Intercultural Sensitivity Development through Experiential Learning

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved brother Robert Louis Stone.
Abstract

Much of the extensive literature on the development of intercultural sensitivity focuses on formal education and training. This dissertation research in contrast makes its contribution to the field by trying to understand how experiences (rather than formal educational experiences) and related informal learning may assist in the development of intercultural sensitivity. A case study was conducted of the population of effective refugee service workers in a program in a nonprofit organization in the United States. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and related informal learning that help to shape individual’s intercultural sensitivity and to identify those experiential factors that contribute to the cultivation of an interculturally sensitive state of mind. The key research question guiding the study is: “What prior experiences influence the development of intercultural sensitivity?” The overall answer to the research question is that participants unanimously reported that they had experiences of cultural difference. In addition, several themes and sub-themes emerged from the interviews. Specifically participants were reflecting on the differences that they experienced, engaging in meaningful interactions or relationships with people different from themselves confronting ambiguity, developing mindfulness, constructing new ways of viewing the world, better understanding cultural value dimensions, modifying and refining their weltanschaung (worldviews), receiving cultural mentoring, continuously questioning their biases, experiencing culture fatigue, looking alike/but thinking differently, being more aware of visibility/invisibility, and bridging differences.
Interviews were conducted to the point of data saturation and revealed two basic findings: 1) the participants’ experiences echoed the intercultural literature despite that they had not had specific training in the intercultural field; 2) it is conceivably possible that interculturally sensitive people may have the ability to break the bonds of a single worldview and apply their skills to breaking the bonds of unfamiliar cultures if they have been able to successfully bridge two or more cultures.

The significance of the findings are that selecting refugee service workers who are interculturally sensitive may help refugees feel more welcome in the refugee serving organization and prevent refugees leaving without being served and with hurt feelings.

The U.S. Census “estimated the number of foreign born [people] in the United States to be nearly 40 million, or 13 percent of the total population” (United States Department of State, 2018).

By the end of 2016, 65.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. That was an increase of 300,000 people over the previous year, and the world’s forcibly displaced population remained at a record high. (UNHCR, 2017)

“Stanley Tambiah (2000) at Harvard argues that the study of such groups is at the most cutting edge of contemporary social science research” (Fry, 2016). With 65.6 million people displaced worldwide and increasing (UNHCR, 2017), the need for refugee services workers who are interculturally sensitive will also increase dramatically.

Service workers in small nonprofit organizations serving refugees are poorly funded and workers receive appalling low wages for long work hours under challenging conditions (such as middle of the night airport pick-ups and assisting clients trying to rid their of homes of bed bugs), often receiving only the legal minimum wage, frequently
with no health insurance, retirement or customary benefits other workers are commonly offered. Despite the difficult working conditions, it is noteworthy and surprising that these interview participants had never been observed to have become bitter, cynical or angry in their relationships with their refugee clients. However, they may have moved on to different types of work more quickly than people doing less challenging work with better compensation packages. Improved compensation and working conditions may be a policy consideration as a means to improve the longevity of services workers tenure as they develop knowledge of social services and cultures and are therefore better able to provide higher quality services to new immigrant and refugee communities. It is essential to make each interaction between service worker and newcomer an effective and meaningful one, so that refugees do not simply leave an agency without receiving the beneficial or effective services guaranteed to them by governmental regulations.

Refugees often arrive from refugee camps with a single bag of belongings and a debt for their airfare to the United States. Although some refugees are doctors, nurses, pharmacists and teachers, it is not easy to become re-licensed for professional work in the United States. Some refugees were farmers back home and most are resettled into cities. These difficulties to resume their profession make it important, at least during the first years, to have support from family, friends or refugee service workers. To provide the highest quality and most effective services it is important that refugee services workers not only have social service skills in their given profession, but also have intercultural sensitivity. It is nice to feel understood, but it is essential to be treated in a culturally respectful way and receive culturally appropriate (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).
services. Perhaps this study can illuminate some of the qualities that employers might consider when selecting people to work with people from many different cultures. Refugee services administrators should make it a priority to provide culturally sensitive services. To do so, part of their selection protocol might include selecting refugee service workers who are interculturally sensitive. Optimistically, doing so will make relationships between incoming and receiving communities more effective and more harmonious. It is imperative to provide culturally-sensitive and appropriate high quality services to our growing immigrant communities (including refugees). Hopefully this research in a small way will provide some useful (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Ravetz, 1987) empirical data and related insights to facilitate and inform attainment of this lofty goal.

*Keywords:* intercultural sensitivity, experiential learning, cultural mentoring, refugees
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<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>DMIS</td>
<td>Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDC</td>
<td>Intercultural Development Continuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOM</td>
<td>Karen Organization of Minnesota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXSA</td>
<td><em>Maximizing Study Abroad: A Students’ Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction:

The Need for Intercultural Sensitivity in Refugee Serving Organizations

Whether through immigration, sojourning, marriage, adoption, or birth, a wide range of people are actively carrying the frame of reference of two or more cultures. --Janet Bennett  (J. M. Bennett, 2014, p. 271)

The development of intercultural sensitivity is a critical issue in the field of comparative and international development education and other disciplines. To develop intercultural sensitivity is to develop a mindset with the capability to reconstruct or re-organize perceived reality according to more than one cultural framework (M. J. Bennett, 2004, 2012). With ever increasing numbers of refugees relocating to the United States and other unfamiliar cultures around the world, businesses (nonprofit and for profit) and educational institutions that offer services to these newcomers have an increasing need to recruit, hire, and retain professionals who are interculturally sensitive. While existing literature offers several approaches as to what intercultural sensitivity is and how to train individuals to develop intercultural sensitivity, few scholars have examined how intercultural sensitivity is developed outside of formal education. Formal education is defined as that which occurs in schools, colleges and universities (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) I argue that intercultural sensitivity can be developed outside of formal education and I intend to address this gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of people who are working or have worked with refugees in the United States (refugee service providers). This research is highly significant for any organization that seeks to recruit an interculturally sensitivity workforce and to create an interculturally sensitivity work environment, but is particularly relevant for refugee serving nonprofit organizations that often do not have the resources to test or to train for intercultural...
sensitivity. More broadly, this study contributes to an empirical exploration of the types of experiences that lead to the development of intercultural sensitivity.

**Context: The “New United States”**

The 2010 American Community Survey of the U.S. Census “estimated the number of foreign [sic] born [people] in the United States to be nearly 40 million, or 13 percent of the total population” (U.S. Census, 2010). For example, in one state, Minnesota in particular, waves of migration have made the state home to the largest U.S. populations of Karen (Karen Organization of Minnesota, 2011) Somali, Liberian, and the second largest population of Hmong (MN State Demographer Office, 2013, 2014). Not only is Minnesota home to the largest populations of several refugee groups, the Minnesota Department of Human Services reports that Minnesota received refugees from 19 different countries in recent years, but is unable to track the exact number of ethnicities. Burma, for example, has 135 recognized ethnic groups (Paing Soe Hlaing, 2014) and within each ethnic group there may be several cultures and languages. One ethnic group from Burma now resettled in Minnesota, the Karen, tend to speak either Sgaw Karen or Pwo Karen. Without help from someone who knows both languages, Karen of one sub-ethnicity cannot converse with the other. Therefore, the typical culture-specific model of becoming interculturally competent, the model of knowing the language, history, customs and culture of each of the 19 nationalities and countless ethnicities represented in a single refugee service provider’s clientele would be quite an

1“Burmese names have no first names or last names, only one complete name” (United States Department of State, 2013). To respect both the people of Burma and APA style requirements, names from Burma will be displayed in their original form, as one single name, in this paper.
impossible undertaking. Likewise, hiring someone from a representative culture to work with refugees poses its own challenges. While it is possible for an organization to hire a person who is Karen, for example, that person alone must also be able to work with someone from Somalia, Laos, Bhutan and a dozen other countries. Therefore, a Karen employee who has the knowledge of language, history, customs and culture of the Karen, for example, must also have intercultural sensitivity for working with many other nationalities and countless ethnicities. In addition, refugee service providers must also maintain their expertise in their own specializations: physician, nurse, social worker, case manager, teacher, etc. For these reasons, it becomes necessary to consider a different model for intercultural interaction. While it would be ideal to be an expert in each ethnicity, at a minimum having the ability to approach interactions with intercultural sensitivity becomes a helpful capability for dealing with the ever-changing cultures of newly arriving refugees (Asgary, 2019).

**Intercultural Sensitivity: Conceptualization and the Gap**

Milton Bennett (1993, 1993, 2004, 2012) defines ethnorelativity as “the experience of one’s own beliefs and behaviors as just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities” (M. J. Bennett, 2012, p. 103). Ethnorelative type experiences have been conceptualized in a variety of ways, including the Protean self:
We are becoming fluid and many-sided. Without quite realizing it, we have been evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of our time. This mode of being differs radically from that of the past, and enables us to engage in continuous exploration and personal experiment. I have named it the "Protean self" after Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms. (Lifton, 1999, p. 1)

Now we know from Greek mythology that Proteus was able to change his shape with relative ease from wild boar to lion to dragon to fire to flood. What he found difficult, and would not do unless seized and chained, was to commit himself to a single form. (Lifton, 1969, p. 44)

In addition to Lifton’s Protean self, other intercultural scholars have conceptualized ethnorelative type experiences as: chameleon (Deardorff, 2008; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Gibson, 2012; McCaig, 1996; Mok & Morris, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) "dynamic in-betweenness" (J. M. Bennett, 1993; Pusch, 2009; Schaetti, 1996; Yoshikawa, 1987), dual consciousness (Tambiah, 2000), and as cultural democracy (Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974). Much research utilizes the framework of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (M. J. Bennett, 1986b, 1993, 2016), a stage theory which articulates positions along a continuum between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. Bennett and Hammer’s Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (1998) assesses the degree to which people are interculturally sensitive and is often used to guide the design of training to increase a person’s intercultural sensitivity (J. M. Bennett, 1993, 2003, 2008; M. J. Bennett, 1986a). “This theory holds that those with more ethnorelative worldviews have more potential to generate interculturally competent attitudes, knowledge, and behavior” (Nam & Fry, 2010, p. 13). However, there are people assessed as being interculturally sensitive who have never had and who will never have formal intercultural training. A gap exists in the literature as to who these people are and what generated their capability.
**Research Goals**

With this gap in mind, the following guiding question is used to investigate the factors leading to the development of intercultural sensitivity: Which formal, nonformal and informal educational experiences contribute to the development of intercultural sensitivity? The example of refugee service providers is utilized to ground the literature review since refugee service providers are often recruited based on the assumption of intercultural sensitivity due to their previous experiences rather than on previous formal education, training or test performances.

Extensive literature concerns itself with how to *educate* people to become more interculturally sensitive but a gap exists in studies on how interculturally sensitive people came to be that way. Some people seem to have a *natural* ability to understand various perspectives. Just as a frog and a swan can shift their perspectives to see from the sky, land or water while maintaining their essential nature, some people, it seems, have the ability to shift perspectives, too, while also maintaining their sense of self. What are the events that contribute to this ability?

Not all people have had the opportunity to take part in formal intercultural training, but that does not mean that they lack intercultural sensitivity. In addition, formal intercultural training does not automatically lead to greater intercultural sensitivity. Without formal training, how does intercultural sensitivity develop? The overarching goal of this study stems from a desire to understand more deeply how people develop intercultural sensitivity, in particular, to determine the life, educational, and training experiences that influenced people who are interculturally sensitive to develop
this capability. The goal is to determine what experiences have influenced people to have, as Milton Bennett describes, the ability to change from seeing beliefs and behaviors as “just the way things are” (ethnocentrism) to experiencing one’s own beliefs and behaviors as just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities (ethnorelativity) (M. J. Bennett, 2004, p. 1). Much literature exists about educational programs that can help move students towards intercultural sensitivity or about how a trainer can design curriculum to support a move towards intercultural sensitivity, but few address how people who possess interculturally sensitive perceptions might have developed that capability on their own. As educational institutions and businesses are considering the experience and knowledge gained through living as valid proxies for formal educational degrees, it is valuable to explore the types of experiences that have helped people to become interculturally sensitive.

**Purpose and Research Question**

With this research goal in mind, the purpose of this study is to examine the experiences that help to shape people's intercultural sensitivity and to identify the factors that contribute to the cultivation of an interculturally sensitive state of mind. Based on this purpose statement, the key research question guiding the study is: What experiences influence the development of intercultural sensitivity?

Although this research focuses special attention on the informal types of experiences that lead to intercultural sensitivity, formal and nonformal learning (Merriam et al., 2007) influencing intercultural sensitivity are also considered.
Assumptions

It is important to acknowledge the assumptions that inform this study, as they are fundamental to the research goals, purpose statement, and research questions. First, the construction of the DMIS is a helpful tool. People are in different positions of development along the ethnocentric/ethnorelative continuum (M. J. Bennett, 1986b, 1993, 2013d). If people are interested in developing greater ability in being able to reconstruct their experiences according to differing worldviews, being at more ethnorelative position may prove to be more helpful in accomplishing this. People who have more intercultural sensitivity may be better at experiencing cultural differences and therefore may have more capability to adapt to differences, but it would be ethnocentric to think that all people should be ethnorelative as that would be equal to applying the same universal standard to all people. Furthermore, the ethnocentric/ethnorelative continuum (and all continua) are considered to be constructions that may be helpful tools to understand or describe a phenomenon, but as a construction they should not be confused with reality.

The second assumption is that it is rare to find a person who is influenced by only a single cultural perspective. People are influenced by multiple cultural perspectives and often have difficulty in fitting their own view of their identity into one of the pre-existing cultural category “boxes” offered by governments, schools, or societies in general. People may also face challenges in claiming their own identity due to cultural traditions and government regulations restricting "membership" to those who have certain "legal" rights to their identity (Cohen & Fischer, 2019; Lawrence, 2004; Treuer, 2011).
Individuals may feel they are a part of one culture but may be prohibited by national or religious laws, cultural customs, or societal norms to claiming that identity; or, they may identify with many cultures. In turn, people's identity has to do both with their own perception and with the perception of those around them (Cohen & Fischer, 2019; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Treuer, 2011).

**Value Premises**

Lastly, the value premises for this research project are based on the notion that each individual's perception is valuable, that each person's story is “true” as she or he constructs it, and that due to historical and persistent aggressions against individuals, groups, cultures, and nations, it is important to remember that fear of personal disclosure (Behar, 2012; Myrdal, 1969; Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974; Treuer, 2011), may make valid research results more difficult to uncover.

Researchers strive for objectivity but the value premises of the researcher may influence the “objectivity” of the research. My work at the University of Minnesota has influenced my value premises which are most eloquently stated by my professors, advisor and mentor:

> We have a strong and deep commitment to total quality control in research and evaluation. We want to do everything we can to “try to get it right” and to have our results be as credible, reliable, and valid as possible. As Linda Tuihawai Smith (1999), in her provocative work, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, has stressed, this represents a particularly formidable challenge when we are doing research internationally and interculturally, or with indigenous people.

> We want to believe that high quality research and evaluation work can be relevant and help move us to have a more just and civil society, with minimization of violence to both humans and their environments (DeJaeghere & Fry, 2003, p. 2).
Key Definitions

The terms that require definition in order to understand the scope of this study are: 1) “intercultural sensitivity,” 2) “intercultural competence,” 3) “ethnorelativity,” 4) “empathy,” 5) “worldview,” 6) “culture,” 7) “refugee,” and 8) Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner’s “formal, informal, and nonformal education.”

To distinguish “intercultural sensitivity” from “intercultural competence,” “intercultural sensitivity” is considered to be the experience of discriminating cultural differences as opposed to the term “intercultural competence” which is the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p. 422). Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman argue that “greater intercultural sensitivity is associated with greater potential for exercising intercultural competence” (2003, p. 422). “The term intercultural sensitivity has a long history of referring to an ability to make complex perceptual discriminations among cultural patterns” (M. J. Bennett, 2013e, p. 1199).

Intercultural sensitivity is quite distinct from the concept of culture specific competence which implies acquiring knowledge of culture specific information, possibly including the language and customs of a second or unfamiliar culture. Milton Bennett makes this distinction by explaining that “recently the term intercultural competence has been used to refer to an array of characteristics and abilities that seem related to successful intercultural interactions” (M. J. Bennett, 2013e, p. 1199). Deardorf’s (2008) definition describes intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively
and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (2008, p. 33). Cushner and Mahon trace the use of cultural competence all the way back to John Amos Comenius in the 1600s who stated the “…belief that a multiplicity of perspectives not only was foundational to knowledge acquisition but also encouraged mutual understanding between people of differing backgrounds…” (2009, p. 305)

Milton Bennett (1993, 1993, 2004, 2012) defines ethnorelativity as “the experience of one’s own beliefs and behaviors as just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities” (2012, p. 103). Empathy is being able to feel what another person is feeling (2004) or his classic definition of having comfort with and ability to adapt to a variety of settings (1998, p. 15). Bennett (2004) defines empathy as the ability to “take perspective or shift frame of reference vis-à-vis other cultures. This shift is not merely cognitive; it is a change in the organization of lived experience, which necessarily includes affect and behavior” (2004, p. 70). Bennett defines “empathy” in a specialized way:

The process of reorganizing our perception of the world to enable an alternative experience is called “empathy.” Empathy allows us to intentionally shift our perspective toward that of another culture and eventually toward that of another person in that cultural context. By allowing ourselves to have an embodied experience of the world through the alternative perspective, we temporarily expand our worldview to include that alternative way of being. (2013b, pp. 580–581)
Professor Benjamin Broome further defines empathy as:

…a process that allows people to imaginatively enter the world of another person, see it from the other person’s point of view, and feel the emotions the other person is experiencing. Through the empathic process, individuals are able to predict, with varying degrees of accuracy, what another human being is thinking and to vicariously experience, with some degree of approximation, what another person is feeling. Empathy helps individuals adapt to the other’s behavior and coordinate interactions with that person, because it allows individuals to anticipate the behaviors and reactions of others. Empathy … is considered by many scholars to be one of several essential forms of intelligence, and it is a key component of intercultural competence. (Broome, 2015, p. 287)

According to Hua (2019), there are no less than 160 different definitions of “culture.” To define “culture,” the authoritative definition from the person considered by scholars to be the father of the field of intercultural studies (Condon, 2015; “Edward T. Hall’s obituary,” 2009), Edward T. Hall. Hall’s three characteristics of culture are: that it is learned, that it is interrelated (touching one part affects every other part), and that it is shared (Hall, 1976, pp. 13–14). Milton Bennett incorporates the conception of “worldview:”

The sense of “culture” used in intercultural communication is that of “worldview.” Culture is a generalization about how a group of people coordinate meaning and action among themselves. (2013e, p. 1196)

“Worldview” could be defined as an individual’s set of feelings, beliefs, values, and convictions.
Refugees are considered to be a specifically designated group of immigrants:

The 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees “endorses a single definition of the term “refugee” in Article 1. The emphasis of this definition is on the protection of persons from political or other forms of persecution. A refugee, according to the Convention, is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3).

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), educational experiences can be described in three categories, formal, nonformal and informal learning experiences:

![Formal, Nonformal, and Informal Learning](image)

Adapted from Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 24

*Figure 1 Formal, Nonformal, and Informal Learning*
This study has been conceived through the framework of Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (J. M. Bennett & M. J. Bennett, 2004; J. M. Bennett, M. J. Bennett, & Allen, 2003; M. J. Bennett, 1986a, 1993, 2013d, 2016) which identifies three ethnocentric worldviews of difference differentiation (denial, defense, and minimization) and three ethnorelative worldviews of difference differentiation (acceptance, adaptation, and integration).
Recently Mitch Hammer has elaborated and modified these stages (2009, 2012) and calls his continuum the “Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC).” In the IDC, the terminology “ethnocentric” is replaced by “monocultural mindset” and “ethnorelative” is replaced with “intercultural mindset.” In addition, the IDC moves minimization from an ethnocentric stage to a transitional state and eliminates the DMIS stage of integration. Milton Bennett (2004) addresses these changes:
Current research with the Intercultural Development Inventory™, an instrument that assesses the experience of cultural difference in terms of the DMIS, has shown that Minimization is a kind of transition state between the constellation of Denial/Defense and the constellation Acceptance/Adaptation (Hammer et al., 2003). The experience of Minimization is theoretically ethnocentric in that it takes one’s own cultural patterns as central to an assumed universal reality. In other words, the experience is that all people are essentially similar in ways that are explainable by my own cultural beliefs. However, the experience also includes the ability to perceive some cultural differences in largely non-stereotypical ways and to recognize the essential humanness of others (2004, p. 68).

