: Whether we know it or not, deep down all humans share basically the same universal values. I assume that elements of my own cultural worldview are experienced as universal. Danger: cultural differences are often trivialized or romanticized.

Ethnorelative stages:

Ethnorelativism supposes that "cultures can only be understood relative to one another, and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context"

Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
ACCEPTANCE of cultural difference: I recognize and accept the fact that my own culture is just one of a number of equally complex worldviews. Therefore, I accept 1. Respect for Behavioral Difference: all behavior 2. Respect for Value Difference: that all values and beliefs exist in a cultural context. I am curious and respectful toward cultural difference.	ADAPTATION to cultural difference: 1. Empathy: I have developed enough intercultural communication skills to be able to adapt to difference and consciously shift, through empathy, into another perspective, into another cultural frame of reference. I can also act in culturally appropriate ways in the other culture. 2. Pluralism: I understand that difference must always be understood within the context of the relevant culture. I have internalized more than one worldview	INTEGRATION of cultural difference: 1. Contextual Evaluation: I am able to manipulate multiple cultural frames of reference in my evaluation of a situation. I am conscious of myself as a chooser of alternatives. 2. Constructive Marginality: My identity is not primarily based on any one culture. I am a constant creator of my own reality.

Figure 3. A detailed explanation of the rubric used to code the participant's recorded reactions.

RESULTS

Figure 4 shows all student reflections coded across the six levels of the bennet scale. The graph combines all the seven reflections for each participant. Denial and interrogation had the lowest numbers of occurrences and acceptance being the mode. The data would make a bell curve if there was not a large dip in the minimization stage. Each cultural cue had different results which is shown in Figure 5.
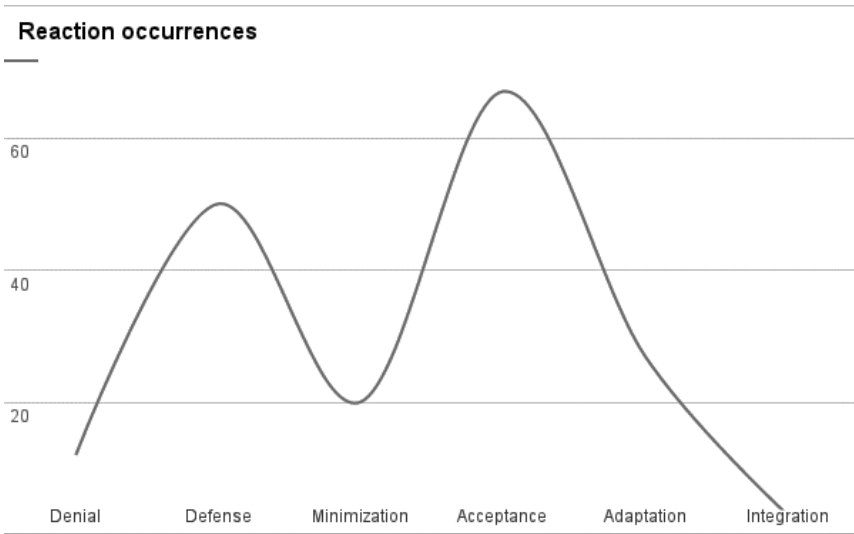
Reaction occurrences

Figure 4. All participant reflections coded and graphed.

Figure 5 shows the data dissected into the DMIS percentages for each of the seven cultural cues addressed. The X-axis shows the different cultural cues that the participants responded to. The X axis categories are named after the sample media participants observed. The seven cues are arranged chronologically from left to right starting at Juggalo and ending with Persepolis. The Y-axis is the percentage of the DMIS level in which participants reflections were coded. There was a downward trend of denial in which with no cases emerging for the last three cues. The other DMIS levels varied significantly with no other chronological trends emerging.
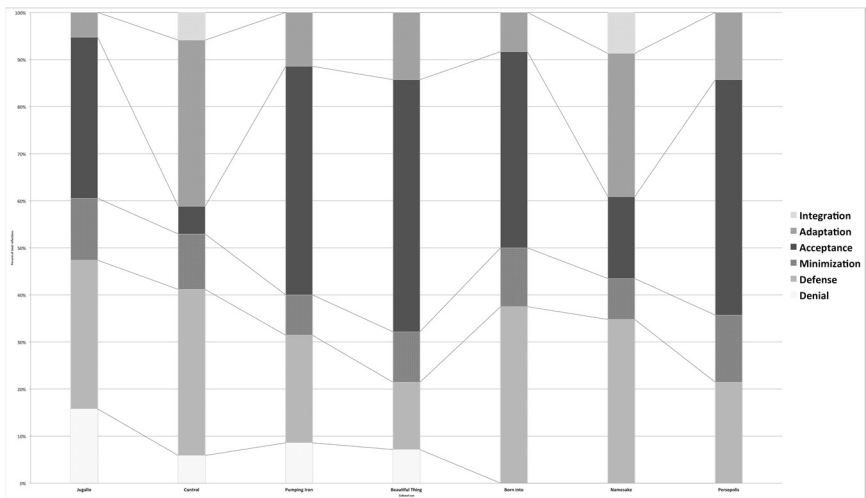
Figure 5. Each cultural cue separated and shaded with by percentage of occurrence for each level of the Bennet scale.