For the purpose of distinguishing intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence an important concept is that intercultural sensitivity is a mindset or a feeling for the culture and the ability to experience cultural worldviews. It is not knowing facts about countries or knowing a list of dos and don’ts, for example, do take off your shoes before entering the house. “The DMIS is not a model of knowledge, attitude, or skills” (M. J. Bennett, 2012, p. 108). Bennett says that there needs to be a:

“critical mass of information about another culture in order to apprehend the worldview, and that even that amount of information is useless unless basic Minimization issues have been resolved first; that is, that they are “ready” to hear the information. People may have some of the linguistic or behavioral skills of another culture without any feeling for how to use those skills in culturally appropriate ways…. (M. J. Bennett, 2004, p. 69)

According to Milton Bennett (2012) overcoming ethnocentrism to enable effective communication across cultures is the most important goal of interculturalism. Bennett considers ethnocentrism to be the inability to experience reality differently than we were originally taught. Ethnorelativity is the ability to sense differences in culture and experience those differences. Interculturally sensitive people are “not necessarily experts in one or more cultures (although they might also be that); rather, they are adept
at identifying how cultural differences in general operate in a wide range of human interactions” (M. J. Bennett, 2012, p. 108). If individuals have the ability to reorganize their conceptions of experiences once, it is more likely that they could do it again and again. Perhaps why third culture individuals are assumed to be capable of intercultural sensitivity is because they learn from an early age that there is not just one framework therefore when they are presented with other frameworks they can reconstrue their experiences in a new way.

**Life Experiences, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Refugee Service Providers**

Research around intercultural sensitivity, refugee service providers, and knowledge and wisdom gained from experiences of life (rather than education) is not unprecedented, but studies that combine the three areas are scarce. Goh & Yang (2011) conducted a study on intercultural sensitivity in mental health practice by examining the characteristics of culturally competent counseling exemplars. Addington (2010) explored intercultural sensitivity in nursing students who provided care for refugees. DeJaeghere & Zhang (2008) explored the development of intercultural sensitivity among teachers. Wright (1981) assessed the level of intercultural competence in agencies that provide refugee resettlement services, but from a training perspective rather than from the perspective of the existing intercultural sensitivity of the employees. Ngai & Koehn (2001) examined an intercultural training program for refugee-assistance crisis management. Mahon (2003) looked at intercultural sensitivity development among practicing teachers from a life history perspective, but not particularly on refugee service providers. Crowne (2007) investigated the relationships among social intelligence,
emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence and cultural exposure. Strekalova (2013) looked at intercultural sensitivity of teachers working with refugee children but not based on experiences. Phillips (2004) examined intercultural knowledge and skills in social service work with refugees from the perspectives of both service providers and recipients but not based on experiences. Fry and Thurber (1989) found traits conducive to the effectiveness of development consultants who worked abroad in a single country at a time, not with domestic refugee service providers who work with multiple cultures on any given day.

**Study Design**

The purpose of this study is to determine the experiences that influence the development of intercultural sensitivity. To respond to this purpose, the stories of a group of individuals who are (or have been) working to serve refugees in the United States have been analyzed. This case study is composed of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with those workers who were observed by their supervisor, colleagues, and refugee clients to be interculturally sensitive.

Because experiences and intentional education may both influence the development of intercultural sensitivity, attention was given to both, with special emphasis on experiences, an area often overlooked and therefore absent in the literature. Examination was made of participants’ experiences, intentional education, opportunities available, and opportunities chosen (and taken). The researcher especially attended to descriptions of experiences that might contribute to intercultural sensitivity, including: intercultural marriage, transnational adoption, working abroad (including
Peace Corps, missionary, teaching or corporate work) or living abroad, being a third culture individual, being an immigrant (including being a refugee), being a member of a non-dominant group or religion, being bi-racial or multi-racial, or bicultural or multicultural, intentional study (study abroad, intercultural study) or, other intercultural experience.

**Methodology and Methods**

This research is a grounded theory study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is an ethnographically (Fetterman, 2010; Wolcott, 2008) informed case study with the bounded unit being people who successfully serve or served refugees in a specific organization (with the name and location to be held in confidence) in the United States. It utilizes in-depth individual interviews and storytelling (Brinkerhoff, 2006; Krueger, 2010, 2011; Labonte, 2007; Labonte, Feather, & Hills, 1999). Purposive sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Patton, 2015) using extreme case analysis (Caracelli & Greene, 1993, p. 199; Fry, Supang, & Amrung, 1981; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) was used to identify research participants who may tend more towards intercultural sensitivity.

**Case study.** A case study is described as an:

…intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community. The case is a bounded, integrated system (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). By concentrating upon a single phenomenon or entity (the case), this approach seeks to describe the phenomenon in depth. For it to be a case study, one particular program (a bounded system), selected because it was typical, unique, experimental, or highly successful, etc., would be the unit of analysis. …Ethnographic case studies are quite common… (Merriam, 2002, p. 8).
Furthermore, Robert Yin might support Merriam as he echoes that case study methodology is appropriate for questions that “require an extensive and “in-depth” description of some social phenomena” (Yin, 2018, p. 4), which makes this form of research appropriate for the research question.

**Case study bounded unit.** The bounded unit of this case study is the population of refugee service workers who were reported to have been observed to have engaged successfully with people from multiple unfamiliar cultures in a particular program of an organization in the United States. Observations were made by their supervisor, colleagues, and refugee clients. In addition, participants had been invited into the lives of the refugees who had been their clients, such as weddings, funerals, births, birthdays, and holidays. The desire of refugees to include their former refugee service worker into their lives was used as a proxy for approval of the services received. Protection of the confidentiality of the interview respondents was essential in obtaining the most authentic responses possible; therefore, the name, location, and other identifiers of the organization, program, and participants will be carefully kept confidential.

**Methods**

This study uses a qualitative approach to achieve rigorous and robust results (Creswell, 2014; DeJaeghere & Fry, 2003). In-depth, semi-structured interviewing was the principal component of the study. In addition, member checking (confirming with interview participants that their meaning was correctly understood) increased research credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Limitations. The primary limitation of this study is generalizability. The goal of this study is to provide insight and *verstehen* (understanding) in the development of intercultural sensitivity. The intention of the study is to determine the factors by which intercultural sensitivity may be attained in refugee serving people through an examination of the life experiences of people who have been successful working with multiple cultures. While it is hoped that the findings will be applicable in other settings, the conclusions drawn will be strictly applicable only to the study participants in the specified setting.

Organization of the Paper

The following chapter, Chapter Two, will present a review of key ideas from the literature. Chapter Three will elaborate the research methodology intended for this study, including the design of the sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four will present the research findings as they respond to the research questions posed earlier in this chapter. Chapter Five will contain a discussion of the larger themes that emerge from the data, such as how the research findings may inform theory, policy, and practice, insights and implications, and what new constructs are discovered through the research.

Research Setting, Rationale, and Significance

As people of various cultures interact, relationships are developed and new family cultures emerge. According to the Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data:

In 2015, 17% of all U.S. newlyweds had a spouse of a different race or ethnicity, marking more than a fivefold increase since 1967, when 3% of newlyweds were intermarried. (Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 1)
In intercultural couples children in particular may feel unclear as to which (if either) of their parents’ culture they belong.

With cultures intermingling, clear delineations of both individual and community cultural identities become less distinct. For example, a refugee child who grows up in Minnesota may feel somewhat Karen (like her parents) and somewhat Minnesotan (her receiving community). The child may be considered Karen by her parents and the school system, but not having grown up in the heritage community, the child may not see herself as sharing her parent’s cultural identity. Her siblings born in the U.S. may not even share a common citizenship with the rest of the family. Furthermore, if she is attending a public school, she may have experiences more similar to her non-immigrant classmates. Given changing cultures, could a person with intercultural sensitivity engage in interactions that help people from a variety of cultures feel honored and respected (Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974)?

**Conclusion**

This introduction has shown how the traditional culture specific model of global literacy—that of knowing the language, customs, politics, and geography although helpful, is not realistically applied to the world of refugee service providers. The classic model, often is used in preparation for study abroad, expatriate living, or diplomatic service in which a single person will be immersed in a single culture
Figure 4 Study Abroad Model: When a U.S. American is posted in Burma, it makes sense to learn the language, culture, politics, etc. (Stone, 2018)

Figure 5 Study Abroad Model versus Refugee Service Worker Model (Stone, 2018)

cannot be applied to a situation in which a single person is responsible for interacting with dozens of cultures every day. It would be impossible for a single person to become culturally competent in the language, customs, politics, and geography of each of many countries and cultures. Therefore a new paradigm is needed. Instead of a culture specific
approach, it may prove useful to examine intercultural sensitivity, a paradigm that utilizes the reconstruction of data in different ways in order to adapt to multiple cultures. Just as the old railway stations had the split-flap displays (that present changeable alphanumeric text to show at which platform the train would arrive) that could electromechanically rearrange the message on the entire board at a moment’s notice, so also the interculturally sensitive thinker can figuratively re-configure or reconstruct the same input into a completely new meaning. The interculturally sensitive thinker can quickly evaluate through various feedback mechanisms whether or not the reconfigured snapshot is the correct one, and if not can instantaneously do another re-arrangement until a suitable configuration has been constructed. When interacting with multiple cultural cues over a short period of time, this type of model may prove more compelling. This research has attempted to determine the factors that lead to interculturally sensitive thinking and may possibly lead to a new model to describe how interculturally sensitive thinkers interact with their environments.

Figure 6 Split-flap Display (http://hackaday.com/2011/01/03/driving-an-8-digit-split-flap-display)
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature:

Cultural Mentoring, Border Experiences, and Cultural Intelligence

Cultures possess their own internal logic and coherence for their members and, hence, their own validity. Making judgments about them is hazardous when the criteria for evaluation come solely from another culture. --Michael Paige (1993a, p. 3)

Figure 7 Factors contributing to intercultural sensitivity

Different Perspectives on the Critical Research Issue

Scholarship related to the types of experiences that may foster the development of intercultural sensitivity falls into three distinct categories: 1) experiences that contribute to the development of cultural intelligence (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; K. A.

The first perspective consists of studies grounded in cultural intelligence (CQ), a concept first articulated by Earley & Ang in 2003 to address the “need to understand why some people are more adept at adjusting to new cultural surroundings than others” (2003, p. 59). The works of Kerri Anne Crowne (Brannen), (2008), David Livermore (2010, 2016), and Thomas and Inkson (2009) are examined as examples of scholarship on cultural intelligence.

While the cultural intelligence scholars offer suggestions on how to become more culturally intelligent, the second group of scholars, those examining cross-border experiences, identify the traits of particular individuals who might be presumed to have already developed an intercultural sensitivity. However, the cross-border scholars do not address the empirical question of whether these individuals do indeed have greater intercultural sensitivity. Janet Bennett (1993) refers to border experiences as those on the margins of cultures which lead to either encapsulated or constructive marginality. Other border experience scholars (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; R. H. Useem & Cottrell, 1996; Van Reken & Bethel, 2005) are concerned with third culture individuals (TCIs) and the
challenges and strengths that result through their extensive experiences traversing between cultures. To focus exclusively on those who have had border experiences might be too restrictive as intercultural sensitivity might be found in people without this cross-border experience.

Although cultural intelligence and border experiences both illuminate types of experiences that may contribute to intercultural sensitivity, it is the third body of literature emphasizing cultural mentoring that I believe proves most promising for this research. Cultural mentoring scholars (Paige & Goode, 2009; Paige, Harvey, & McCleary, 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012c) propose that although necessary, it is not the cultural immersion experience in and of itself that leads to the development of intercultural sensitivity, but the immersion combined with the process of constructing and deconstructing experiences through the guidance of a skilled trainer, teacher, or cultural informant. Because cultural mentoring features the ability to deconstruct and reconstruct one’s framework of culture, it is this body of literature that I believe provides the most meaningful insights into how intercultural sensitivity is developed, and thus is most relevant to this research.

**Cultural Intelligence**

Cultural intelligence is a research-based model proposing that four skills are required to adjust to new cultural surroundings: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral skills (Earley & Ang, 2003; Livermore, 2010, 2016; Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009; Van Dyne, Ang, & Livermore, 2010). Cultural intelligence research addresses the “need to understand why some people are more adept at adjusting to new...
cultural surroundings than others” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 59). Earley and Mosakowski (2004) related “cognitive” to head, “notices clues to a culture's shared understandings. These can appear in any form and any context but somehow indicate a line of interpretation worth pursuing” (2004, p. 141). They related “behavioral” to body, “an ability to mirror the customs and gestures of the people around you” (p. 141), and “motivational” to heart, believing in yourself enough that in unfamiliar cultures you will not give up but instead will “reengage with greater vigor. To stay motivated, highly efficacious people do not depend on obtaining rewards, which may be unconventional or long delayed” (2004, p. 142).

Earley & Ang’s 2003 work is based on Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) framework of multiple intelligences (Van Dyne et al., 2010), although they also credit models of intelligence proposed by John Berry, Howard Gardner, John Mayer and Peter Salovey. Earley and Ang observed that someone with high cognitive or social intelligence can correctly interpret and respond appropriately to another person from a familiar culture; however, in an unfamiliar cultural setting the same cues may lead to misinterpretation and incorrect response. In order to respond properly in unfamiliar cultures, a person must have the flexibility to create a “common frame of understanding” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 61). This ability to create a common frame of understanding is very close to the constructivist perspective found in cultural mentoring which will be examined later.

Factors influencing the development of cultural intelligence. While the previous scholars identify some of the qualities that comprise cultural intelligence, Kerri
Anne Crowne (Brannen)’s research question fits closely to my own because she is exploring the “lived” experiences which contribute to developing cultural intelligence. Crowne also finds that there is a gap in the literature related to the kinds of experiences that lead to CQ and declares that knowing this is important in managing people who work interculturally:

Currently, no information exists regarding what leads to higher levels of CQ. Each of these aspects of CQ would be essential to individuals who are working with people from other cultures. It is crucial, therefore, for managers to understand what the antecedents to CQ are, in order to incorporate this knowledge into their global business plans” (K. A. Crowne, 2008, pp. 392–393).

Crowne used 140 surveys for her research, in which CQ was assessed using a previously validated (Ang, Van Dyne, Yee, & Koh, 2004) survey. Crowne’s research (2008, p. 398) investigated whether a person who had any type of exposure abroad might have higher CQ than someone who had not. Secondly, she examined whether the number of countries visited might influence CQ. Her findings were that “those who had been abroad for employment and education were found to have higher levels of CQ. Other types of exposure, such as vacationing abroad, did not increase an individual’s level of CQ” (K. A. Crowne, 2008, p. 394). Surprisingly, she also found that simply being currently employed or having higher levels of education leads to higher levels of CQ in general. She hypothesizes that this may be due to the opportunities employment and education provide for cultural interaction (K. A. Crowne, 2008, p. 394); however, her research lacks a qualitative component that may have strengthened her hypothesis.

**Drive, knowledge, strategy, and action.** Livermore conceptualized his model of CQ as a circular process that relies on a person’s drive, knowledge, strategy, and action,
similar to the CQ models explained above. Livermore’s action component differs slightly from Earley and Mosakowski’s concept of mirroring in that Livermore considers the question of when to adapt to another culture and when not to do so. In Livermore’s model, “a person with high CQ learns which actions will and will not enhance effectiveness and acts on that understanding. Thus, CQ action involves flexible actions tailored to specific cultural contexts” (Livermore, 2010, p. 28). A significant concept is the importance of authenticity and respect:

The goal is to be yourself while figuring out which behaviors need to change in order to accomplish your objectives…one of the revolutionary aspects of the cultural intelligence model is the emphasis on inward transformation in our perspective and outlook rather than just trying to master the “dos” and avoid the taboos. Artificial attempts to modify behavior invite inflexibility and fall short of giving us a sustainable approach to leading cross-culturally. (2010, p. 136)

The sense of inward transformation is also found in cultural mentoring literature. In the work of Stewart and M. Bennett (1991) and Hammer and Paige (2013b) Livermore’s idea that the “degree to which we continue to change internally will be seen in the impressions we leave on others through our actions” (2010, p. 136) is echoed. Livermore’s conception of the cycle of reflection and action provides yet another example of similarity shared by him and cultural mentoring scholars. Where Livermore’s conception differs from cultural mentoring is that it lacks the intervention piece that cultural mentoring scholars have found to be a critical component needed to increase intercultural sensitivity.

Livermore (2018) finds that perspective-taking is important and can best be built through relationships:
Perspective taking is the ability to step outside our own experience and consider something from another person’s point of view…Perspective taking doesn’t mean you give up your own perspective or lack conviction. …Perspective taking is best developed in relationship. Many people change or at least reevaluate their dogmatic views about sexual orientation, religion, or politics when a friend or loved one is the one who represents the opposing perspective. Conversation and dialogue are the best ways to learn about another’s perspective. (Livermore, 2018, p. 1)

Livermore’s concept of perspective taking is reminiscent of Milton Bennett’s revision of the golden rule into the platinum rule:

Approaching people as if they are different from us allows us to generate an addition to the Golden Rule. It is the Platinum Rule, which could state, "Do unto others as they themselves would have done unto them." Through empathy, we at least can be aware of how others would like to be treated from their own perspectives. We may not want or be able to provide that treatment, but the very act of acknowledging the difference and attempting empathy is profoundly respectful and affirming of others. Of course, it is that respect for the equal (but different) humanity of others that was probably the original intent of the Golden Rule. (2013g, p. 230)

**Cultural intelligence and mindfulness.** Thomas and Inkson’s text is based on several sources: research from an international consortium of researchers called The Cultural Intelligence Project, case studies, the work of Earley (2002), and Earley’s 2003 book with Soon Ang, (D. C. Thomas & Inkson, 2009, p. 190). Although all of the CQ scholars mentioned thus far in this paper, including Thomas and Inkson, have based their work on that of Earley and Ang, Thomas and Inkson differ slightly in their conception of cultural intelligence. They visualize cultural intelligence as a Venn diagram with three intersecting circles of knowledge, mindfulness and skill, with cultural intelligence in the center. In Thomas and Inkson’s version of cultural intelligence, they define knowledge as knowing cultural continuums such as those found in Hofstede, for example individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).
Mindfulness. Another difference is the use of the term *mindfulness*. Based on the work of the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hạnh (1992, 1999) and Harvard Professor Ellen Langer (1989) (D. C. Thomas & Inkson, 2009, p. 193), Thomas and Inkson define *mindfulness* as “the ability to pay attention in a reflective and creative way to cues in the cross-cultural situations encountered and to one's own knowledge and feelings” (2009, p. 16). They propose that cultural intelligence is gained through combining attention to the situation, retention of knowledge, and reproduction of correct behavior (2009, p. 156). Paying attention to the reaction of the person, with whom one is communicating, and altering behavior accordingly, is similar to the conception in Livermore, Stewart and Bennett, and Hammer and Paige above. The reflection and feedback in the form of reaction from others helps us refine our behaviors. A person with high CQ may be able to modify behavior appropriately, whereas someone with low CQ who lacks an understanding of the way in which the behavior needs to be modified, might be trapped in a never ending cycle of unsuccessful modifications. Therefore, what is missing in Thomas and Inkson’s approach is the recognition of the need for an intervention by a cultural mentor.

Although Thomas and Inkson never discuss an intervention such as cultural mentoring, they do describe the very essence of cultural mentoring (2009, pp. 151–152), through a case study in which a U.S. American public relations officer in Beijing has an unresolved altercation with a Chinese employee. The U.S. American cannot resolve the situation until she consults with another manager who has been in China longer. This manager, in the role of cultural mentor, explains the situation from the Chinese point of view.
view. After this explanation (what cultural mentoring scholars would call the *intervention*), the public relations officer acquired a new framework (a Chinese framework) with which to reconstruct her experience. After reconstructing the experience according to her Chinese employee’s worldview, she eventually resolved her challenges. Although Thomas and Inkson do not name this case study as an example of cultural mentoring, their description of this intervention has all the elements of cultural mentoring. Cultural mentoring interventions such as these maximize successful interactions, as will be discussed in future sections of this paper.

Perhaps to answer the critiques of CQ that it lacked a developmental component, Thomas and Inkson (D. C. Thomas & Inkson, 2009) have created a five stage continuum for the development of cultural intelligence similar to Bennett’s DMIS (M. J. Bennett, 1986b, 1993, 2016). As opposed to Bennett’s six positions: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration, Thomas and Inkson’s five stages are: reactivity to external stimuli, recognition of other cultural norms and motivation to learn more about them, accommodation of other cultural norms and rules in one’s own mind, assimilation of diverse cultural norms into alternative behaviors, and proactivity in cultural behavior based on recognition of changing cues that others do not perceive (D. C. Thomas & Inkson, 2009, pp. 154–155).

This section examined suggestions for developing the ability to work with culturally different people through the framework of cultural intelligence including cognition, knowledge, and behavior. Although ideal, the attainment of knowledge about a particular culture is not always a possibility for refugee service providers. The next two
sections explore models more applicable to refugee service providers: 1) people who have lived between cultures, and 2) the cultural mentoring model.

**Border Experiences and the Integration of Betweenness**

Although the previous group of scholars offers suggestions on how to become more culturally intelligent, the second group of scholars identifies the traits of particular individuals presumed to have developed intercultural sensitivity through cross-border types of experiences. This second group of scholars: Janet Bennett, (1993), Ruth Hill Useem and Ann Baker Cottrell (1996), David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken (2009), share the common assumption that there are people who, through their experiences traversing the borders of cultures, have developed the capability of reconstructing their experiences from different cultural perspectives. Janet Bennett (1993) refers to border experiences as those experiences on the margins which lead to either encapsulated or constructive marginality. Other border experience scholars (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; R. H. Useem & Cottrell, 1996) are concerned with third culture individuals (TCIs) and the challenges and strengths that result through their extensive experiences of movement between cultures. TCIs are defined as those who have moved between cultures and have blended their home and the host culture(s), resulting in a multicultural identity which is neither that of the home nor that of the host culture, but rather a third culture, which can be shared with others who have had similar experiences (Cockburn, 2002; Lyttle, Barker, & Cornwell, 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012; J. Useem et al., 1963).

**Encapsulated and constructive marginality.** Janet Bennett is a scholar in intercultural communication who poses the important research question: How can
educators help people who are not interculturally sensitive learn how to become interculturally sensitive (1993)? Using the DMIS (M. J. Bennett, 1986b, 1993, 2016), Janet Bennett’s training system explains how to assist people in moving along the intercultural sensitivity continuum. However, what is particularly interesting in Janet Bennett’s work is her focus on those people who are presumed to have already developed intercultural sensitivity. Janet Bennett’s (J. M. Bennett, 1993, 2014; Paige & M. J. Bennett, 2015) importance to this dissertation is her development of the concepts of encapsulated and constructive marginals. When individuals are not able to make judgments or to establish appropriate boundaries, they are wrestling with internalizing their multiple identities, a situation Bennett defines as being “encapsulated” or hindered by their marginality (1993, p. 113). “The encapsulated marginal is a person who is buffeted by conflicting cultural loyalties and unable to construct a unified identity” (1993, p. 113) as opposed to a constructive marginal who is able to “construct context intentionally and consciously for the purpose of creating his or her own identity” (1993, p. 113). The two orientations have been used to describe a person as one who feels at home nowhere (encapsulated) or one who feels at home everywhere (constructive).

Although writing as early as 1993, Janet Bennett uses the example of former president Barak Obama as the “ideal case study of a man in the middle of many cultures… he appears to claim for himself an identity that is beyond any single cultural perspective” (1993, p. 110). In her extensive analysis of cultural marginality, Bennett includes a broad range of people who have lived on the border between cultures: global nomads (including third culture individuals like Barak Obama who lived abroad while
young); individuals in bicultural marriages and their children; transnationally or transculturally adopted children and their families; members of non-dominant culture groups (including “invisible minorities”); birth in a country different from one’s current residence; identification with any group that holds minority status in the place of residence; choice (or lack of choice) in migration (children, refugees); membership of an indigenous group that was invaded by a colonial power; being racially, ethnically, and/or culturally different from the dominant culture; speaking the dominant language as a second or other language; being female; being gay, lesbian, or bisexual; not sharing primary identification with any group; and, working, playing, or studying at institutions staffed by people different from one’s self (J. M. Bennett, 1993, p. 198). Having a visible or invisible disability might have been an appropriate addition to Bennett’s group.

Milton Bennett claims that constructive marginals are in the most ethnorelative position on the DMIS, the position of Integration:

Integration of cultural difference is the state in which one’s experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews. Here, people are dealing with issues related to their own “cultural marginality”; they construe their identities at the margins of two or more cultures and central to none. As suggested by J. Bennett (1993), cultural marginality may have two forms: an encapsulated form, where the separation from culture is experienced as alienation; and a constructive form, in which movements in and out of cultures are a necessary and positive part of one’s identity. (2004, p. 72)

Milton Bennett does not make it clear from his writings, however, how he reached this conclusion—whether through testing with his Intercultural Development Inventory or other inventory, or through hypothesizing.

Third Culture Individuals (TCIs). The anthropologist-sociologist team of Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem (J. Useem, 1963; J. Useem & Useem, 1955; J. Useem et al.,
1963, 1963; R. H. Useem, 1973; R. H. Useem & Downie, 1976) recognized a special nature of those living on the margins of cultures. Ruth Hill Useem spent her career developing and refining the concept of “third cultures.” “We began to use third culture as a generic term to cover the lifestyles created, shared, and learned by people who are in the process of relating their societies, or aspects thereof, to each other” (R. H. Useem & Cottrell, 1993, pp. 23–24). An early definition describes TCKs as:

…American third-culture kids (TCK’s) who have come “home” after living abroad as dependents of parents who are employed overseas. Although they have grown up in foreign countries, they are not integral parts of those countries. When they come to their country of citizenship (some for the first time), they do not feel at home because they do not know the lingo or expectations of others—especially those of their own age. Where they feel most like themselves is in that interstitial culture, the third culture, which is created, shared, and carried by persons who are relating societies, or sections thereof, to each other. (R. H. Useem & Downie, 1976, p. 103)

This definition is widely used even now in the third culture literature.

**Constructive marginality in third culture kids.** Useem and Cottrell (1996) analyzed the results of 604, twenty-four page questionnaires of adults from 25-90 years old who had lived abroad as children in the post-World War II period, and who were dependents of parents from the State Department (23%), the military (30%), business enterprises (16%), religious organizations (17%), and other communities (14%). Useem and Cottrell found respondents:

…who have been geographically mobile and have been socialized to participate in a diversity of cultural settings, give us insights into the lifestyle and world view most appropriate to the next century—one that not only tolerates but celebrates diversity, one that is flexible and tolerant of ambiguity (1993, p. 35).

This depiction of flexibility fits well with Janet Bennett’s concept of constructive marginality and provides broad research findings. A significant finding is that most adult
third culture kids (ATCKs) do not fall into the encapsulated category, with survey participants disagreeing with statements such as “I often feel lonely,” “I am hesitant to make commitments to others,” and “I feel adrift” (Useem & Cottrell, 1996, pp. 33–34). They found that the constructively marginal ATCKs report they feel “at home everywhere.” They are eager to meet people from other countries and like to travel and live abroad, with eighty percent saying that, regardless of differences in religion, nationality, race or ethnicity, they can relate to anyone and establish relationships easily.

A finding significant to my examination of refugee service providers is that:

ATCKs are helpers and problem solvers. Drawing on their own experiences in new situations, 85 percent of ATCKs say that they reach out to help those who appear unsure of themselves, especially foreigners and non-English-speaking minorities. As one respondent put it, “We know what it is like to be confused in a country where we cannot speak the language well.” Moreover, most report that in situations where there is a conflict or misunderstanding, they are the ones who step in to mediate. When they themselves are facing new situations, the majority claim that they can establish relationships easily; and when confronted with unexpected or difficult situations, nearly 90 percent agree that they can usually figure out a way to handle them. (R. H. Useem & Cottrell, 1996, pp. 32–33)

Like Janet Bennett, Useem and Cottrell also took note of Barak Obama, but went beyond to examine other TCKs in the U.S. presidential 2008 election:

… during the 2008 presidential campaign in the United States. Cable TV news commentators spent endless hours struggling to define then-candidate Barack Obama’s cultural and racial identity. They seemed trapped by old definitions or categories of identity, none of which were sufficient to explain the complex intertwining of cultural worlds making up President Obama’s life story, including his experience as a TCK. Ironically, these same commentators also never seemed to consider how the global upbringing of John McCain, the opposing presidential candidate, might have shaped his sense of identity and worldview. Neither did they discuss how the many other adult TCKs President Obama named to his administration, such as Valerie Jarrett, Timothy Geithner, James L. Jones, or (Ret.) Major General J. Scott Gration, might have been impacted by their internationally mobile childhoods. (2009, pp. xi–xii)
Clearly, there are people identified in the border experience category who are perceived to have the qualities of intercultural sensitivity.

**Third culture and cross-culture kids (TCKs and CCKs).** Van Reken and Bethel (2005) and Pollack and Van Reken (1999, 2009) built on the foundational work of the Useems (J. Useem, 1963, 1963; J. Useem et al., 1963; R. H. Useem, 1966, 1973; R. H. Useem & Cottrell, 1996; R. H. Useem & Downie, 1976) and expanded their original concept to include other cultural marginals beyond only those who lived abroad as children, just as Janet Bennett did in the analysis above. Pollack and Van Reken also talk about our population of interest--encapsulated and constructive marginals, albeit with different terminology. Their research attempts to discover what similarities exist in “in-between” children by examining their life experiences, specifically looking for common patterns in their various experiences. According to their definition, a third culture kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture and frequently builds relationships to all of their cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar backgrounds (other TCKs and CCKs) (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

The strength of Useem, Cottrell, Van Reken, Pollack, and Bethel is that they have gathered life stories of people who demonstrate their ability to shift worldviews, rather than hypothesizing that people without formal training might have ethnorelative traits. Despite the lack of formal testing, their stories indicate that they have found people who, presumably without formal intercultural education, demonstrate the capability to move
between worldviews. Janet Bennett and Muneo Yoshikawa describe this consciousness of movement between worldviews to be a comfortable and continual movement between their various cultural identities:

Consciousness of one’s own cultural marginality, of one’s role in creating a unique cultural identity has been called a state of “dynamic in-betweeness” by Muneo Yoshikawa. The suggestion here is of continual and comfortable movement between cultural identities such that an integrated, multicultural existence is maintained, and where conscious, deliberate choice making and management of alternative frames prevail (Yoshikawa, 1987, p. 326). Yoshikawa depicts the final stage of cross-cultural adaptation as a Mobius strip or mathematical infinity symbol, reflecting twofold movement, paradoxical relationships, and “identity-in-unity” with realities that are complementary and constantly in interaction. (J. M. Bennett, 1993, p. 118)

The double-swing model also shows that one steps out from one’s own ground to meet the other. The focus is neither on one side nor on the other, but rather on the dynamic flow of dialogical interaction, a process through which the one and the other are constantly created anew. One is different from the other, yet both are fundamentally interrelated in the same continuum (Yoshikawa, 1987, p. 326).

The concept of co-creation as described by Yoshikawa above will be seen again later in the discussion of constructivism and cultural mentoring.

The strength of the border experience scholars is the concreteness that they bring to the abstract conception of intercultural sensitivity. The scholars identify actual people who they describe as being constructive marginals with traits that would be important in refugee service providers. The major limitation of this body of literature is that they have not used an instrument (such as the IDI) to test for intercultural sensitivity. Rigorously testing for levels of intercultural sensitivity is a characteristic of the research in the third body of literature, cultural mentoring, which I explore next.
Cultural Mentoring

Cultural mentoring (sometimes referred to as intercultural mentoring) in international education is defined as the facilitation of the development of intercultural sensitivity in students through an intervention by trained international education professionals knowledgeable in assisting students in reconstructing their experiences according to different cultural frameworks (Paige & Goode, 2009, p. 333). The concept of cultural mentoring resulted from a need identified by interculturalists that intercultural learning must be purposefully integrated into international education, rather than have it continue to be a haphazard byproduct of a study abroad experience. This final body of literature--cultural mentoring, will be examined through the work of Paige and Goode as well as two major studies: the Georgetown Consortium Project and Maximizing Study Abroad, and will show that intercultural learning is significantly enhanced when it is facilitated (Paige, Cohen, & Shively, 2004; Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg, 2007; Vande Berg, Balkcum, Scheid, & Whalen, 2004; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012c).

Theoretical foundations of cultural mentoring. The theoretical foundations for cultural mentoring draw on four components, including Paige’s earlier work (1993a) defining ten intensity factors in intercultural experiences 1) cultural differences; 2) ethnocentrism; 3) cultural immersion; 4) cultural isolation; 5) language; 6) prior intercultural experience; 7) expectations; 8) visibility and invisibility; 9) status; 10) power and control, as well as his (2006) model of culture learning. In addition, Paige and

Paige and Goode identify three key challenges for international educators in helping their students develop intercultural competence: 1) lack of agreement on intercultural concepts and theory, 2) inconsistent intercultural training of international education professionals (Adams & Savicki, 2008; Deardorff, 2008; Goode, 2008; Paige, 1993b; Paige & Goode, 2009; Rasch, 2001; Sunnygard, 2007; Ziegler, 2006), and 3) lack of a consistent pedagogy for developing the intercultural competence of students (2009, p. 340). Paige and Goode summarize their findings in four points: 1) the development of intercultural competence is seen as an important outcome of international education; 2) cultural mentoring is important to intercultural competence development and is effective before, during and after study abroad; 3) too often intercultural learning is left up to the students themselves in part due to the lack of intercultural theoretical background and understanding among international education professionals; and, 4) when cultural mentoring is implemented students show greater development of intercultural competence (Paige & Goode, 2009, pp. 333–334).

**Maximizing Study Abroad (MAXSA).** Begun in 1993, the Maximizing Study Abroad Research Project (MAXSA) at the University of Minnesota was one of the first programs that included intercultural learning as a central, explicit design element. MAXSA is comprised of curricula, textbooks (Mikk et al., 2009; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002), and research (Cohen, Paige, Shively, Emert, & Hoff, 2005; Paige et al., 2004, 2012) that rigorously tested the effectiveness of *Maximizing Study*
Abroad: A Students’ Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use (Paige, Cohen, et al., 2002), a language and culture learning text.

Using a “true” experimental design, 86 upcoming study abroad students were randomly assigned an experimental (N=42) or control group (N=44) who were differentiated by whether or not they took an online course using the MAXSA text during their study abroad. All 86 research participants were tested before and after studying abroad using: the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer & Bennett, 1998); the new Speech Act Measure of Language Gain (Cohen & Shively, 2002a, 2002b); the Strategies Inventory for Learning Culture (Paige, Rong, et al., 2002); and the Language Strategy Survey (Cohen, Oxford, & Chi, 2002). Students in the MAXSA course completed weekly language and culture readings and wrote seven biweekly reflection papers. The instructor of the course functioned as a cultural mentor and was available for contact if the students wished. The study found a statistically significant gain of intercultural sensitivity of 4.5 points on the IDI for all students, indicating that the study abroad itself was associated with intercultural learning. However, students in the MAXSA course had better improvement all around. The MAXSA research project found gains in intercultural sensitivity in the experimental group. Although the gains were modest, they proved the effectiveness of cultural mentoring as an intervention (Paige et al., 2012; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012).

The Georgetown Consortium Project. With a sample of 1,159 study abroad participants and 138 non-study abroad student control group, the Georgetown Consortium Research Project (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande
Berg & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg, Quinn, & Menyhart, 2012) was conducted between 2003 and 2007 to examine the effect of immersion on intercultural sensitivity development and language learning. The study asked three research questions: “1) Does immersing students in the new culture abroad help them develop interculturally?; 2) Do particular aspects of the study abroad immersion experience affect intercultural development more than others?; and 3) What types of intervention can enhance learning beyond that provided by the immersion itself” (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012, p. 35)?

Seven program design elements (Engle & Engle, 2003, 2012) or “defining components” to ensure intercultural sensitivity development were examined: 1) length of student sojourn; 2) entry target language competence; 3) language used in course work; 4) context of academic work (who the students took classes with); 5) types of student housing (who the students were housed with); 6) provision for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning; and 7) guided reflection on cultural experience (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 8). The Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer & Bennett, 1998) and Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (Stansfield, 1991, 1996) were administered before the study abroad, immediately after, and five months after the study abroad, and results were compared.
**Findings summary.**

1. Duration of experience abroad: Small impact on intercultural development
2. Homestays: No significant gains in intercultural sensitivity development
3. Direct enrollment in host university courses: No significant gains in intercultural development
4. Unfacilitated “experiential” activities: No significant gains in intercultural development
5. Maximizing contact with host nationals: No significant gains in intercultural development
6. Improving foreign language proficiency: No significant gains in intercultural development
7. Pre departure cultural orientation: Small impact on language skills only
8. Homestays—when students engage with host: Significant gains in intercultural development

**Synthesis**

Although there are many common traits in the literatures of cultural intelligence, border experiences, and cultural mentoring, there are two features of cultural mentoring that distinguish it from the other perspectives: 1) the use of an intervention in the form of a cultural mentor to guide the experience of construing and re-construing an experience according to different frameworks, and 2) the elimination of “paradigmatic confusion” (M. J. Bennett, 2012, 2013a; M. J. Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004) by applying a constructivist paradigm rather than a positivist one to understand cultural experiences. Cultural intelligence scholars advocate for the importance of knowing about cultures, practices and customs, having a cultural consciousness, being flexible in behavior, and having the motivation to persevere when encountering differences. Certainly these qualities do not conflict with what could be considered helpful by scholars of border experiences literature and advocates of cultural mentoring. However, what makes
cultural mentoring stand out is the concept of actually recreating one’s perspective of an experience according to a different framework, of being able to reconstruct one’s “cultural perspective and to adapt their behavior to other cultural contexts” (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012b, p. 18). Milton Bennett emphasizes that understanding in and of itself is not the goal. The “purpose of understanding is to get the feeling for something, and thus to enable a different experience” (2013a, p. 22), perhaps a distinction similar to looking at a photo of a person eating a sandwich versus actually eating a sandwich.

**Cultural mentoring and constructivism.** Advocates of cultural mentoring agree on the importance of moving beyond positivistic and relativist paradigms in international education to a paradigm of constructivism (M. J. Bennett, 2012, 2018; Lou & Weber Bosley, 2012; Medina-Lopez-Portillo & Salonen, 2012; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012; Savicki, 2012; Stuart, 2012; Weber Bosley, 2018). In fact, several scholars have compared the movement to a constructivist paradigm to Thomas Kuhn’s (1962) concept of looking at the same data but creating new connections and paradigms (M. J. Bennett, 2012; Lou, Vande Berg, & Paige, 2012; Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012b). Vande Berg and Paige claim that each of the cultural mentoring scholars (M. J. Bennett, 2012; Duke, Taylor, & Vande Berg, 2012; Engle & Engle, 2012; Lou et al., 2012; Lou & Weber Bosley, 2012; Medina-Lopez-Portillo & Salonen, 2012; Paige et al., 2012; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012; Savicki, 2012; Stuart, 2012; Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012b; Vande Berg, Quinn, et al., 2012) in their text is informed by and writes from a constructivist perspective (Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012b, p. 19). Certainly, the similarities among the philosophies of cultural intelligence, border experiences and
cultural mentoring are numerous. All scholars advocate for experiencing new situations, learning, and reflecting, but what is specific to cultural mentoring is the application of the constructivist paradigm.

What is innovative about cultural mentoring is this idea of constructing one’s experience in a way that is similar to the way individuals from the target culture construct their own experience. A paradigm shift to constructivism would include both immersion in another culture and cultural mentoring, because the experience of difference alone (without cultural mentoring) may not change deeply held beliefs or behaviors. In this paradigm the student co-creates the world through ongoing interactions with the environment along with the assistance of an educator who is trained to intervene both strategically and intentionally. The co-construction in this paradigm happens when the observer goes beyond recognizing a difference in perspective to being able to reorganize the experience according to the perspective of someone else (M. J. Bennett, 2013f, p. 41).

Milton Bennett gives this example:

… if one wishes to participate in Japanese culture as an Italian, he or she must stop organizing the world in an Italian way and start organizing it in a Japanese way. (This is the theoretical ideal, never achieved, of course). The ability to use self-reflexive consciousness in such a way as to construct alternative cultures and move into alternative experience is the crux of intercultural adaptation. When two people are doing this, it generates a “virtual third culture”—the interactional space where intercultural learning occurs. (M. J. Bennett, 2012, p. 101)

Milton Bennett is not alone in his analysis. Laura Bathurst gives us a similar example of when a student is immersed but does not, for whatever reason, reconstruct a non-U.S. American version of reality. She tells of a student who just returned from a study abroad:
“What I’ve realized,” he said, “is that I wasn’t really in Japan, even though I lived there. That is, I didn’t really learn anything about Japanese culture” (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012, p. 281).

Similar constructivist arguments are proposed by many scholars (M. J. Bennett, 2004, 2011, 2012, 2013g; Duke et al., 2012; Lou & Weber Bosley, 2012; Nam, 2011; Paige et al., 2012; Savicki, 2012; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009) who all illustrate their cases by using this well-known quote from George Kelly:

Experience is made up of the successive construing of events. It is not constituted merely by the succession of events themselves. A person can be a witness to a tremendous parade of episodes and yet, if he fails to keep making something out of them, or if he waits until they have all occurred before he attempts to reconstrue them, he gains little in the way of experience from having been around when they happened. (1963, p. 73)

Just as in Bathurst’s example of the student who was in Japan but was never really in Japan and Bennett’s example of failing to organizing events according to a Japanese framework, Kelly is telling us that how we construe our experiences is what is important. If individuals are not already interculturally sensitive, or if they do not have a cultural mentor to help them learn how to reconstruct experiences from a Japanese perspective, for example, they may not even perceive themselves to be in another culture (as in the aforementioned Bathurst quote).

The cultural mentoring scholars have shown how the intervention of cultural mentors can assist a person in learning how to deconstruct and reconstruct experiences according to different cultural frameworks. In developing the capability to reconstruct experiences according to a wide variety of frameworks, refugee service providers with this capability might be able to imagine other perspectives that would be helpful in working with cultures with which they are not familiar. An analysis utilizing this
constructing and deconstructing process has proved helpful in this dissertation about
refugee service providers.