DISCUSSION

The downward trend of reflections that were coded into the DMIS denial level suggest that PCH had an effect. The fact that participants stopped making comments at the lowest level of the DMIS could suggest that having constant circumstances of PCH may lead to a general development in cultural sensitivity. Even though participants only spent a little time with each new culture, the continued exposure through optimal experiences to unfamiliar cultures through media may have had an effect on how unfamiliar cultures are approached in general. These trends of sensitivity did not carry over into the higher level of the DMIS. Consistent DMIS development may have happened for some participants but as a collective this only happened at the denial level. This research was designed to look at group trends to measure the effect of the class program. However individual Intercultural development may

have been significant for some participants. This factor could be explored in future studies and may show an emergence of susceptibility to the effects of PCH. If this was done, it may be helpful to conduct background surveys of participants to see how the trajectory of development occurs. However, for the case of this research participants data was collected together and kept anonymous, analyzing the group as a whole.

Outside of the trend in the denial stage, each new cultural cue yielded very different results. This may be do to the culture itself, the class influence, or the media in which it was encountered. Each new culture we encounter has the potential to provoke cultural conflict (Barbanti, 2005). This cultural conflict could also be due to the way in which the culture was represented in media. Throughout the course we discussed the effects that authorship, motivation and quality of content may have, but that does not stop conflict from occurring. If a culture that we have never been exposed to is villainize the first time it is encountered this will leave a strong impact. For example many weekly crime or hospital dramas may add a character from an unfamiliar culture purely for shock value. These characters are seen as a one time topic. This formula will help ratings, however the writers have very little responsibility in giving dimension or accuracy to this character because they will not be seen after their debut episode (Fiske, 1988;). There is often major differences of a tv show or film represents a culture depending on if the authors or inside or outside the displayed culture. Also if the media is labeled as a documentary or narrative also changes its reception. Media will keep being made and viewed irregardless of these factors. These factors may have influenced the differing levels and lack of trends outside the denial stage seen in Figure 5. The delivery in how the media is approached as a class is something that further research could explore. The class could also look into cultural conflict mapping (Meyer, 2014) to understand what types of resistance to intercultural sensitivity may arise. In this class we addressed unfamiliar cultures as frequently as possible, so as to become aware of explanatory

gaps. These gaps are the difference of observing something and understanding why it is being done. For example if I see someone bow that is an observation, but that does not mean I understand why that bow is being done (Harman, 2007). Price (1996) argues that when we see the experience the unfamiliar we see these explanatory gaps more clearly.

As mentioned in the results there were few cases of minimization in the coded reflections in figure 4. This is not the case in other research using the DMIS. As shown Figure 3 the minimization stage of the DMIS elicits statements that we are all the same deep down and there is little difference between us. In the beginning of the course participants discussed how to question versus repress their initial reactions to an unfamiliar culture. For example if a participant felt uncomfortable about a new culture they were asked to write about their discomfort. After writing about it participants were then asked to question what it is about the culture that in is contrast or makes them are feel uncomfortable. This method combines the Empathy as cultural process model discussed Cheon, Mathur, and Chiao (2010) with Zakharia work on reflective practitioners (2013). It would be interesting to expand the testing outside the participating class to test if this abnormality is actually a normality in the larger scale of the university. This abnormality also brings straight forward nature of the DMIS into question. The Bennet scale is linear, which makes it a very accessible assessment tool, however cultural sensitivity may not develop only laterally. Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has been compared with the DMIS and found to be more reliable in certain circumstances (Garrett-Rucks, 2012). Testing the same data with the ICC or the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, Xu, 2002)) as well as having additional coders would be practical next steps for a follow up study.

In this study participants expressed their reflections in their L2, because this was a language course. This could have limited the emergence of intercultural sensitivity due to the competency in the participants L2. If further studies were carried out with participants

learning in an L2 it may be beneficial to have a pre and posttest translated into their L1 that measures DMIS such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; benet, 2011). In this case study the results showed a trend toward elimination of denial throughout the semester. If this development happens throughout language learning due to opportunities for PCH to occur, administering and collecting data using a test such as the IDI may help in having a more measurable understanding of cultural competence. Studies have already found significant IDI development for students who study abroad (Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012), and according to the results of this study situations of PCH can also have an effect. Finding a valid system to measure intercultural sensitivity development has the potential to lead to more informed curriculum decisions that represent common cultural competence goals.