**Relationship to this Research**

This review of the literature has examined three bodies of scholarship that
investigate different approaches to developing intercultural sensitivity. The scholars
examined in this review are examining the same types of questions as examined in this
research: How do the people who interculturally sensitive develop that capability? As
we have seen, the cultural intelligence scholars ask “Why are some people more adept at
adjusting to new cultural surroundings than others?” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 59); the
border individual scholars ask what special capabilities are developed from repeatedly
crossing cultural borders; and cultural mentoring scholars ask how can an intervention by
a qualified guide help people develop intercultural sensitivity?

While the above literature review is useful in understanding what contributes to
the development of intercultural sensitivity in general, this research is particularly
interested in investigating how people develop intercultural sensitivity without formal
training. This is a significant issue for the organizations who hire refugee service
providers in particular, since they often do not have the funds to train or to test for
intercultural sensitivity in their potential employees. Furthermore, because of the
complexity of working with over a dozen different ethnicities in a single day, refugee
service workers must possess protean cultural flexibility (Lifton, 1999) when working
with people who have different perspectives.
This research addresses a gap in the literature around factors contributing to the development of intercultural sensitivity in refugee service providers. Although the combined insights of the scholars cited in this review contribute to this research, the cultural mentoring literature seems to be the most helpful and relevant. Cultural mentoring scholarship also corresponds most closely to observations that once someone is able to reconstruct their experiences they become more able to do this appropriately with each successive new culture. This is an important capability for refugee service providers. The purpose of this study is to examine the life and educational experiences of people who work with refugees and to identify the life factors that may contribute to the cultivation of intercultural sensitivity. Hence, the research question guiding my proposed study is “How do experiences or other factors contribute to intercultural sensitivity development?”

**Conclusion**

“There is a critical need for individuals who are flexible, versatile, and highly adaptable given the rapidly changing contexts and conditions” (Nam & Fry, 2010, p. 23), but there is a gap in the literature of how people become this way informally. Although formal intercultural training such as study abroad sojourns are increasing internationally, and nonformal intercultural training through community organizations is increasing, informal intercultural training of the type found in families may affect the largest group of people. For example, refugees and other immigrants, refugee children and other first and second generation immigrants, expatriates and their families, missionary and military
children often have no other training than what they observe from their surroundings including observing their family members.

Figure 8 Photo from the movie Babies. https://vacuumspace.wordpress.com/2010/12/02/18-babies/

The documentary Babies (Chabat, Billot, Rouxel, & Balmès, 2010) documents a year in the life of a baby in each of four countries, Mongolia, Namibia, the United States, and Japan, from their actual birth (seen on screen) until they are one year old. Without a single word spoken throughout the film, viewers are shown the process of how a baby becomes acculturated. For example, the Namibian baby watches his mother pounding a root vegetable with a rock. The baby imitates the action by pounding a rock with another rock. In each country, in just one short year the babies have observed and incorporated the behaviors of the culture. Perhaps it feels comfortable or normal to the Namibian baby to pound with a rock. As for the TCKs/CCKs, other border individuals, or people of several heritages, they may be more like a baby traveling from Namibia to Japan to Mongolia to the U.S.—like a baby growing up experiencing each of the cultures of the movie Babies. Perhaps each person feels comfortable or normal in each of the cultures
with which they are familiar. If a baby was growing up in each of the four cultures perhaps they would be incorporating into themselves four different ways of knowing about the world. They might be able to internalize the “correctness” of many different possible worldviews.

This may be what is happening with Karen refugee children who experience a U.S. worldview in a St. Paul classroom by day and Karen worldview when they go home to their Karen family in the afternoon. This could be what a child who spends life in Kansas internalizes when he spends summers incorporating or at least reflecting on and internalizing or rejecting the worldview of his Amish cousins while living in the countryside. Or this could be what someone with one Chinese parent and one U.S. parent feels after living in China and then moving to the U.S. There is more than one set of frameworks being internalized. A former and much admired professor once told me that his worldview became flexible because one parent was Lutheran and one was Catholic; it made him think in two different ways. Though both parents were Christian, this diversity of thought shattered the one-way thinking that could have evolved in him as a child.

Cultural mentoring appears to be on the cutting edge of intercultural education. For refugees and the people who work with them, special attention is paid to informal cultural mentoring. It is not enough to have an experience of another culture but it has to be internalized through critical reflection (possibly with the help of a mentor who understands cultural values dimensions and possibly with soft challenge and strong support) (Sanford, 1969) in order to be able to move among worldviews. Maybe it is because we strive to keep this multiple perspective, this movement through worldviews
active that we seek out professions or families that demand that we keep moving among worldviews. Perhaps our constant movement in early life and our comfort with our own culture (which is comfort with instability) has us seek out this instability (or this situation of constantly challenging our worldviews and reflecting on them) through our families and professions. This is the key idea explored in this dissertation. Whether it is explored through the choice of intercultural marriage, transnational adoption, or profession, it has been interesting to discover this through in-depth exploration of the stories of the people who choose the profession of refugee service worker. How are they able to interact with people from many different cultures throughout the day? Are they good at this? If so, how did they become good at this?
Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

-“Should you marry him?”
the question comes in English.
-“Yes.”
-“Should you marry him?”
the question echoes in Polish.
-“No.”
--Lost in Translation (Hoffman, 1989, p. 199)

Origin of the Study

My involvement with refugee communities goes back decades as part of a community-wide effort to address the large incoming refugee populations that were overwhelming my city’s English teaching and social service system. I have had the opportunity to work in various refugee serving organizations or with various refugee research projects in different cities for many years.
One of the responsibilities of managers of nonprofit organizations serving refugees is to select refugee service workers to work with newly arriving refugees. It is clear that the programs are more successful when they are staffed with people who could work well with people who had different values and beliefs. Managers become experienced in selecting people to work with refugees who proved to be good at working interculturally. Nonprofit organizations working with refugees are not only assisting people being resettled into poverty, but are also in poverty themselves due to low wages.
and minimal funding for programming and often do not have the financial resources to utilize formal sensitivity testing, such as the IDI. Neither would many consider this an ethical use of the test (Nam & Fry, 2010, p. 16).

In materials prepared by Mitch Hammer and presented by Michael Paige at the Intercultural Development Inventory IDI® Qualifying Seminar in Minneapolis, Minnesota held June 19-21, 2013, this slide was presented:

![Intercultural Development Continuum](image)

*Figure 10 Intercultural Development Continuum, (Hammer, 1998-2013)*

The explanation that accompanied this slide was that at each position along the Intercultural Development Continuum, there was a response from the person with whom one is working ranging from feeling ignored, to uncomfortable, to not heard, to understood, to valued and involved. This is significant in refugee serving work because the responses of the refugees were observable over a period of years. Observations,
being told directly by refugees that they felt ignored, uncomfortable, not heard, understood, or valued and involved, were indicators of the intercultural sensitivity of the refugee service workers. “Based on this behavioral model and the assessment of behavioral outcomes, Ruben (1976) argues that individual's competence is best assessed by observed actions rather than self-reported data” (Nam & Fry, 2010, p. 12). Nam and Fry also find that:

Both intercultural experts (scholars) and administrators agree that it is possible to assess degrees of intercultural competence, and the mixed methods approach of using both quantitative and qualitative measures is suggested as the best way to assess intercultural competence, including interviews, observation, and judgment by self and others” (2010, p. 13).

The use of observation and the IDC’s way of interpreting intercultural sensitivity from the feelings invoked by others is consistent with the scholars reviewed in Chapter Two. Recall that the work of Stewart and M. Bennett (1991), Hammer and Paige (2013b), and Livermore share this same theme that the “degree to which we continue to change internally will be seen in the impressions we leave on others through our actions” (Livermore, 2010, p. 136). Just as Thomas & Inkson (2009, p. 156) purported that the iterative process of combining attention to the situation, retention of knowledge, and reproduction of correct behavior based on the reaction of the person, with whom one is communicating, and altering behavior accordingly helps us refine our behavior.

Refugee serving nonprofit managers develop a sense for determining which people would be appropriate to work in programs in which intercultural sensitivity was needed. An extensive interview protocol and training curriculum helped managers assess the intercultural sensitivity of people applying to work with refugees. As their abilities
developed they became adept at determining “organization fit.” They realized that contrary to the belief that international or multicultural experience alone creates intercultural sensitivity, it was really not just exposure to other cultures that seemed to precede intercultural sensitivity but it was how that exposure was reflected upon, interpreted and analyzed that seemed significant. Refugee services managers realized that simply because a job applicant had had international or multicultural experience did not mean that they had intercultural sensitivity.

Years of working with refugee service providers has been a key factor in the ability to gain access to, and have a deeper understanding of the people who work with refugees. For example, at one organization there were around 30-35 employees (different numbers at different times), at least 53% had had significant international or intercultural experience including being an immigrant or refugee, a third generation child of missionary parents, had lived abroad or had worked abroad, or had a spouse from a different country (or more than one of these factors).

Research Design

This research is a grounded theory study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is an ethnographically (Fetterman, 2010; Wolcott, 2008) informed case study with the bounded unit being people who successfully serve or served refugees in a specific organization (with the name and location to be held in confidence) in the United States. It utilizes in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews and storytelling (Brinkerhoff, 2006; Krueger, 2010, 2011; Labonte, 2007; Labonte et al., 1999).
Participant Selection

Purposive sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Patton, 2015) using extreme case analysis (Caracelli & Greene, 1993, p. 199; Fry et al., 1981; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Teddlie & Yu, 2007) was used to identify research participants who may tend more towards intercultural sensitivity.

This study is a qualitative study. Maxwell (2005) points out that the terminology “sampling” can prove problematic for qualitative research due to the implication that it represents a population. Maxwell instead uses the terminology “purposeful selection” based on (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990) and points out that there are other terms such as “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 40) and “criterion-based selection” (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). He defines purposeful selection as a “strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88) or using panels (Weiss, 1994) of unique people who are experts or have experience the phenomena in question.

Selecting those times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need in order to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative selection decisions” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). With Maxwell’s words in mind, the most important selection criteria for this study was to find people who work or have worked with refugees who are interculturally sensitive in order to identify factors in their experiences that have influenced them to become that way. Other scholars who have utilized sampling to achieve representativeness or comparability using this type of participant selection are Patton (2015), Creswell & Plano
Clark (2018), Caracelli & Greene (1993) and Fry, Supang, & Amrung, (1981) with the latter two identifying their purposive selection as extreme case analysis consistent with Teddlie & Yu’s extreme sampling (2007).

Participants for the study were sought who have three characteristics 1) they have worked with or are currently working with refugees in the United States at a particular organization, 2) they are considered to be more interculturally sensitive as described by the IDC (see Figure 10 above), and 3) they are considered by their supervisor, colleagues, and refugee clients to be effective in working with people from many different nationalities and ethnicities.

**What is effectiveness?**

To be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures. A reasonable term that summarizes these qualities of people is intercultural sensitivity, and we suggest that it may be a predictor of effectiveness. (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992, p. 416)

In this case, the study participants were carefully selected as being observed by others to be effective in working with multiple various cultures. They were observed to be effective by their supervisor, by their colleagues, and by proxy, through former refugee clients who maintained their connection with the workers even after their enrollment in the program had ended. As reported by their supervisor, colleagues, and themselves, these research participants were invited to be included into the family events of their clients such as funerals, weddings, births, birthdays, family arrivals, and festivals, which indicates that clients had at least some comfort with the study participants beyond the office setting.
Furthermore, a measure of effectiveness is defined as the refugee service worker’s ability to successfully complete the time determined by their contract (without resigning or being asked to leave) without being reassigned to another program, terminated due to inability to meet the demands of the program, or resigning.

In addition, it is a subjective determination as to how the standard of effectiveness is defined. In this case, the study participants were carefully selected as being observed by colleagues or their supervisor or both to be effective in working with multiple various cultures. In addition to observation by colleagues, research participants were often invited to be included into the family events of their clients such as funerals, weddings, family arrivals, and festivals, which indicate that clients had at least some comfort with the study participants beyond the office setting. As Nam and Fry have stated “the best way to assess intercultural competence, include[s] interviews, observation, and judgment by self and others” (2010, p. 13). Years of observation and the researcher’s connection with refugee serving organizations has presented the opportunity for purposeful participant selection. Enough qualifying participants were located in a single program of a refugee serving organization in the United States. Interviews were conducted of the complete population until the point of data saturation.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews. Potential study participants were initially contacted in person, by telephone, via Skype, or via email. Multiple contacts were made prior to the interviews to explain the nature of the study, what types of questions would be asked, acquire agreement from the group members, and obtain a signed consent form prior to scheduling
the interviews. Interviews were held in a location that was comfortable, provided the participant sufficient privacy, and was quiet enough for audio recording. Each participant was invited to a convenient location and also allowed to suggest a location that would be more convenient. Flexibility was important, as in pilot studies some participants were most comfortable having family members present during interviews; other participants preferred to be interviewed individually. In addition, some participants found it most convenient to be interviewed in their homes while others preferred public locations or other private locations. Participants who were unable to meet in person were interviewed remotely via telephone or Skype. No compensation was offered to study participants.

Data collection was in the form of in-depth ethnographically (Fetterman, 2010; Wolcott, 2008) informed semi-structured individual interviews with study participants who met the requirements established above. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between two and four hours each generating between 50 and 70 pages of transcripts per interview. Participants were encouraged to tell their stories for as long as they liked. The participant was initially asked to spend a couple of hours and allowed to determine when their story was complete. Most participants did not need prompting to tell rich, detailed, and candid stories. If needed, participants were asked follow-up questions to probe for more details when appropriate. Most interviews were completed in a long single session but for participants who had more to add and needed more time to do so, a second session was held. Two digital audio recorders were utilized for each interview to ensure recording success (Behar, 2012). Carefully written notes were also taken during the interview. Pre- and post- interview contact with participants involved
contacting them to explain the study, obtain written consent, arrange times for the interviews, and if they were part of the featured interviews, asking them to review their written story for accurateness and confidentiality. Revisions were made based on participant input, sometimes with multiple follow-ups.

Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended in order to capture thick description (Geertz, 2003) of experiences relevant both to the participant and the researcher. Sufficient rapport was established so that participants felt encouraged to tell their stories (Brinkerhoff, 2006; Krueger, 2010, 2011; Labonte, 2007; Labonte et al., 1999) in the way they wished to do so. In addition, interview questions were developed to guide the interview if necessary to expand the discussion relevant to the research topic or to probe more deeply. Probes might include questions such as: “1. Tell me more about... 2. What was that experience like for you? 3. What else would you like to say about that” (Collier, 2008, p. 48)? Participants were asked to discuss:

- How would you define intercultural sensitivity?
- To what extent do you consider yourself to be interculturally sensitive?
- What do you think accounts for your level of intercultural sensitivity?
- Please describe for me the nature of your intercultural journeys and experiences.
- Which journeys and experiences have influenced you the most in terms of the development of your intercultural sensitivity?
- What can you tell me about your earliest memories of your life with your family?
- What are the circumstances in which you have experienced more than one culture?
- Have you been effective in working interculturally? (examples?)
To what do you attribute your effectiveness in working interculturally?

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this study conforms to Merriam’s conception of a basic interpretive and descriptive qualitative study in which the researcher seeks:

…to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these. Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. These data are inductively analyzed to identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data, a rich, descriptive account of the findings is presented and discussed, using references to the literature that framed the study in the first place. (Merriam, 2002, pp. 6–7)

This study utilized inductive data analysis to identify common themes. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative analysis-style software as in previous research (Stone, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2017).

**Conclusion**

This research fills a gap in the literature on factors that lead to intercultural sensitivity in people who serve refugees in the United States. Few similar studies have been designed to present the rich, descriptive stories of people who are in this line of work. Prior studies have focused on increasing intercultural sensitivity through creating training programs to foster intercultural sensitivity, while this investigation will examine the life of workers who already exhibit qualities of intercultural sensitivity as observed (Nam & Fry, 2010) by their supervisor, colleagues and by proxy as seen in the impressions of the people being served (Hammer, 2013b, p. 201; Stewart & Bennett, 1991; D. C. Thomas & Inkson, 2009). Livermore shares this same theme that the “degree to which we continue to change internally will be seen in the impressions we
leave on others through our actions” (2010, p. 136). In this world filled with ever increasing numbers of people fleeing violence, should it not be a high priority to understand what contributes to the development of individuals who can create positive feelings in the people around them? To have the ability to “change internally” (Livermore, 2010, p. 136) and to be able to reconstruct the world in a way in which we understand one another better, is the crux of intercultural sensitivity (M. J. Bennett, 2004), and also of a more harmonious community. This study provides insights towards how intercultural sensitivity is developed. Imagine a world in which no one needs to flee violence. Imagine a world that does not create refugees. It is my hope that this research can lead to a first step in understanding how interculturally sensitive individuals contribute to more harmony in at least one small part of the world.
Chapter Four: Individual Case Studies

I am not you. (A. Crowell-Johnson personal communication, 2018)

Nine refugee service workers who were observed to be interculturally sensitive by supervisors, colleagues and former clients were interviewed for this research. Transcripts for each interviewed ranged from 50 to 70 pages. Given space limitations, a selection of four of the nine interviews are presented here. All of the respondents’ stories had similar themes of encountering and reflecting upon cultural difference. All of the respondents spoke candidly and completely while being interviewed making any of the nine life stories acceptable to be presented here. These particular four stories were chosen because 1) some respondents were more concerned about having their identity revealed due to distinctive aspects of their life experiences, therefore those stories were not chosen; 2) these particular stories were included due to the intricacy of the stories told; 3) the participants reflected more deeply on their experiences; and, 4) because they encompassed multiple aspects of intercultural sensitivity. Data saturation was attained.

To portray an accurate presentation of the stories told by research participants, extensive quotations are used to give them genuine voice. In addition, each of these four interview summaries was sent to the corresponding study participants to be reviewed for accurate portrayal of their experiences. Some participants asked that their description might be further decontextualized so that they might not be identified. For example, instead of stating the countries in which she had lived, one participant asked if the countries she lived in could be decontextualized further to say simply “Latin America” or “Europe.” Because of
the candor with which each participant answered the questions, other participants also had concerns about being identified. Therefore, the names of the people, places and other identifiers have been made more vague or have been changed or removed to strictly protect confidentiality.

The people interviewed in this case study describe their experiences and the factors in their lives that they believe contributed to their intercultural sensitivity. Although each participant was asked the same set of questions, each person elaborated on different aspects of their lives that they considered to be significant to the development of intercultural sensitivity. The experiences and stories are presented in the words of the people interviewed. The data presented here are analyzed further in chapter five.

“Izzy’s” Story

Early school years. By third grade Izzy was being bussed out of her own neighborhood to a neighborhood with rich diversity in the populations who lived there. Her new elementary school was heavily Latino, Hmong and African-American. Izzy reports that out of a class of 30 she was one of three white children in her class-- which was normal at that school:

When you're in third grade, eight years old, that's when you really start to have an idea of relationships and the fact that [they] look different than I do. It's not just that we all like playing in the sandbox but we actually have some cultural differences that would make us act differently or really differently to each other…. I knew all about the journey of the people from Laos and Vietnam told directly to me by my friends and actively taught in school.
Parents. Izzy’s mother had her master's degree in public health. She was a researcher who spent a decade doing a longitudinal quality of life study on children. Izzy remembers that for her mom public health and serving those who have additional needs was always part of her framework. Her mom helped to open a non-profit fine art center for children who could not afford music lessons. The nonprofit also provided a variety of arts classes particularly for low-income children. Izzy was raised with the framework that if you are fortunate to have means then it is your responsibility to help people who do not. This framework was the basis for what her family did and what she has continued to do throughout her life:

My mom was really involved with her church and they [my parents] did a lot of volunteering. They did a program called interfaith hospitality…and they would partner with a whole bunch of other religious agencies so churches, synagogues, mosques what-have-you, to house families who were homeless. For as long as I can remember back, I did a lot of volunteering with homeless families… who were housed at the church so we were cooking dinner, talking with the kids, playing games, singing songs and stuff like that. The church always raised donations and they had partnered with a school in rural Guatemala. [I was too young, but] my mom always went on those trips. Our church in general was a Presbyterian church but really open, really inclusive, really kind of a servant style of Presbyterianism, so that was the framework of my growing up as well.

Spanish. Going to school with Hmong, African-American, and Latino children prompted Izzy to study Spanish, but it was her Spanish violin teacher who was her primary influence. Izzy started learning to speak Spanish and to play the violin from the age of five. Both the Spanish language and playing the violin have continued to be central to her life. Her violin teacher conducted her violin lessons in Spanish which prompted Izzy to attend music camp in Spain and later during college to have her study abroad experience in a Spanish town near her music camp:
I spent a couple weeks at music camp in the mountains above [the city] when I was 16. My violin teacher was there instructing at the camp. Besides me, there was only one other non-Spaniard there. The circumstances forced me to speak Spanish.

Izzy studied Spanish at school from the first time she could choose a language all through her university experience. In her undergraduate program, she majored in Spanish, Portuguese, and psychology. In the summers through high school she attended a culture and language immersion camp:

I loved it! I still remember some of the camp songs. I sing them now to my baby and he likes them. My husband [who is from Mexico] always asks, “Where did you learn that song?” He knows some of them from his childhood. “I've never heard anyone else sing that.” So I sing for Baby and he claps along and it's cute.

**Intercultural sensitivity.** Izzy sees intercultural sensitivity as being inclusive and being sensitive to others’ cultures without judgment and without preconceived notions of what the culture means to that person. Izzy defines the distinction she makes between intercultural sensitivity and cultural competency:

Just because I had a lot of Hmong friends growing up, it doesn't mean that everyone who is Hmong is going to act like that or look like that or feel the same way as my particular Hmong friends did. I think that especially when I'm describing myself I would describe myself as being “interculturally sensitive” as opposed to “culturally competent.” I think cultural competency is an imaginary idea. I don't think you can actually be competent. That's the same reason why I don't say that I'm a hundred percent fluent in Spanish because I don't even think I’m 100 percent fluent in English. I mean, I don't know every single word that exists in either language.
Pushing her biases/Awareness of unawareness. Izzy hopes that she is interculturally sensitive but states that there will always be times when she will not be, and for example, not use “people first” language. Sometimes she will have created a perception of someone based on previous experiences and she continuously strives to examine her views, values and perception to push against her own biases:

As a human being in this global society you are required to constantly push your biases so that you don't continue to perpetuate them. So I try to be as culturally sensitive as possible, and at times I'm sure that I have been biased… I think the more aware of a bias you are the more likely you are to be pushing back against it behaving in ways that are in opposition to your biases.

Izzy believes that simply being aware that she has biases (even if below her conscious awareness of them) might lead to a higher level of intercultural sensitivity because at least then she is conscious that she might not be aware of her biases.

Listening and observing. Izzy states that there is value in listening and observing when interacting interculturally:

I think a lot of this is sitting and listening to people and observing people. When I think about intercultural competence the idea I have is that you read a book about a culture and then you just assume that “Okay, I'm competent now I get this so this must mean that everyone in this culture is going fit this mold and this is how I should act when I meet a person [from a particular culture].” It seems just very black-and-white whereas I feel that intercultural sensitivity is that you're allowing people to educate you about who they are.

Izzy is sensitive to the fact that intercultural sensitivity can be situational:

I could talk all day long about how well I can evaluate my biases but if I'm in a situation where my personal identity is being threatened or if I'm in a stressful situation, I'm going to revert back to what I know and what I'm good at. I think everything takes practice. I didn't become a reflective listener overnight so I think those with more exposure to different cultures are going to be able to use the tools that they have learned to work with other cultures and to be sensitive to things that might make [someone] uncomfortable.
Choosing challenges/comfort with discomfort. Izzy has intentionally put herself into situations that challenge her culturally. In fact, she says that part of why she chose to live in Spain for six months is that she wanted to not only learn the language but to push herself beyond where she felt comfortable. One way she did this was to participate in the “intercambios which are language exchanges you would find on all the bulletin boards” to find strangers who wanted to practice English in exchange for letting their partner practice Spanish. This was particularly uncomfortable for Izzy who does not consider herself to be a good networker:

I'm terrible at small talk … but with these intercambios it forces you to sit with a stranger, a person who may or may not understand you in a place that might be uncomfortable and then you're forced to find something to talk about. It's the worst possible networking scenario you can think of, but I made a lot of really good friends that way. It was really an uncomfortable beginning but it became something that with every victory it builds confidence. … I wanted to put myself into a situation in which I was uncomfortable.

In addition to the intercambios, a formal, culture specific course taught by her abroad program was especially important to her interculturally:

[A class on culture] was part of [the program’s] initial orientation to us as new students [to teach us that] this is what the culture really means to the people in this town in particular. It was invaluable because it was taught by a grad student studying culture at the [university there] and so somebody who was really invested … really delving into what culture means to people. I learned a lot from that but one of the things that this person said was to take risks, not like safety-wise but take confidence risks because you have only six months here so take advantage of the time you have with this really fortunate, incredible experience.
Learning from “failures.” Izzy attributes her experiences to helping her develop her intercultural sensitivity, especially purposely putting herself in situations in which she does not know the people or places and where she has the opportunity to learn more. Allowing herself to sit with her discomfort is one key to her development. She firmly believes that the more she learns about people, the more she will expand her sense of the world by being exposed to different experiences. With each “victory,” she builds confidence and awareness, however she acknowledges that not each encounter has been what she considers a “victory.”

Intercultural marriage. Izzy is in an intercultural marriage with her husband and in a sense, his extended family from Mexico. She reports that in her marriage there is a lot of miscommunication, not only in terms of language and words but also with intercultural miscommunications, which can be detrimental. She illustrates an example of the differences she bridges in her true story, the Safety Pin and the Eclipse. When Izzy was pregnant she wanted to see the lunar eclipse that was happening where she lived. Izzy explains that her husband had strong feelings from his Mexican cultural orientation against her doing so:

There’s a common belief in Mexican folklore where if you are pregnant and you go outside and you see a lunar eclipse your child will be born with disfigurements. The belief is that the cure to avoid having disfigurements during a lunar eclipse is to put a piece of metal near your belly. So my husband wanted me to put a safety pin on my underwear because that was nearest to where the baby was. I flat-out refused to do it because it smashed up against all my own cultural norms. My husband was adamant about this, and we got into a huge argument. He basically crowd-sourced the [best thing to do] with all of his female cousins.
Despite her husband’s real panic over the possibility of their baby having adverse effects from the lunar eclipse, Izzy decided to experience it anyway (without the safety pin) and she reports that her husband did not speak to her for days:

I was nine months pregnant with my child and already had enough stress in my life … It would have been so easy for me to just say “Okay.” Second time around I'll probably say “Okay,” but I became so stubbornly rooted in my scientific background that I was like “This is not possibly true. I cannot give in. You cannot possibly be right about this.” There were probably some pregnancy hormones happening at the same time. …It was a very culturally insensitive moment for me. That's when I received an F in intercultural sensitivity. It's every day of my life. I feel like by eight or nine o'clock I am so culturally fatigued every single day, every day.

Izzy reports that she is fatigued from her attempts to bridge cultural differences every day of her life because she is married to a person who is so strong in a single culture-- the culture that he has grown up with, even though she recognizes that not everyone from Mexico experiences the same cultural norms. By contrast, Izzy feels she has no culture:

I kind of have no culture. My culture seems like a whole bunch of random things thrown together. I'm ethnically Polish, but I don't sit there and eat borsch every day. I don't even know how to make it. …I'm from [my home state]--that's my culture I guess, so “drink beer and eat brats” is my culture. I know at some point my child is going to say “Where are you from?” He knows where Dad's from. Dad’s from Mexico that's really easy. Mom’s from --I don't know-- the country of [my home state]?
While it might be stressful and fatiguing, Izzy states that it is fascinating to be married to somebody who is a first-generation immigrant to the United States. “Being married to the most polar opposite person you could possibly think of,” Izzy considers herself to be an ultra-feminist, activist, social worker while her husband cherishes his traditional cultural beliefs. Izzy has a master’s degree in social work and maintains her family’s most foundational belief, that is, to help others, which she has done her entire life. Her husband has totally different beliefs:

My husband will tell you to this day the most appalling moment that he had in our entire relationship was when he asked me what I wanted to do in my life and I said I wanted to help people, and his response was “Are kidding me? You have to help yourself and, then you can help people.” In his mind, because that's how he was brought up, you help yourself, and that's what you do. You don't have to care about anyone else. Let them do what they want to do.

“Betsy’s” Story

Parents. Betsy had what she considers to be a very strong family experience and an ideal upbringing—“a very classic suburban upbringing.” She lived in the type of neighborhood in which she could “run around” on her own with her friends. She describes her parents as being particularly non-judgmental people who like to give people the benefit of the doubt and who are very generous and broad-minded. Betsy reports that her parents always think that people have the best intentions. She further reports that her parents’ gracious attitude of kindness has been instilled in her. Betsy recounts that it is natural for her to think that people have positive intentions and that she will find a basis of understanding that will help her when communicating interculturally. She describes her dad as an extremely compassionate man. She believes that watching his compassion
has made her compassionate as well. She gives an example from her childhood of a time when she and her father were at a gas station near their home:

There was a guy there who obviously was really down on his luck and I think he had just come out of the hospital. He had his arm in a splint and he needed a ride. My dad was looking at him and looking at me, his seven-year-old daughter, as if to say, “I’m not taking a strange man in a car with my seven-year-old daughter.” So he went home and dropped me off and went back and picked up the guy and gave him a ride and I really remember that, that I could see the pain in my dad’s face about rejecting this guy. My dad was always a very generous donator, too.

**Religious and civic values.** Betsy grew up Catholic and went to Catholic Church every week. She remembers that her involvement in her church and in being in Girl Scouts instilled a great sense of duty in her in terms of social justice, service towards people who are not in the best circumstances, and generosity. Betsy feels a strong sense of duty to do work at service related jobs and has a long history of doing so.

**Childhood.** Betsy attributes her development of intercultural sensitivity to having good role models growing up. In elementary school she had a teacher who had been an AmeriCorps volunteer at a Hopi reservation. Her teacher spoke about her experiences there often and with great respect. This was one of Betsy’s first introductions to the reality that there were other cultures within the United States and that was important to her:

I think my teacher was one of the most influential people in my development of intercultural sensitivity because I remember my curiosity being really peaked ... There was a period, a couple years there, when I was in elementary school that I was very intrigued by indigenous cultures. That gradually grew.
People over chimpanzees. When Betsy was older she studied Jane Goodall and her work with chimpanzees. By the time she got into college, she already knew she wanted to have a global experience and was looking at international relations and anthropology as major areas of study. She initially went into college thinking she wanted to be Jane Goodall but then realized that it was more important to her to work with people who did not have the means to provide for themselves. That realization changed her from wanting to be Jane Goodall into wanting to work in community development and international development, which she did.

Dating and friendships. Betsy did some intercultural dating for several years. For four years, all of high school and some college, she dated someone who was Jewish. The couple would go to each other’s services and discuss religion and cultures. Later, at the end of college, for two years Betsy dated a Muslim man from Kenya who she met in her Swahili class. Discussions about religion led Betsy to the realization that:…we have more in common than we do not. We had lots of fascinating conversations—all the religious stuff and just about family values and obligations. So it was fun to date people who had different religious beliefs and talk about them. My Kenyan boyfriend was expected to marry someone his family had picked out for him, so that was a big cultural difference. Everything else we could really talk about and have a good laugh over [but]…his family’s requirement that he was required to marry a cousin was a sticky point in the development of our relationship.

Study abroad in Kenya. Betsy studied for six months in Kenya during college. The program assigned her to two different host families, one in the city and one in a rural area. She noticed both physical similarities and cultural differences. Physical similarities. One thing I realized is that people are people [physically]. … it was kind of like realizing [our bodies are] not different, it’s just this is how [physical bodies function] here.
Cultural differences. One of the cultural differences that Betsy noticed in Kenya was that there is a very different sense of privacy and ownership. She relates an experience that illustrates the difference she experienced in ownership. In Betsy’s U.S. American worldview she viewed her items as her personal property, but was able to shift her worldview to accommodate property and ownership customs in her host family. One night she was at an engagement ceremony with her rural family host sister who was 11 years old: It started to rain and get a little cool, so I lent [my host sister] my cardigan and the next morning I saw my sister’s friend on her way to school wearing my cardigan. [I had] no emotional attachment to that cardigan. I’m happy to have the memory of my host sister’s friend walking on the road in my cardigan the next morning. There was no sense of possession or privacy in the family.

Another cultural difference that Betsy noticed was that people did not discuss their families with her. In the United States, Betsy’s experience at work was that people had many photos of their family members displayed at their desks. At work (in the U.S.) she knew about everyone’s spouse, children, or important people, but in Kenya she did not know anything about the family of her friends and co-workers. Betsy was able to adapt to not knowing:

I still never really delved into this or really found good answers but people weren't necessarily open about their families, their family situations, or their troubles with their families. They didn't talk about their dating histories. I remember finding it so odd that I could know a person for months in Kenya and not know if they were married or single or if they had a family…I think if I would have been there longer maybe I would've asked about it, but you know when you are only there a couple months, I just kind of noticed this, just kind of like learning about it and I didn’t really feel comfortable being like “Why didn’t you tell me about your family.”
**Family roles and the rabid hippo.** In Kenya, Betsy noticed that people take their family roles seriously. During her first week with her rural host family:

…there was a rabid hippo wandering the community and the men felt a very strong call to duty to protect their community. It was really interesting in this traditional community, when I was living out in a rural place, how strong the gender norms were and how people knew what their role was and what they had to do to fulfill their role in the community. …The men took the gender role of protecting the village seriously and they took pride in doing that.

**Egypt: Destiny and personal accountability.** Betsy spent two weeks in Egypt visiting a friend who was working there. While there she had an experience that illustrated the cultural differences between cultures who believe that human destiny is a matter of fate, beyond one’s ability to control, in the hands of others (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2006b, pp. 64–67) and people who believe that people control their destiny through their actions (Paige et al., 2006b, pp. 64–67). Betsy and her friends had organized a camping trip in the desert and had hired a guide to drive them to a little desert community near the sand dunes:
The driver was really smitten with one of my friends. We were all in his little Jeep and then we got out to look at some interesting stones from an old volcanic explosion that were really quite unique. Meanwhile he was driving on the dune while we were down looking at the stones...and he flipped [the jeep] over. So there we were at the bottom of a big sand dune and we see at the top that he's rolled over with the Jeep. You can’t really run up a big sand dune but we started running. We charged up there and he was fine. We helped him down. He was talking about how someone must have wished him ill for his jeep to turn over. I’m like, “No, you were showing off to our friend. No one made you drive your Jeep up to the top of this.” Fate, destiny and personal responsibility--it was really interesting that we were seeing this situation so very differently.

**Parenting around difference.** Betsy grew up in a town, which she says, was known for being one of the more segregated cities--a very divided city, without a lot of the natural mixing of cultures. Betsy remembers that when she was just three years old her parents were driving her around when they got to a more diverse part of town. Betsy noticed that the people there did not look the same as people in her neighborhood. Her mother did not appreciate Betsy voicing her observation. This experience was formative in Betsy’s future decision on how to raise her own daughter:

I commented on it and my mom was kind of shushing me because it’s not polite to openly talk about the difference of skin color. …As pure and insightful as it was meant to be, it could be taken differently by different people … When my mom shushed me I thought that I had said something wrong, but I didn’t understand why what I said was wrong. I think that’s why that memory has stuck around with me.

Now Betsy is the mother of a three-year-old and wants to ensure that her daughter will not have a similar experience but instead that her daughter will learn about cultural differences in a natural way. Betsy and her husband have made deliberate decisions about where they will live and where their daughter will go to school based on giving her family the most interculturally diverse environment:

I hope I won’t shush [my daughter] when she makes [that comment]. That’s one of the reasons why we are living where we live and have chosen the day care we have chosen for her. We don’t want our daughter to have that experience of
segregation. Her school is Spanish immersion with kids of all backgrounds. We intentionally chose to live close enough to the local university where there are a lot of children [of international graduate students] coming in and maybe this is the third language that they’re learning. It has been very intentional on [my husband] and my part to make sure our daughter has a very innate understanding that people look different and that difference is normal [and] that she is not going to have to go through a learning process to learn that. She will have just grown up knowing that difference is just so normal.

“Sam’s” Story

Sam attributes her intercultural sensitivity to two significant events in her life—1) how her family raised her—including a trip to El Salvador for the 20th anniversary of the assassination of Óscar Romero and 2) more recently, reading a book, The New Jim Crow (Alexander & West, 2012). This is her story of the events in her life that she credits for her development of intercultural sensitivity.

Family and childhood. Sam attributes her intercultural sensitivity to two aspects of her childhood: 1) her family and 2) the neighborhood in which she was raised. Her neighborhood was a mixture of high rises that housed low-income local, immigrant and refugee families as well as having middle-income single-family homes. Her school drew from the neighborhood which was racially, religiously, and economically diverse. In addition, from an early age Sam was able to experience people who were different from herself largely through her family who often hosted international visitors of all ages (many of whom were fleeing violence and political persecution) who lived with her family for weeks, months, or even years. Her parents had lived in Latin America before she was born and maintained an interest in that region of the world. Sam recounted the stories of various individuals, couples and families from all over the world who lived with her family while she was growing up. These experiences helped to shape Sam’s
understanding, knowledge and appreciation of cultures. **Óscar Romero.** Sam’s parents often led delegations and mini-study abroad experiences for people interested in other countries. Sam considers her trip with her dad when she was 12 years old to be one of the most influential experiences that led to her intercultural sensitivity: When I was 12 my dad led a trip to El Salvador to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Óscar Romero’s assassination. Óscar Romero was an archbishop in El Salvador who had been a rich, conservative guy who turned to the cause of the working person in El Salvador by interacting with the peasant community. Romero turned into an advocate for the poor in El Salvador and was assassinated…

Sam remembers reading a book of short stories from people in El Salvador while on the plane. The book contained stories of people in poverty and about people who had been tortured:

It was about people who were tortured so much that their torturers thought that they were dead and threw them in a pit with other dead bodies and they hid under the dead bodies to stay alive until the dead bodies were discarded off and then they were able to escape. The book had horrendous things that people do to other people.

Reading this book further opened Sam’s mind to consider issues of poverty, power and privilege. She has heard people discussing immigration and refugees and saying things like:
“Why should we have to take these people and why can’t they stay in their countries?” when realistically most of the countries that send large numbers of immigrants to the United States are countries that United States has meddled in (meddled is a nice word) pretty significantly and so when we look at the large population of Hmong in [certain cities], for example, that's the direct result of the Vietnam war. That's not talked about, the role that our country played and so I think as a 12 year old I was really shocked and horrified by these things. We went to El Salvador to see where Romero's house was when he grew up and the house that he lived in and we saw the church that he presided over. We actually saw the bloodied clothes that he had been wearing the day he was assassinated and it was just extremely impactful for me as 12 year old.

**Living Abroad: Europe and Latin America.** Sam was drawn to living in other countries. She found her own job in Europe and lived in two countries in Latin America. It was during her stay in one of those countries in Latin America that Sam experienced economic diversity in the form of intense poverty and also social reform:

…the challenges that people faced on a regular basis were unbelievable. … My host parents in [Latin American] were really involved in the revolution back in the 70s and 80s… I was just really impressed that people seemed to be trying something different and not just accepting things the way that they were …

**Pushing back.**

**Pushing back on others/Personal agency.** Intercultural relationships often require finding a solution between how one is being treated and how one wants to be treated. Sometimes it is difficult for people working across cultures to know how to bridge their own cultural preferences with preferences common in another culture. Sam describes how she was able to bridge the intercultural gap through her courage to engage with a man from Latin America who was regularly “cat calling” her in Spanish as she walked to work in the United States. She “pushed back” by asking him to stop. He
explained that he was from Latin America and his behavior was customary. She engaged in a discussion with him, telling him:

“I would just encourage you to think a little bit more about that statement.” … I just felt like I’d been gently, not insultingly, but gently pushing back and saying, “That hasn't always been my experience and I understand it is pervasive in the culture, but it doesn't mean that everyone does it and that it's okay for everyone to do it…” It was a really interesting conversation but after that he always treated me with a lot more respect and we ended up becoming friends. I think it’s so important to try to understand when people come out with things from their home [culture], but that it doesn't always mean that there's not room for dialogue about that.

Sam explained that cat-calling was trouble for a lot of her female friends in Latin America, but while Sam herself gently pushed back against being addressed in this manner, many of her friends had the attitude that while in another country they should go along with the cultural norm. On the other hand, Sam preferred to engage with the people in the local culture and dialogue about cultural differences.

There was one woman who I studied abroad with and [the cat calling] just drove her nuts and I think that she had the [attitude], “Well, it's their country so I'm not going to say anything.”

Sam, on the other hand, thought that it was important to figure out how to dialogue through disagreements about issues as opposed to accepting differences that were offensive to her. Sam cherished her own agency and was not afraid to attempt to bridge cultural differences in a respectful way:

I would push back on people and I would say, “I would appreciate if you didn't talk to me like that.” But I wouldn't say, “You terrible person, how dare you say something like that?” Instead I would say “I would appreciate it if you wouldn't engage with me in that way.”
**Pushing back on herself: “Catching myself.”** A critical skill in interculturalism is the ability to examine one’s own progress in becoming interculturally sensitive. Sam explains how she “pushes back” on herself or “catches” herself by continually scrutinizing her thoughts, values, and interactions: I think I’m pretty good about [being interculturally sensitive] but I do catch myself sometimes. I think if anyone tells you they’re 100 percent great at it, they probably are lying to themselves and you. I think I’m pretty good at it. I do think there’s always more room for improvement.