Science at its best epitomizes openness, creative self-doubt, and tolerance for revolutionary options.
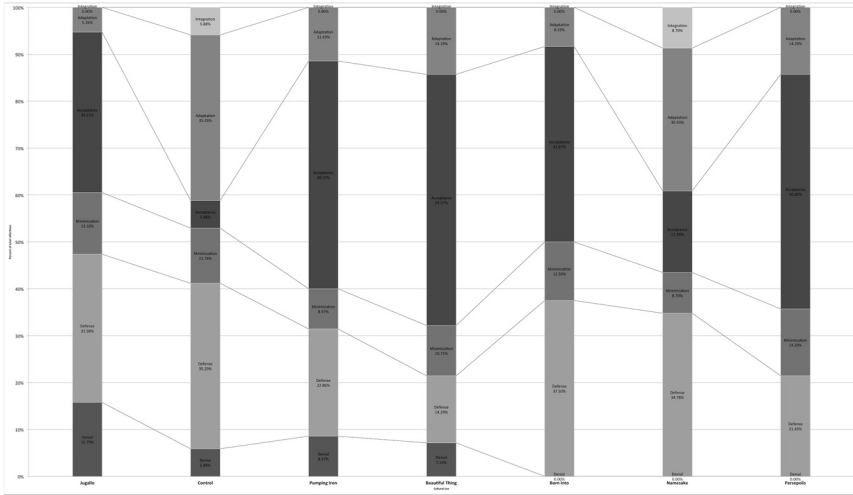
-T. Clark

REFERENCES

Allport GW. (1954). The Nature of Prejudice. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. 537 pp.

Barbanti, O. (2005)."Development and Conflict Theory." Beyond Intractability. Retrieved January 13, 2010 from <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/development-conflict-theory>.

Bennett, J. (1993) "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity." Education for the Intercultural Experience. Ed. R.M. Paige. 2nd edition. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 21-71.

Bennett, M. J. (2011). A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Retrieved 06.06.16, from http://www.idrinstitute.org.

Berg, M. V., Paige, R. M., & Lou, K. H. (2012). Student Learning Abroad: What Our Students Are Learning, What They? re Not, and What We Can Do About It. Stylus Publishing, LLC..

Brown, R., & Hewstone, M. (2005). An integrative theory of intergroup contact. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol.37, pp. 255-343). San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press.

Cheon, B. K., Mathur, V. A., & Chiao, J. Y. (2010). Empathy as cultural process: insights from the cultural neuroscience of empathy. World Cult Psychiatry Res Rev, 5, 32-42.

Clark, T. (1992) Relativism and the Limits of Rationality. Humanist, Vol 52, (1), pp. 25-32.

Crisp R.J., Hewstone M. (2007) Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 39, pp. 163-254.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1975). Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1990). Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience. New York: Harper and Row.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1998). Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life. Basic Books.

Dovidio, J. Eller, A. Hewstone, M. (2011) Improving intergroup relations through direct, extended and other forms of indirect contact. Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 14 (2), 147-160.

Fiske, J. (1988). TV: Re-situating the popular in the people. *Continuum, 1*(2), 56-66. doi: 10.1080/10304318809359337

Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. Journal of personality and social psychology, 82(6), 878.

Fiske, S. T. (2008). Look twice. Greater Good Magazine, 5 (1), 14-17. www.greatergoodmag.org.

Garrett-Rucks, P. (2012). Byram versus Bennettt: Assessment discrepancies in learners' IC development. Proceedings of Intercultural Competence Conference. Vol 2, 11-33.

Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. International journal of intercultural relations, 27(4), 421-443.

Harwood, J., & Vincze, L. (2011). Mediating second language learning and intergroup contact in a bilingual setting. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 32(4), 377-386. doi: 10.1080/01434632.2011.574701

Harman, G. (2007). Explaining an Explanatory Gap. APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Computers, 6(02), 2-3.

Hinkelman, D. Intercultural Simulation Games for Management Education in Japan. Economic Journal of Hokkaido University, 24: 59-89. 1995

Meyer, E. (2014). The culture map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business.

Paolini, S., Harwood, J., & Rubin, M. (2010). Negative intergroup contact makes group memberships salient: explaining why intergroup conflict endures. Pers Soc Psychol Bull, 36(12), 1723-1738. doi: 10.1177/0146167210388667

Pettigrew, T. F. (2003). Intergroup Contact Theory. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65

Price, M. C. (1996). Should we expect to feel as if we understand consciousness?. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, *3*(4), 303-312.

Rudman, Laurie A.; Ashmore, Richard D.; Gary, Melvin L. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol 81(5), Nov 2001, 856-868. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.5.856

Schiappa, E., Gregg, P. B., & Hewes, D. E. (2005). The parasocial contact hypothesis. Communication Monographs, 72(1), 92-115. DOI: 10.1080/0363775052000342544

Sherry, J. L. (2004), Flow and Media Enjoyment. Communication Theory, 14: 328-347. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00318.x

Shin, N. (2006), Online learner's 'flow' experience: an empirical study. British Journal of Educational Technology, 37: 705-720. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8535.2006.00641.x

Stangor, Charles (2000). Stereotypes and prejudice : essential readings. Psychology Press, Philadelphia,

Zeena Zakharia (2013) Preparing reflective practitioners. Online discussion forum: Teaching education in emergencies--Good practice and challenges. INEE. http://www.ineesite.org/en/discuss/preparing-reflective-practitioners

Alternative charts for figures 4 & 5 if needed.

DMIS average of all cues