Sam gives a recent example about an interaction with her friend who was in the United States on a temporary visa. At first Sam did not understand why her friend needed a visa to go to London:

I stepped back and checked myself, “Well, I don't need a visa to go to London because I am an American citizen and that opens doors that are closed to others.” …I think I'm pretty good at [being interculturally sensitive], but occasionally I do catch myself saying certain things or thinking certain things that I have to catch myself and think, “Well, of course that could be a problem because she doesn’t have U.S. citizenship.”

**Pushing back by family and friends/Being held accountable.** Sam considers herself to be fortunate that she has family and friends who will push back on her thoughts and actions. She thinks that accountability is an important way to continue her own development: I think a lot of people have opinions and don't challenge themselves regularly and don't have people who push back on them regularly, and that's something that I really appreciate about friends that I have and my romantic partner, who will all help me hold myself accountable.

**Working with people with different, deeply held values.** Sam was able to demonstrate intercultural sensitivity when bridging value differences working in government. To come to an agreement on legislation requires understanding differences while at the same time finding enough common ground to form mutually agreeable
alliances:...if I learned anything from working at the ... legislature is that with everyone you meet, you're going to agree with them on at least on one thing and you're going disagree with them on at least on one thing. Most likely multiples in both of those categories but even the ... people [who I disagreed with the most] we could still find something to agree with and you might disagree with 95% of what they think but trying to figure out, “How can we work together with people who are really different from us. What common thing can we find that will tie us all together?” I do think that’s where it will be interesting. I think we have to develop relationships with people who are different from us and then, maybe then we can start having conversations about things that really matter to both of us.

The New Jim Crow. Sam continues to question herself and others. She credits even more intercultural understanding to a book she read when she began working on issues in communities of color in the United States. Sam explains that The New Jim Crow describes the experience of “young black men in the United States” and how policies that foster discrimination have now become ingrained in our criminal justice system. Sam gained insight into how current policies lead to discrimination. She worked in politics at the time when “a young black man was shot and killed” by a police officer at a traffic stop. Sam reports that the book gave her data which helped her understand why this type of tragedy occurs time after time, and why people “lose their cool at a city council meeting when they're being told that what happened to them on a daily basis isn't happening. I think that's what we're talking about in discussing intercultural understanding.”

Reflecting back. As Sam reflects back about her life she credits her ability to work interculturally to her welcoming and hospitable family. Sam’s parents emulated the people who were hospitable to them and in turn Sam has modeled herself on her parent’s kindness and hospitality. This welcoming attitude she learned from her parents who were shown extreme hospitality in the face of poverty has influenced her greatly: [My parents are] some of the most hospitable people I’ve ever met. They would live with these extremely impoverished people who would kill their only chicken
to make a nice dinner when my parents could come and visit even though they had no food for the next day. I think my parents really learned from those experiences about how important it is to be welcoming to people who need some help and need some assistance.

“Eden’s” Story

**Childhood awareness of the experience of difference.** Eden was born in the United States where she lived until she was six. She remembers that she was probably only four or five the first time she ever saw a person with skin a different color from her own. She was in the grocery store in her suburb: I remember … I was staring at him because I had never seen somebody with a different color skin. So that would have been my very first encounter with a different race.

Both sets of Eden’s grandparents worked in Ethiopia. Thus, both of her parents grew-up in Ethiopia. At age six, she and her family moved “back” to Ethiopia from United States. Eden’s grandfather had built the house she lived in in Ethiopia, so moving there was like going home for her parents.

**Parents as cultural mentors.** Eden’s parents prepared her for her initial trip to Ethiopia. Both her parents had grown up in Ethiopia (because both sets of her grandparents had worked in Ethiopia) therefore they were highly familiar with the culture. Eden remembers her mom prepping her and her sisters for the trip before they left, even though Eden was just five or six. She remembers her mom telling her both the positives as well as the drawbacks of life in Ethiopia. One of the precautions Eden remembers her parents explaining was about chiggers: I remember when Mom and Dad told us we were going to go to Ethiopia for the first time and we had no idea what to expect and so they told us little stories about some of the interesting things that were there. The one that I remember is they talked about chiggers. They’re these little tiny bugs that burrow into your foot or they can go underneath your fingernail and get into your skin. … Then they lay eggs and they can be painful or itchy and you have to get them out. So, at that age, five or six, I was imagining those eggs but I
couldn’t picture it as I was very small so I just had an image of this bug at the bottom of my foot with a nest made of branches like a bird’s nest somehow in my foot. That was a kind of scary image. Maybe [my parents] clarified that my image wasn’t actually correct or something because my sisters and I were still excited about going.

Eden’s dad likes thinking about interculturalism, and because he had grown up in Ethiopia he helped Eden process the differences she observed. In this way, he and her mother were both able to mentor Eden and her sisters and help them understand and interpret life in Ethiopia. Her parents spent their lives traveling back and forth between Ethiopia and the United States. Having parents who were so familiar with both cultures and who loved being in Ethiopia helped Eden develop a love of the good times and a patience when things did not go so well. Her parents still live in Ethiopia:

I think Mom and Dad had and they still have a lot of patience for things that came up. They’ve been there a long time and they would say that they want to be there, that they love being there. They like being in Ethiopia not only because they think their work is important and they feel they need to be there for ideological reasons but they actually like to live there. So I think that was and is a helpful message to hear and that there are going to be good and bad things everywhere.

**First days in Ethiopia.** Eden remembers her first few days in Ethiopia. She remembers arriving at the airport after an overwhelmingly long flight. She was in a hot, crowded airport where the smells were different, the air was stuffy and everyone looked different from the people in her home town. Shortly after arriving, she started her first day of school where the children were friendly: This one girl, her name was Rehema, I think she was Kenyan probably (I never really knew where people were from at that age) but she asked the teacher, “Who’s going to be her friend” and the teacher said “Oh, maybe you will be her friend.” So she held my hand as we stood in line before we went to class.
Eden adapted quickly to the differences in her new life in Ethiopia, perhaps due to pre-arrival mentoring that helped her turn the unexpected into the expected. While she noticed the many differences between life in the United States and life in Ethiopia, it is significant that she quickly adapted to the differences:

I think the transition of going from [my hometown] (where I looked like everyone) to Ethiopia and being in a minority, I don’t remember that being necessarily jolting and noticing “Am I the only one?” I just have memories of the actual experiences and I think I got used to the idea pretty quickly that I had people around me who were different. It wasn’t important [the specific way] they were different just that I was experiencing their difference.

Where is home? Eden went back to her hometown in the United States for third and fourth grades before returning to Ethiopia and her former school there until ninth grade. By ninth grade she had spent four straight years in Ethiopia and felt very comfortable there: I just remember feeling like “I can’t believe I’m back here—it feels amazing”—even though I was only in second grade when I left, it just made me really happy to be [in Ethiopia] again.

My sense of comfort when I’m just at ease like when I let my guard down and when my heart feels at rest, I think that happens in Africa whether it’s Kenya or Ethiopia and I think that’s an aspect of home. I think my sense of pride in terms of where my roots are and where I’m excited about new things happening and developing, geographically in location, I think that also happens in Africa—probably mostly in Ethiopia but it happens in Kenya as well. But they are “foreign” countries and so I cannot live there unless I have a work visa. I know that unless I become a citizen that it’s legally never going to be my home so I cannot be there even if that feels more like home. …I live here [in the United States] and this is where I’ve created my life.

Fitting in visually. When Eden went to college in her hometown in the United States she looked like the other students but she didn’t feel as though she was similar to the students there. The assumption by others was that she was U.S. American and although she was U.S. American, that was only part of who she was. Being treated as if
she were only U.S. American, (based on her appearance) created intercultural misunderstandings resulting in a feeling of not fitting in…. I really didn’t look different from the other students. I didn’t look like I didn’t fit in. My classmates made the assumption that I had [the same] background that they had, which I just didn’t. I think that’s probably one of the most significant assumptions [people could make about me is that I grew up in the U.S.] because then you end up shocking them when you’re not what they expected even in small ways like if you don’t know something about [the] past that they assume everyone knows because everyone grew up watching the same TV shows.

This kind of misunderstanding did not happen only in Eden’s home state in the United States when Eden was in college, but also when she returned to the United States after finishing graduate school in Kenya and began working in a different state.

I’m not Dutch and [that particular city] is a very Dutch area and this co-worker that I was talking to, that’s her ethnic background and so we were discussing a little bit and she said “Oh well, you know, it’s all right you have a Swedish background and I’m Dutch but the great thing is that wherever you go, everyone grows up watching the same cartoons and all that stuff.” And I was like “No. I didn’t.” So even though she knew that I had told her that I had grown up in Ethiopia, what she clung to as the wonderful thing that unites people is that [everyone is the same, basically]. So that’s the kind of assumption that people make.

**Intercultural sensitivity.** Eden defines intercultural sensitivity as recognizing that people are different in a lot of different ways: preferences for art, dance, language, verbal or non-verbal communication styles and other preferences. She goes on to explain that intercultural sensitivity is being sensitive to what people value most in their culture--the things that are important to *them*: It’s realizing that there are all those differences that people might have…. There’s a lot different ways that you could do these different things and it would be okay.

While keeping in mind how it felt to constantly have inaccurate assumptions made about her based on her appearance (both in the United States and Ethiopia), Eden recognizes that there are some similarities that people have and that it can be helpful to
identify these similarities in order to bridge cultural differences. However, as noted above in her conversation with her co-worker, Eden makes it clear that just because we might look more similar, we may have very important invisible cultural differences:

I would add also that people are similar too, in some fundamental ways. So, that kind of can help you get past the differences sometimes—realizing that you might also have things in common...I do still believe that there are some universal values that are important to uphold—different cultures are going to see those differently but I still have my own opinion on what those are and maybe how they should be applied. I mean, you could just say that the value of human life is important to me, and I think that should cross cultural boundaries because no matter who you are, your life matters and hopefully whatever culture one is in, that would be recognized. … I would say that recognizing our common humanity is a good starting point for intercultural relations, but by itself it does not encourage the full expression of who we are to each other. We have to also appreciate our differences as much as possible.

**Developing intercultural sensitivity.** Eden attributes her development of intercultural sensitivity to the relationships she has developed with people. She has found that relationships can stretch one’s sensitivity while removing some of the prejudices or stereotypes that may exist:
…that means living in close relationship with people who are different from you. That being said, I think it’s some of the past experiences that I’ve had [that have influenced my intercultural sensitivity]. There were other opportunities that contributed such as going to international schools when I was young. So my friends could be like my peers, and I see them equally and learn from them at the same time even though we’re different. …living somewhere alone does not necessarily change the way you see something.

Eden examines her views, and when she finds attitudes that she wants to change she feels the need to break through them. How does she do that? She has people in her life that help her with that. In particular, becoming close to people who are different from her has helped her learn about the cultures in which she lived or interacted:

In middle school, I had this friend and we spent a lot of time together and he was Ethiopian, the country that we were living in. So, it was just bringing Ethiopia, Ethiopians closer to me because I had a friend.

**Being interculturally sensitive.** Eden thinks of her intercultural sensitivity as a skill to be utilized when she is in a situation in which her own worldview may not offer the culturally appropriate response. In her mind, Eden visualizes herself sitting quietly and patiently observing the situation and the other people and then being willing to stay in that position of ambiguity until she gains clarity that she should be doing something else: It has a lot to do with our sense of time and the urgency of time that other cultures see things very differently. Also you may not know what’s the most appropriate thing to be doing at the moment, so you can just kind of observe a little bit and figure out from what you’re seeing what would be the better way to go instead of being the one to jump in and initiate what happens. You can follow a little bit more. I guess I think that does go a long way but—because you could be visiting in somebody’s home and if you go in there with your own ideas of what’s going to happen, it’s going to go over a whole lot differently than if you just go in there and kind of let them show you their hospitality in a sense of what they’re expecting you’re comfortable with.

Eden has been successful working interculturally by allowing people the space to be themselves. She steps back in a way that is not typical in Western culture and waits
patiently amidst her uncertainty even if that is uncomfortable for her. Her goal is to make the intercultural situation comfortable for the people with whom she is engaged:

…they’re comfortable if you let them be themselves. I think that’s where just stepping back a little bit and not being the initiator for everything helps. Its one thing [that’s helpful] I would say—just to let [people] be themselves. I think it may be hard with Western culture because we like to initiate, and we value that. We value being assertive. It shows that you’re capable and not afraid to take on a challenge. But I think that it totally backfires sometimes if you use it in the wrong ways, in the wrong times.

**Graduate school in Kenya.** After working for a couple of years in the United States, Eden decided to attend a graduate school in Kenya where there were only three percent Westerners, 30 percent non-Kenyan African students and with the majority of students and faculty being Kenyans. Her roommates were from different countries in Africa. She chose to go to Kenya with the express purpose of putting herself in a situation in which she would be forced to interact with cultural differences: I just figured [going to graduate school in Kenya] would [change me] and I think it did. I think it really had a significant impact on how I viewed people, mostly people in Africa….that experience of being there, learning from them, so putting myself in a humble position as a learner, and also then, as a roommate. Living really closely with these people and you become close. And you learn a lot when you’re actually living with somebody, about who they are. … You just learn who they are and what their culture is. We’re not all the same but like I said, there are also some similarities that you rely on to be friends.

**What is normal life?** Eden remembers a specific experience she had in Ethiopia when she was about to leave to go to college in the United States. Her dad’s brother and his family were visiting from the United States:
… my aunt said something to me about “Aren’t you ready to get back to normal life” or “Are you ready to get back to normal life?” … I think I told her “This is normal; this is normal life to me” and not just jumping at the chance to go back to the United States. I think maybe that’s another aspect of realizing culture is not an exotic thing to observe or to kind of be a tourist in but that it’s really people’s way of everything—being who they are.

**People/Peers.** Eden feels she has the most in common with other people who have had international experiences, whether it’s with international people within their home country or they actually lived abroad somewhere. She finds that there seems to be a common bond among people who have interacted in a meaningful way with people from another culture. She feels more comfortable because there’s already an assumption that that person is going to be different from her: …but those things that you see initially, that other people might react to as being weird or strange don’t tell you really anything about the core of who they are, so you just kind of observe them and appreciate them, but you don’t use that necessarily to make a judgment. It’s just easier to be with them and there’s this understanding of what’s important about people and so you can relax… They’re the people I tend to relate with best even if they are from another country that I’ve never been to before.

**“Difference” in marriage and children.** Eden is not alone in feeling more comfortable interacting with people who have had international experience. She started her interview by explaining that she can remember the first time she ever saw a person who had skin that was a different color from hers at age five. Living in Ethiopia and Kenya for so many years influenced her openness to marrying someone of a different race and culture, but especially someone who could understand her intercultural upbringing by having had experienced something similar himself:
I was in Ethiopia and Kenya. I was white and pretty much everybody else was black. Then I ended up marrying somebody back in the United States who is black. [Having lived in Ethiopia and Kenya] probably opened my mind to the possibility of marrying somebody black….It became evident pretty early on when I met [my husband] that he also saw people differently—which made him able to understand me better. He just fit me better than somebody who had not been exposed to difference. His exposure was living in the United States but being raised as a child of immigrants. He had an immigrant family with parents from two different countries. [My husband] grew up in white suburban America, so he still had that mix [of cultures, too]…. 

Eden explained that she felt different. She looked U.S. American but felt African in the United States. Feeling different gave rise to a need for a safe haven to return to—a place where she could just let her guard down and where her interculturalness would be understood. That safe haven of feeling understood was the kind of home that Eden sought to create for herself. Sometimes Eden needs to have a break from the outside world and she gets that break when she is with her husband. Eden has enjoyed listening to how her young children view their intercultural family:

I think with my own children, and Renee is only three, but just from her own figuring out how to talk about the way we look as a family, she says that I am white, that was the word she used, and that she’s brown, Petra (her younger sister) is brown, the same brown, and that Daddy’s brown, but he’s darker brown. I just thought that was really interesting. That was just part of her family and she’s just describing what we look like. …It’s okay to notice our differences. It’s just how you react to those differences that ends up making the real difference.

**Themes and Sub-themes**

A variety of major themes and sub-themes emerged from the interviews. Without exception each person described their experiences of difference that impacted them in their early years. They each attributed this experience to helping them to experience the world in a new way. Other themes that were mentioned by all or most of the participants (although not in these words) included: interest in and ability to develop deep
relationships with culturally different people, cultural mentoring, taking decisive action to be challenged and engaging ambiguity, culture fatigue, comfort with others who share intercultural experiences, looking alike but thinking different, visibility/invisibility, cultural value dimensions, pushing back against biases, and bridging differences. The themes presented here were shared by the majority of research participants.
Experiences of difference. Each person interviewed in this study attributed their experience of difference to be a key factor in their development of intercultural sensitivity. Experiences of difference included living in two or more countries from childhood, growing up with parents who had different faiths, meaningful travel with
parents as children (such as Sam’s trip with her father on the anniversary of the assassination of Óscar Romero), having people from different cultures or countries live with their family, attending schools with diverse faculty and student bodies, studying or living abroad, being an immigrant or the child of immigrants, living in diverse neighborhoods, or experiencing differences through the volunteer, civic, faith, or work activities of one’s parents. However, as Eden, who grew up in two countries, cautions us, “…living somewhere alone does not necessarily change the way you see something.”

**Interest in and ability to develop deep relationships.** Having an interest in people and wanting to get to know people from different cultures (even when doing so may be uncomfortable) was another solid theme in the interviews. Being calm in the face of ambiguity (not knowing) and being interested in people different from themselves seemed almost like a prerequisite to participants’ abilities to develop deep and long-term relationships with people who were different from themselves. All participants attributed developing meaningful relationships as one source of developing intercultural sensitivity; in fact, the majority of respondents have either had long-term dating or romantic relationships or are or were married to someone from a different cultural background. Betsy, herself Catholic, had long-term relationships with Jewish and Muslim men. Izzy is married to a recent immigrant from Mexico. Eden is married to a man whose parents were immigrants to the United States from two different countries. Another interview respondent originally from Asia is married to a U.S. American, and yet another interview respondent whose parents immigrated to the United States from Asia had a long-term
relationship with a U.S. American. In addition to romantic relationships, significant friendships were meaningful for developing intercultural sensitivity. As Eden says:

In middle school, I had this friend and we spent a lot of time together, and he was Ethiopian, the country that we were living in. So, it was just bringing Ethiopia, Ethiopians closer to me because I had a friend. … I think one thing I’ve realized for myself is that essentially having relationships with people helps. It can really, maybe stretch your sensitivity. You increase your level of your sensitivity and remove some of the prejudices you might have or stereotypes that you’re operating with and things like that. That means living in close relationship with people who are different from you.

*Deep social contact.* Respondents all reported that deep social contact with someone from a different culture had a significant impact on their development of intercultural sensitivity.

*Inviting intercultural challenge.*

*Quest for experiencing intense intercultural challenges.* It is noteworthy that despite the challenges of confronting one’s own worldview, the study participants actively sought out experiences in which they would force themselves into situations in which they would have to interact with highly different values in order to keep developing interculturally. Much as a mountaineer may start with lower peaks for practice in summing the highest peak, study participants remarked on their quest to put themselves into more and more intense intercultural situations.

Despite the ever increasing intensity of their intercultural experiences, a defining aspect of this research was that study participants fearlessly sought to encounter differences of the greatest degree—not only involuntarily as their parents’ children, but as children exploring on their own or as young or older adults seeking greater degrees of difference for the express purpose of helping themselves develop greater intercultural
sensitivity. In other words, the study participants were actively seeking out experiences that would develop their intercultural sensitivity.

_Taking decisive action to put one’s self into interculturally challenging situations._ Several people discussed their decisions to voluntarily put themselves in interculturally challenging situations specifically to help them develop their intercultural sensitivity. Although Eden first went to Ethiopia with her parents (something she was too young to choose), she later resolutely chose to go to graduate school in Kenya for the express purpose of being in an interculturally challenging situation. Eden states she chose to live in Kenya and go to graduate school there “because what else could force me to deal with differences.”

Izzy also chose to go to Spain not only to practice her Spanish language skills but also to interact with the culture. As Izzy says, “I just wanted to put myself into a situation in which I was uncomfortable” to learn more about the culture. To do this, both women had to be willing to sit with their discomfort of not knowing the “correct” thing to do culturally. Their enthusiasm to engage cultural differences, to experience this discomfort and to actively seek it out is noteworthy. One may wonder about the use of the concept of discomfort. I interpret this to mean that the respondents who discussed facing their discomfort were not uncomfortable experiencing culture so much as they saw the discomfort as a necessary part of becoming more interculturally sensitive—much the way an Olympian might not want to train strenuously but will do so to achieve a greater goal. It doesn’t mean that Michael Phelps, with his 23 gold medals for swimming, is afraid of water just because diving in every day all day can cause discomfort.
Engaging ambiguity. Betsy was willing to engage ambiguity when she chose to live in Kenya. Sam stepped into uncomfortable situations while engaging with men who were cat-calling her on the streets and also when trying to forge agreements for governmental policies. Other interview participants also discussed their conscious choices to engage differences through participating in meaningful intercultural relationships, through deeply experiencing living abroad, or through working in an environment in which they would have meaningful contact with people from many different countries. It is significant that like an Olympian, each person interviewed would opt for his or her own discomfort in order to further develop their intercultural sensitivity.

Eden describes her approach to ambiguity in intercultural situations as sitting quietly “and waiting or being patient and watching a little bit and being willing to be in that position until it’s clear that you should be doing something else.”

… you may not know what’s the most appropriate thing to be doing at the moment. And so you can just kind of observe a little bit and figure out from what you’re seeing what would be the better way to go instead of being the one to jump and initiate what happens. You can follow a little bit more. … they’re comfortable if you let them be themselves. I think that’s where just stepping back a little bit and not being the initiator for everything helps. It’s one thing [that’s helpful] I would say. Just to let them be themselves.

Eden describes the way that she engages as observing, watching and listening to figure out from what she observes how the person in the other culture might construct his or her worldview and then make a best guess at what would be the better way to proceed in the encounter. She does this by stepping back a little bit and following instead of jumping in and leading the situation (leading might be acting from a U.S. worldview). She has found that others seem more comfortable with her when allowed to be
themselves and she is able to create a comfortable atmosphere in which others can initiate action from their own worldviews and she can adapt to them.

Other interview respondents shared Eden’s strategy. For example, Izzy echoes Eden’s strategy, stating, “I think a lot of this is sitting and listening to people and observing people… you're allowing people to educate you about who they are.”

**Mindfulness and constructivism.** Eden and Izzy’s strategy is consistent with the concept of mindfulness. From Eden and Izzy’s explanations of their strategies for creating comfort for the person with whom they are interacting, it seems an important but often overlooked part of intercultural sensitivity development is the importance of generating multiple cultural interpretations so that the most correct response might be approximated.

**Cultural value dimensions.** It is interesting to note that when Betsy described her experience in Egypt, she was able to identify the cultural value continua of the fate and destiny orientation of her driver and her own cultural orientation towards personal responsibility. Betsy also told stories of family and gender role differences and attitudes towards privacy and ownership. Other respondents also observed differences in cultural values, although they did not use that terminology.

**Cultural mentoring.** Many of the interview respondents gave examples of how individuals in their lives who could think in two or more worldviews assisted them in being able to reconstrue their experiences from a new cultural perspective. For example, Eden’s parents had grown up in Ethiopia and prepped their daughters prior for moving them there. They also provided mentoring as incidents arose while living there. Sam’s
parents helped her understand poverty, power, and privilege through welcoming people from other cultures to live in their home, taking Sam on educational trips to illustrate those concepts, and helping her to develop relationships with people in other countries. In addition, they provided important reading materials prior to departure to guide her observations upon landing. Izzy’s mom was a role model as she made her life’s work helping people. Through her mother’s mentoring Izzy learned to be of service to people experiencing economic hardships and homelessness in her city and in Central America. Betsy’s teacher helped Betsy understand indigenous cultures and her father was important in modeling being of service to people in need. Other interview participants mentioned learning about opposing religious beliefs or cultural values from parents, teachers, and friends. Respondents were unanimous that having experience with differences and then having them interpreted (or re-interpreted) by parents or other intercultural mentors assisted them in developing intercultural sensitivity and enhanced their ability to see people or a culture in a new way.

**Continuous self-monitoring.** Several people who were interviewed commented that they closely observe themselves in their intercultural interactions. If they find they could be more interculturally sensitive, they gently bring themselves back to a more sensitive position. This perpetual self-monitoring keeps them in a state of constant quality improvement in their intercultural development. They continuously monitor their own intercultural sensitivity and push back on themselves when they notice that (in their own opinion) they are falling short. In addition to monitoring their own progress in becoming interculturally sensitive, several people had good friends, family members, or
other people in their lives who helped to gently push them when their thoughts were more ethnocentric. Sam describes this as “catching” herself. When Sam hears how some other people talk:

I think, “Oh I'm so good at this kind of stuff.” But then I do catch myself and think there are still times when I could think more critically about something or I could challenge myself to think more from a perspective of someone else. I think a lot of people just have opinions and don't challenge themselves regularly and don't have people who push back on them regularly, and that's something that I really appreciate about friends that I have and my romantic partner, who will all help me hold myself accountable and I don't see that in as many people.

Izzy made a similar comment:

As a human being in this global society you are required to constantly push your biases so that you don't continue to perpetuate them. So I try to be as culturally sensitive as possible, and at times I'm sure that I have been biased… I think the more aware of a bias you are the more likely you are to be pushing back against it behaving in ways that are in opposition to your biases.

Several of the other participants also discuss the idea of confronting their own attitudes.

**Culture fatigue.** The concept of culture fatigue came up in quite a few of the interviews. Betsy mentions it in terms of the how she just “didn’t have the energy to hash out” the intercultural differences when the jeep flipped over in Egypt:

It was really interesting that we were seeing this situation so very differently. We were all too traumatized to really hash out that cultural difference between his cultural orientation towards fate and destiny and my cultural orientation towards personal responsibility.

Despite an interest and motivation to engage with people from different cultures, there are times when we have too much culture fatigue (as Izzy had during the lunar eclipse), and it can be helpful to take a break from the fatiguing culture. Izzy reports that she is fatigued from her attempts to bridge cultural differences every day of her life because she is married to a person who holds so strongly to his own (different) cultural
values. She explains that during her pregnancy she was more culturally fatigued than usual and the day to day engagement in the language and culture of her husband made her particularly weary:

There were probably some pregnancy hormones happening at the same time. … It was a very culturally insensitive moment for me. So that's when I received an F in intercultural sensitivity. It's every day of my life. I feel like by eight or nine o'clock I am so culturally fatigued every single day, every day.

**Comfort with those who share intercultural experiences.** While culture fatigue can be exhausting, taking a break from a different culture can be restorative. Eden says she has the most in common with people who also have intercultural experience, whether it is with people from another country in the United States or with U.S. Americans who have lived abroad somewhere. She finds that there seems to be a common bond among people who have interacted in a meaningful way with people from another culture. She feels more comfortable because there’s already an assumption that that person is going to be different than you:

…but those things that you see initially that other people might react to as being weird or strange don’t tell you really anything about the core of who they are so you just kind of observe them and appreciate them, but you don’t use that necessarily to make a judgment. It’s just easier to be with them and there’s this understanding of what’s important about people and so you can relax… They’re the people I tend to relate with best even if they are from another country that I’ve never been to before.

While the whole of Eden’s statement above is significant, the most enlightening part is that she can relate to people from another culture even “if they are from another country that [she has] never been to before.”

**Look alike/think different.** Eden explained that she felt different when she returned to the United States. She said that while she looked like most of the students in
her undergraduate program in the United States, she felt more African. Feeling different
gave rise to a need for a safe haven to return to—a place where she could just let her
guard down and where the intercultural aspects of herself would be understood. That safe
haven where she felt understood was found in the kind of home that Eden sought to
create for herself. It takes just a short time to have a break from the outside world and
Eden gets that break from culture fatigue when she is with her husband.

While in Africa Eden looked different but thought more like Africans. When she
returned to the United States she looked alike but thought differently than those around
her. When Eden went to college in the United States she *looked* like the other students
but she did not *feel* as though she were similar to the students there. The assumption by
others was that she was purely U.S. American (although she was U.S. American, that was
only part of who she was) created cultural misunderstandings. Being treated as if she
were only U.S. American, based on her appearance, created intercultural
misunderstandings resulting in her feeling as if she did not fit-in:

… I really didn’t look different from the other students. I didn’t *look* like I didn’t
fit in. My classmates made the assumption that I had [the same] background that
they had, which I just didn’t. I think that’s probably one of the most significant
assumptions [people could make about me is that I grew up in the U.S.] because
then you end up shocking them when you’re not what they expected even in small
ways like if you don’t know something about [the] past that they assume everyone
knows because everyone grew up watching the same TV shows.

This kind of misunderstanding did not happen only in Eden’s home state when
Eden was in college, but also when she returned to the United States after finishing
graduate school in Africa and began working in another state:
I’m not Dutch and [that particular city] is a very Dutch area and this co-worker that I was talking to, that’s her ethnic background and so we were discussing a little bit and she said “Oh well, you know, it’s all right you have a Swedish background and I’m Dutch but the great thing is that wherever you go, everyone grows up watching the same cartoons and all that stuff.” And I was like “No. I didn’t.” So even though she knew that I had told her that I had grown up in Ethiopia, what she clung to as the wonderful thing that unites people is that [everyone is the same, basically]. So that’s the kind of assumption that people make.

Izzy also commented on looking different and thinking differently:

When you’re in third grade, eight years old, that’s when you really start to have an idea of relationships and the fact that you look different than I do, it's not just that we all like playing in the sandbox but we actually have some cultural differences that would make us act differently or really differently to each other.

Visibility/Invisibility. Josie, one of the research participants not featured in chapter four, has also noticed the significance of visibility and invisibility in her mostly white town in which she frequently befriended exchange students while in high school:

There wasn't a language barrier in these cases and I didn't really view it as much of a racial barrier either, it was more of [the fact that] a lot of the exchange students were from somewhere in Europe. Not having to overcome how to interact and deal with [visibility] was a little bit easier, because it is different when you have such different physical characteristics, there's a lot more attention on that person when they're here. For me when I'm in Africa, I am very aware of being the only white person in the room... There's a different barrier to overcome when there are more physical differences, but it's not impossible.

Eden has enjoyed listening to how her young children view their intercultural family:

I think with my own children, and Renee is only three, but just from her own figuring out how to talk about the way we look as a family, she says that I am white, that was the word she used, and that she's brown, Petra (her younger sister) is brown, the same brown, and that Daddy’s brown, but he’s darker brown. I just thought that was really interesting. That was just part of her family and she’s just describing what we look like. ...It’s okay to notice our differences. It’s just how you react to those differences that ends up making the real difference.
Eden is not the only participant to comment on visibility and invisibility.

**Bridging cultural differences.** While all respondents engaged with cultural differences, they also commented on the importance of finding a way to bridge cultural differences by identifying common ground. Finding a way to work together through identifying common ground is not the same as denying cultural differences. Sam noted this when she worked in government. She did not agree with many of the values of others but they needed to work together in order to move forward. She asks, “How can we work together with people who are really different from us? What common thing can we find that will tie us all together?” and answered that:

> We have to develop relationships with people who are different from us and then maybe we can start having conversations about things that really matter to both of us even if we disagree with 95% of what the other person values.

Eden might agree. She says:

> I would say that recognizing our common humanity is a good starting point for intercultural relations, but by itself it does not encourage the full expression of who we are to each other. We have to also appreciate our differences as much as possible.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the experiences of the research participants from their perspective using their own words as much as possible. The next chapter will include a discussion of the major themes and subthemes found in the complete set of interviews as they relate to intercultural literature. It will also include the implications and significance of the findings.
Chapter Five: Discussion: Significance and Implications of Findings

The process of reorganizing our perception of the world to enable an alternative experience is called “empathy.” Empathy allows us to intentionally shift our perspective toward that of another culture and eventually toward that of another person in that cultural context. By allowing ourselves to have an embodied experience of the world through the alternative perspective, we temporarily expand our worldview to include that alternative way of being. When we enact the alternative experience in our behavior, we are adapting (not assimilating, not acculturating) to the other culture. At any moment we can choose to enact our primary cultural experience. In the process of constructivist empathy, we do not lose ourselves; we gain authentic alternative selves. --Milton Bennett (2013b, pp. 580–581)

This chapter presents a discussion of the data analysis, significance of the research, implications for theory, policy, and practice, the limitations of this study, and ideas for relevant future research. Some quotes that appear in the interviews will be repeated here in their original text or in an expanded version to illustrate key themes and sub-themes.

Implications for Theory: Data Analysis/Intercultural Theory

Participants’ stories closely aligned with the intercultural literature. A significant finding was that participants’ stories closely aligned with the intercultural literature. In chapter two, a review of the literature was presented. Although most respondents were unfamiliar with the intercultural literature presented in chapter two, it is astonishing how closely their responses echoed intercultural theory (albeit in different words). Participant responses reflected the ideas of: experiencing difference, social contact theory, engaging ambiguity, mindfulness, constructivism, cultural value dimensions, cultural mentoring, continuous quality management, culture fatigue, looking
alike but think differently, visibility and invisibility, and bridging differences. In this section the themes and sub-themes will be presented in conjunction with their corresponding intercultural theory. For that reason, the relevant quotations are presented here again to coordinate with the theory being discussed.

**Experiences of difference.** Milton Bennett explains that:

The importance of "difference" is so widely accepted in the field of intercultural communication that it is sometimes overlooked as the major factor in a learner’s successful acquisition of the intercultural perspective. (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 24)

Each person interviewed in this study attributed their experience of difference to be a key factor in their development of intercultural sensitivity. Experiences of difference included living in two or more countries from childhood, growing up with parents who had different faiths, meaningful travel with parents as children (such as Sam’s trip with her father on the anniversary of the assassination of Óscar Romero), having people from different cultures or countries live with their family, attending schools with diverse faculty and student bodies, studying or living abroad, being an immigrant or the child of immigrants, living in diverse neighborhoods, or experiencing differences through the volunteer, civic, faith, or work activities of one’s parents.

However, as Eden, who grew up in two countries, cautions us, “…living somewhere alone does not necessarily change the way you see something.” Although the experience of difference is a key factor in the development of intercultural sensitivity, intercultural scholars agree that immersion alone or experiencing difference without processing it, is insufficient for the developing of intercultural sensitivity (Hammer, 2012; Paige et al., 2012; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; Savicki, 2012):
Although these studies demonstrate that immersion in another culture, in and of itself, is not as powerful as immersion plus reflection, engagement with the culture is still at the heart of the study abroad experience. Becoming involved with another culture brings abstract cultural concepts to life. (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012, p. 54)

**Interest in and ability to develop deep relationships.** Having an interest in people and *wanting* to get to know people from different cultures (even when doing so may be uncomfortable) was another solid theme in the interviews. Being calm in the face of ambiguity (not knowing) (Deardorff, 2015, p. 219) and being interested in people different from themselves seemed almost like a prerequisite to participants’ abilities to develop deep and long-term relationships with people who were different from themselves. All participants attributed developing meaningful relationships as one source of developing intercultural sensitivity; in fact, the majority of respondents have either had long-term dating or romantic relationships or are or were married to someone from a different cultural background. Betsy, herself Catholic, had long-term relationships with Jewish and Muslim men. Izzy is married to a recent immigrant from Mexico. Eden is married to a man whose parents were immigrants to the United States from two different countries. Another interview respondent originally from Asia is married to a U.S. American, and yet another interview respondent whose parents immigrated to the United States from Asia had a long-term relationship with a U.S. American. In addition to romantic relationships, significant friendships were meaningful for developing intercultural sensitivity. As Eden says:
In middle school, I had this friend and we spent a lot of time together, and he was Ethiopian, the country that we were living in. So, it was just bringing Ethiopia, Ethiopians closer to me because I had a friend. … I think one thing I’ve realized for myself is that essentially having relationships with people helps. It can really, maybe stretch your sensitivity. You increase your level of your sensitivity and remove some of the prejudices you might have or stereotypes that you’re operating with and things like that. That means living in close relationship with people who are different from you.

**Deep social contact.** The findings are consistent with social contact theory (Allport, 1954; Fry, 2016; Pettigrew, 1998, 2008, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008, 2008; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005) which states that social contact can foster learning to appreciate the worldview of others under the conditions of: 1) equal status, 2) common goals, 3) cooperation, and 4) having authorized permission for contact. “However, this type of contact accounts for only between 4% and 5% of reduction of prejudice” (Savicki, 2012, p. 232).

Deep social contact may provide a more genuine glimpse into the values and beliefs of someone who is from a different culture. If there is only brief or superficial contact, people may not share how much someone else’s values are hurting them due to social desirability, culture fatigue, or other reasons. However, in a 20 year marriage, for example, each partner’s values will probably be exposed to the other partner over time. The expression of conflicting values still may hurt and values may still remain contrasting, but with intercultural sensitivity, some sort of understanding or mutual adaptation may arise. The ability to develop deep intercultural relationships may assist with the development of intercultural sensitivity. As Livermore says:
Many people change or at least reevaluate their dogmatic views about sexual orientation, religion, or politics when a friend or loved one is the one who represents the opposing perspective. (2018, p. 1)

Inviting intercultural challenge.

**Quest for experiencing intense intercultural challenges.** Study participants actively sought out experiences in which they would force themselves into situations in which they would have to interact with highly different values in order to keep developing interculturally:

This progression … challenges one's sense of self, cultural identity, and worldview. Consequently, sojourners can experience intense psychological stress. (Paige, 1993a, p. 2)

The greater the degree of cultural difference between the sojourner's own and the target culture, the greater the degree of psychological intensity. This is the major hypothesis appearing in the intercultural literature. As M. Bennett (this volume) observes, it is not cultural similarities which challenge us, but cultural differences. And the greater those differences in value orientations, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, patterns of thinking, and communication styles, the more challenging and stressful the intercultural immersion will be. (Paige, 1993a, p. 5)

**Taking decisive action to put one’s self into interculturally challenging situations.** Several people discussed their decisions to voluntarily put themselves in interculturally challenging situations specifically to help them develop their intercultural sensitivity. Eden states she chose to live in Kenya and go to graduate school there “because what else could force me to deal with differences.” Izzy chose to go to Spain not only to practice her Spanish language skills but also to interact with the culture. As Izzy says, “I just wanted to put myself into a situation in which I was uncomfortable” to learn more about the culture. To do this, both women had to be willing to sit with their discomfort of not knowing the “correct” thing to do culturally.
Engaging ambiguity. Betsy was willing to engage ambiguity when she chose to live in Kenya. Sam stepped into uncomfortable situations while engaging with men who were cat-calling her on the streets and also when trying to forge agreements for governmental policies. This behavior may be consistent with John Berry’s framework of mutual adaptation (Berry, 1997, 2015), in which people from two cultures interact without either assimilating to the cultural beliefs, traditions or customs of the other, and each can learn about and respect the other while remaining true to his or her own beliefs. Other interview participants also discussed their conscious choices to engage differences through participating in meaningful intercultural relationships, through deeply experiencing living abroad, or through working in an environment in which they would have meaningful contact with people from many different countries, values, or beliefs.

Eden describes her approach to ambiguity in intercultural situations as sitting quietly “and waiting or being patient and watching a little bit and being willing to be in that position until it’s clear that you should be doing something else.”

… you may not know what’s the most appropriate thing to be doing at the moment. And so you can just kind of observe a little bit and figure out from what you’re seeing what would be the better way to go instead of being the one to jump and initiate what happens. You can follow a little bit more. … they’re comfortable if you let them be themselves. I think that’s where just stepping back a little bit and not being the initiator for everything helps. Its one thing [that’s helpful] I would say. Just to let them be themselves.

In materials prepared by Mitch Hammer and presented by Michael Paige at the Intercultural Development Inventory IDI® Qualifying Seminar in 2013, a slide illustrated that when people are able to “Bridge across Difference” the people around them may feel understood, valued, and involved. Eden describes the way that she brings this about as
observing, watching and listening to figure out from what she observes how the person in the other culture might construct his or her worldview and then make a best guess at what would be the better way to proceed in the encounter. She does this by stepping back a little bit and following instead of jumping in and leading the situation (she says that leading might be acting from a U.S. worldview). She has found that others seem more comfortable with her when allowed to be themselves and she is able to create a comfortable atmosphere in which others can initiate action from their own worldviews and she can adapt to them.

Other interview respondents shared Eden’s strategy. For example, Izzy echoes Eden’s strategy, stating, “I think a lot of this is sitting and listening to people and observing people… you're allowing people to educate you about who they are.”

**Mindfulness and constructivism.**

**Mindfulness.** Eden and Izzy’s strategy described above is consistent with Stella Ting-Toomey’s concept of mindfulness and ODIS (J. M. Bennett, 2015; Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2015; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019):

When entering a new culture, learn to mentally observe (O), describe (D) and Interpret (I) cultural differences from the other cultural values' perspective. In an unfamiliar culture, patient observation with our five senses can help us to shift value lenses and get ready, emotionally and cognitively, to appreciate and understand the differences. Furthermore, with focused observation, we should work on generating multiple cultural interpretations in viewing a "seemingly deviant" behavior. We should make explicit our own unconscious cultural interpretations in comparison to that of the interpretations from the other cultural viewpoint. In this way we hope, by mentally walking through the O-D-I steps, we have suspended (S) our hastily formed ethnocentric evaluations of the observed behavior, taken together, this is known as the O-D-I-S method: observing, describing, interpreting, and suspending evaluations. (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 83)
I would add to the ODIS above the letter “C” for confirm. The ODIS-C would be an extra final step in which we would confirm that our evaluations of a particular culture are correct through a conversation with someone from that culture as Michael Paige does in his Kenyan Wedding story below.

From Eden and Izzy’s explanations of their strategies for creating comfort for the person with whom they are interacting, it seems an important but often overlooked part of intercultural sensitivity development is the importance of generating multiple cultural interpretations so that the most correct response might be approximated.

Constructivism. Continuing the theme of mindfulness, Ellen Langer explains that mindfulness is related to the construction of new categories:

The creation of new categories … is a mindful activity. Mindlessness sets in when we rely too rigidly on categories and distinctions created in the past (masculine/feminine, old/young, success/failure). Once distinctions are created, they take on a life of their own. (Langer, 1989, p. 11)

Cultural value dimensions. Cultural value dimensions have been researched and identified by intercultural scholars (Hall, 1990; Hofstede et al., 2010; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Paige et al., 2006b). Cultural value dimensions may be described as generalizations of the values of the group. A commonly used example of a continua of value dimensions is collectivism and individualism (M. J. Bennett, 2013c, p. 54). Bennett and other scholars caution us not to confuse the categories we create as existing outside our minds (M. J. Bennett, 2013c; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Weng & Kulich, 2015).

It is interesting to note that when Betsy described her experience in Egypt, she was able to identify the cultural value continua of the fate and destiny orientation of her
driver and her own cultural orientation towards personal responsibility. Betsy also told stories of family and gender role differences and attitudes towards privacy and ownership. Other respondents also observed differences in cultural values, although they did not use that terminology.

**Cultural mentoring.** Cultural mentoring (Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009; Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012c) is the facilitation of the development of intercultural sensitivity through an intervention by an expert knowledgeable in assisting with the reconstruction of events according to different cultural frameworks (Paige & Goode, 2009, p. 333). Although Paige & Goode’s definition is typically used in conjunction with international education programs, in this research project it is broadened to include people experiencing a variety of types of cultural differences in various situations (sometimes including international education). Cultural mentoring is considered to be the most important factor in increasing intercultural sensitivity (Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012c). Many of the interview respondents gave examples of how individuals in their lives who could think in two or more worldviews assisted them in being able to reconstrue their experiences from a new cultural perspective.

For example, Eden’s parents had grown up in Ethiopia and prepped their daughters prior to moving them there. They also provided mentoring as incidents arose while living there. Sam’s parents helped her understand poverty, power, and privilege through welcoming people from other cultures to live in their home, taking Sam on educational trips to illustrate those concepts, and helping her to develop relationships with people in other countries. In addition, they provided important reading materials
prior to departure to guide her observations upon landing. Izzy’s mom was a role model as she made her life’s work helping people. Through her mother’s mentoring Izzy learned to be of service to people experiencing economic hardships and homelessness in her city and in Central America. Betsy’s teacher helped Betsy understand indigenous cultures and her father was important in modeling being of service to people in need. Other interview participants mentioned learning about opposing religious beliefs or cultural values from parents, teachers, and friends. Respondents were unanimous that having experience with differences and then having them interpreted (or re-interpreted) by parents or other intercultural mentors assisted them in developing intercultural sensitivity and enhanced their ability to see people or a culture in a new way.

**Importance of cultural mentors.** To further make the point that cultural mentoring can make a difference to the experience of those living in another culture, in her interview, Eden remarked that, “living somewhere alone does not necessarily change the way you see something.” This fits with a quote from Laura Bathurst who relays a comment by a student who had just returned from studying abroad in Japan:

“What I’ve realized,” he said, “is that I wasn’t really in Japan, even though I lived there. That is, I didn’t really learn anything about Japanese culture.” (2012, p. 281)

As George Kelly says:

A person can be a witness to a tremendous parade of episodes and yet, if he fails to keep making something out of them, or if he waits until they have all occurred before he attempts to reconstrue them, he gains little in the way of experience from having been around when they happened (1963, p. 73).

A cultural mentor can help us reconstrue our experiences. Milton Bennett suggests that we should attempt to organize the world the way a person from another
culture would. Again, a cultural expert who is a friend, family member, or teacher can assist us in getting closer to this goal:

… if one wishes to participate in Japanese culture as an Italian, he or she must stop organizing the world in an Italian way and start organizing it in a Japanese way. (This is the theoretical ideal, never achieved, of course) (2012, p. 101).

In a different culture we experience new things and often do not know how to interpret them. A cultural mentor in the form of a family member, friend or teacher can help us understand from a new perspective.

**Continuous self-monitoring.** Several people who were interviewed commented that they closely observe themselves in their intercultural interactions. If they find they could be more interculturally sensitive, they gently bring themselves back to a more sensitive position. This perpetual self-monitoring keeps them in a state of constant quality improvement in their intercultural development. They strive for something that sounds like total quality management with “constancy of purpose toward improvement” (Deming, 2000, p. 23) by continuously monitoring their own intercultural sensitivity and pushing back on themselves when they notice that (in their own opinion) they are falling short. In addition to monitoring their own progress in becoming interculturally sensitive, several people had good friends, family members, or other people in their lives who helped to gently push them when their thoughts were more ethnocentric. Sam describes this as “catching” herself. When Sam hears how some other people talk:
I think, “Oh, I'm so good at this kind of stuff.” But then I do catch myself and think there are still times when I could think more critically about something or I could challenge myself to think more from a perspective of someone else. I think a lot of people just have opinions and don't challenge themselves regularly and don't have people who push back on them regularly, and that's something that I really appreciate about friends that I have and my romantic partner, who will all help me hold myself accountable and I don't see that in as many people.

Izzy made a similar comment:

As a human being in this global society you are required to constantly push your biases so that you don't continue to perpetuate them. So I try to be as culturally sensitive as possible, and at times I'm sure that I have been biased… I think the more aware of a bias you are the more likely you are to be pushing back against it behaving in ways that are in opposition to your biases.

Several of the other participants also discuss the idea of confronting their own attitudes.

**Culture fatigue.**

**Culture fatigue.** Culture fatigue (Grove & Torbiorn, 1993, p. 84; Grove & Torbiörn, 1985; Mumford, 1998; Paige, 1993a, 2015, p. 3; Ward, 2015, p. 1; Zapf, 1991) is apparent in the lives of the interview participants. Intercultural scholar and practitioner Michael Paige gives this explanation of culture fatigue:

Sojourners who are deeply immersed can experience what has been identified in the literature as language fatigue and culture fatigue, which result from having to regularly communicate in another language and function in another cultural system. (2015, p. 3)

The concept of culture fatigue came up in quite a few of the interviews. Betsy mentions it in terms of the how she just “didn’t have the energy to hash out” the intercultural differences when the jeep flipped over in Egypt:

It was really interesting that we were seeing this situation so very differently. We were all too traumatized to really hash out that cultural difference between his cultural orientation towards fate and destiny and my cultural orientation towards personal responsibility.
Despite an interest and motivation to engage with people from different cultures, there are times when we have too much culture fatigue (as Izzy had during the lunar eclipse), and it can be helpful to take a break from the fatiguing culture. Izzy reports that she is fatigued from her attempts to bridge cultural differences every day of her life because she is married to a person who holds so strongly to his own (different) cultural values. She explains that during her pregnancy she was more culturally fatigued than usual and the day to day engagement in the language and culture of her husband made her particularly weary:

There were probably some pregnancy hormones happening at the same time. … It was a very culturally insensitive moment for me. So that’s when I received an F in intercultural sensitivity. It's every day of my life. I feel like by eight or nine o'clock I am so culturally fatigued every single day, every day.

*Comfort with those who share intercultural experiences.* While culture fatigue can be exhausting, taking a break from a different culture can be restorative. Interculturalist Janet Bennett acknowledges the feeling of comfort Eden found being with others with intercultural backgrounds:

This comfort may be partially due to the acknowledgment that indeed one does have a peer group. It is not fellow members of one’s own culture, but rather a group of fellow marginals with whom one has more in common than anyone else. (2014, p. 279)

Eden says she has the most in common with people who also have intercultural experience, whether it is with people from another country in the United States or with U.S. Americans who have lived abroad somewhere. She finds that there seems to be a common bond among people who have interacted in a meaningful way with people from
another culture. She feels more comfortable because there’s already an assumption that that person is going to be different than you:

…but those things that you see initially that other people might react to as being weird or strange don’t tell you really anything about the core of who they are so you just kind of observe them and appreciate them, but you don’t use that necessarily to make a judgment. It’s just easier to be with them and there’s this understanding of what’s important about people and so you can relax… They’re the people I tend to relate with best even if they are from another country that I’ve never been to before.

While the whole of Eden’s statement above is significant, the most enlightening part is that she can relate to people from another culture even “if they are from another country that [she has] never been to before.” Could it be possible that once a person has the ability to reconstrue experiences according to a different worldview (perhaps of a culture they are familiar with), then they can utilize that skill to reconstrue experiences according to a worldview that they are not familiar with? This topic would be intriguing for future research.

**Look alike/think different.** Eden explained that she felt different when she returned to the United States. She said that while she looked like most of the students in her undergraduate program in the United States, she felt more African. Feeling different gave rise to a need for a safe haven to return to—a place where she could just let her guard down and where the intercultural aspects of herself would be understood. That safe haven where she felt understood was found in the kind of home that Eden sought to create for herself. It takes just a short time to have a break from the outside world and Eden gets that break from culture fatigue when she is with her husband.
Scholars Pollock, Van Reken and Bethel all noticed what Eden described. While in Africa Eden looked different but thought more like Africans. When she returned to the United States she looked alike but thought differently than those around her. Pollock, Van Reken and Bethel devised a four-square chart to illustrate how people may feel based on which place in the world they are in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Look different</th>
<th>Look alike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think different</td>
<td>Think alike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look different</td>
<td>Look alike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think alike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cultural Identity in Relationship to Surrounding Culture*

*Figure 12 Four square box of Cultural Identity*

(Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Van Reken & Bethel, 2005, p. 55)

*Fitting in visually but not culturally—“look alike/think different.”* When Eden went to college in the United States she *looked* like the other students but she did not *feel* as though she were similar to the students there. The assumption by others was that she was purely U.S. American (although she was U.S. American, that was only part of who she was) created cultural misunderstandings. Being treated as if she were only U.S. American, based on her appearance (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Van Reken & Bethel, 2005, p. 55), created intercultural misunderstandings resulting in her feeling as if she did not fit-in.
… I really didn’t look different from the other students. I didn’t look like I didn’t fit in. My classmates made the assumption that I had [the same] background that they had, which I just didn’t. I think that’s probably one of the most significant assumptions [people could make about me is that I grew up in the U.S.] because then you end up shocking them when you’re not what they expected even in small ways like if you don’t know something about [the] past that they assume everyone knows because everyone grew up watching the same TV shows.

This kind of misunderstanding did not happen only in Eden’s home state when Eden was in college, but also when she returned to the United States after finishing graduate school in Africa and began working in another state:

I’m not Dutch and [that particular city] is a very Dutch area and this co-worker that I was talking to, that’s her ethnic background and so we were discussing a little bit and she said “Oh well, you know, it’s all right you have a Swedish background and I’m Dutch but the great thing is that wherever you go, everyone grows up watching the same cartoons and all that stuff.” And I was like “No. I didn’t.” So even though she knew that I had told her that I had grown up in Ethiopia, what she clung to as the wonderful thing that unites people is that [everyone is the same, basically]. So that’s the kind of assumption that people make.

One of the positions on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is that of minimizing differences. Eden’s colleague may have been minimizing differences as “she clung to [the belief that] the wonderful thing that unites people is that [everyone is the same, basically]”. According to the slide mentioned above, the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) considers that people interacting with someone in the position of Minimization would feel unheard. This is what Eden felt in her interactions in which she looked alike but thought differently. This can lead to the kind of cultural fatigue that her husband provides respite from. One might speculate that feeling unheard in her own interactions raises Eden’s awareness not to make assumptions
about others. Her ability to wait patiently and really listen to others without preconception is a demonstration of her intercultural sensitivity.

Izzy also commented on looking different and thinking differently:

When you're in third grade, eight years old, that’s when you really start to have an idea of relationships and the fact that you look different than I do, it's not just that we all like playing in the sandbox but we actually have some cultural differences that would make us act differently or really differently to each other.

*Visibility/Invisibility.* Another concept related to Pollock, Van Reken and Bethel’s four-square chart is the concept of visibility and invisibility (Calloway-Thomas, 2015, p. 607; Paige, 1993a, pp. 10–11, 2015). Michael Paige’s explanation of visibility and invisibility echoes Eden’s experience to the extent that it is almost as if he were writing about Eden specifically:

This intensity factor is well-known and understood by those who have been the visible outsider or minority in their own or another culture. But it is not skin color, nationality, values, political views, or sexual orientation per se that creates the experience of being highly visible or invisible. It is the new culture itself that creates the experience of visibility or invisibility for the sojourner.

Visibility is often a function of skin color, and it is complex. Think of a White person, for example, coming to a small Kenyan village or the newly arrived international student from Kenya arriving at a small, predominately White liberal arts college in the United States. They will be highly visible. If one has not anticipated or ever experienced visibility, it can be quite demanding. Invisibility refers to a different situation where something about the sojourner is not recognized, however important it might be to the person. (Paige, 2015, p. 446)

Eden is not the only participant to comment on visibility and invisibility. Josie, one of the participants not featured in chapter four, has also noticed the significance of visibility and invisibility in her mostly white town in which she frequently befriended exchange students while in high school:
There wasn't a language barrier in these cases and I didn't really view it as much of a racial barrier either, it was more of [the fact that] a lot of the exchange students were from somewhere in Europe. Not having to overcome how to interact and deal with [visibility] was a little bit easier, because it is different when you have such different physical characteristics, there's a lot more attention on that person when they're here. For me when I'm in Africa, I am very aware of being the only white person in the room... There's a different barrier to overcome when there are more physical differences, but it's not impossible.

**Bridging cultural differences.** While all respondents engaged with cultural differences, they also commented on the importance of finding a way to bridge cultural differences by identifying common ground. Finding a way to work together through identifying common ground is not the same as denying cultural differences. In fact, according to the IDC, “Bridges across Difference” is one of the most interculturally sensitive positions on the continuum. Sam noted this when she worked in government. She did not agree with many of the values of others but they needed to work together in order to move forward. She asks, “How can we work together with people who are really different from us? What common thing can we find that will tie us all together?” and answered that:

> We have to develop relationships with people who are different from us and then maybe we can start having conversations about things that really matter to both of us even if we disagree with 95% of what the other person values.

Eden might agree. She says:

> I would say that recognizing our common humanity is a good starting point for intercultural relations, but by itself it does not encourage the full expression of who we are to each other. We have to also appreciate our differences as much as possible.

As opposed to the ideas of the denial, defense, or the minimization of differences, finding common ground may be an initial step leading to bridging cultural differences. As
mentioned in chapter one, in the IDC minimization is moved from Bennett’s ethnocentric position to a position of transition between the monocultural mindset and the intercultural mindset:

Between the more monocultural mindset and the intercultural orientations is minimization. Minimization is a transitional state between the more ethnocentric orientations of denial and polarization (defense/reversal) and the more intercultural states of acceptance and adaptation. (Hammer, 2009, p. 207)

If we look simply at the quotations that emphasize the commonality between cultures, we might consider these statements to characterize the minimization of difference. However, if we examine the entire quotation we see that each person is acknowledging the commonality in cultures as a starting point for moving forward (for the purposes of getting to the differences), but also acknowledging the profound differences in thoughts, values, and beliefs with statements such as “We have to develop relationships with people who are different from us and then maybe we can start having conversations about things that really matter to both of us” and acknowledging that similarities may lead to a “bridging point” but that similarities by themselves do “not encourage the full expression of who we are to each other. We have to also appreciate our differences as much as possible.” Mitch Hammer notes that:

The approach taken in minimization toward these recognized cultural differences is to focus on more unifying frameworks within which the cultural differences may be better understood—albeit understood largely from one's own cultural perspective. A minimization perspective is able to recognize some patterns of cultural difference; but the orientation emphasizes dealing with these identified differences through a commonality lens that can mask underlying differences. (Hammer, 2009, p. 208)
The view presented by interview participants of acknowledging the importance of differences and working together is quite different from how Eden’s colleague viewed commonality:

I’m not Dutch and [that particular city] is a very Dutch area and this co-worker that I was talking to, that’s her ethnic background and so we were discussing a little bit and she said “Oh well, you know, it’s all right you have a Swedish background and I’m Dutch but the great thing is that wherever you go, everyone grows up watching the same cartoons and all that stuff.” And I was like “No. I didn’t.” So even though she knew that I had told her that I had grown up in Ethiopia, what she clung to as the wonderful thing that unites people is that [everyone is the same, basically]. So that’s the kind of assumption that people make.

Eden’s colleague seemed to be aware that Eden was different but saw her as basically the same (or wanted her to be the same), while Eden and Izzy both were aware of the differences but were looking for a starting point to move people forward through disagreements. This topic would be interesting for future research.

**Significant Findings**

**Breaking through the bonds of a single worldview.** The objective of this study is to identify life experiences (as opposed to formal educational experiences) that might lead to intercultural sensitivity. Several common factors were found in the experiences of the study participants: reflecting on experiences of difference, engaging in meaningful interactions or relationships with people different from themselves, encountering ambiguity, developing mindfulness, constructing new ways of viewing the world, recognizing cultural value dimensions, receiving cultural mentoring, implementing continuous quality management, experiencing culture fatigue, looking alike but thinking differently, experiencing visibility/invisibility, and bridging differences.
The most significant finding was the possibility that participants appear to be able to break through the bonds of a single worldview. Future research might examine the mechanism operating in the minds of interculturally sensitive people to determine how this happens. As noted in this study, intercultural scholars have various ideas as to how this happens.

From the interviews we know that all participants had experiences of difference. They had reflected on them in various ways as stated in the analysis. Some of the participants noticed particular value continua that were different in two cultures. For example, Betsy noticed that there was a continuum in values between self-determination and fate. As stated above many intercultural scholars have identified and written about these kinds of value continua. Once a person can identify a series of value continua, they might be able to identify where they exist on the scale and where the person with whom they are interacting is. Again, referring to the example of Betsy in the interviews, she identified that she was more on self-determination end of the continuum while the person with whom she was interacting was on the fate end. From Betsy’s interview we know that Betsy’s ability to identify this cultural difference was helpful to her in processing her intercultural interaction. In other words, knowledge that there is not a single way to interpret a situation can be helpful. Although research participants had not formally studied value continua, they had noticed that there were cultural differences in values. Perhaps being able to identify cultural value continua through their experiences of differences helped them understand situations from the perspective of the person with whom they were interacting. If they were able to do this in a second culture, for example,
if Eden could identify predominant values in the U.S.A. and also in Ethiopia, then perhaps it was easier for her to pull a dozen or so cultural values out of her pocket and apply them to people from cultures previously unknown to her, cultures such as those found in Burma or Somali. As mentioned previously, many scholars have researched cultural value dimensions. Here is an arrow representing a cultural value continuum between Ethiopia and the United States:

*Figure 13 Single value continuum of Ethiopia and the U.S.A.*

When two cultures are known well by an interculturally sensitive person, a monocultural worldview might be shattered and a multicultural worldview might emerge. This new multicultural worldview might then be applied to a third, fourth, and fifth unfamiliar culture. In refugee settlement work large numbers of refugees have arrived from Burma, Somalia, and Bhutan.

*Figure 14 Single value continuum of various cultures.*
Developing a feeling for cultural values. Of course Eden is not using a particular cultural value continuum because, as was established from the interviews, she did not have formal education in cultural value continua, but let us suppose that she has a feeling for different cultural values gained over a lifetime of experiencing differences in the cultures in which she has lived and worked. Let us further suppose that she gets a sense of the cultural value differences. If visualized as a cultural continuum with dozens of different cultural values and dozens of different cultures, we might visualize multiple sets of arrows as depicted above. Now suppose Eden is offering services one day to people from Somalia and Laos, and let us suppose she is unfamiliar with these cultures. Perhaps with her intercultural wisdom she is able to interact with these two clients by being able to slide along that polychronic/monochronic continuum from end to end as she approximates where the person with whom she is interacting may be on that continua. May we speculate further that in her mind Eden might hold dozens of cultural continua? If so, perhaps she can slide up and down in her mind until she hits on the correct worldview. She does this, as she explains, by observing a little bit, following a bit more, and figuring out from what she’s seeing what would be the better way to go. From her description her process seems to be iterative with feedback from the person or people with whom she is engaged. Eventually, she might land on an approximation of the worldview of her client that is close enough to allow her to offer interculturally sensitive services. May we further speculate that Eden keeps making approximations until at last (although quickly) she settles on the combination that helps her work effectively?
One practice used by several participants was to use mindfulness techniques to sit with ambiguity and then implement their ability to generate different constructions until one appears that seems more appropriate to the worldview of the person with whom they are interacting.

Having the culture specific information on their home culture and on a second (familiar) culture may have been the stepping stone necessary to generate a second worldview and then a third (despite being unfamiliar). The interviews indicate that it was not the culture specific information that helped participants with unfamiliar cultures. In fact, they were unacquainted with the culture specific information of an unfamiliar culture. It seems that the key to working effectively with multiple unfamiliar cultures is the participants’ ability to generate and approximate accurate cultural constructions that they could apply to situations with people in unfamiliar cultures. While this skill might be less important in the traditional context of international education in which a student goes to a single country and learns important culture specific information, it is essential when working domestically with a daily parade of people with highly different cultural backgrounds seeking services at an organization throughout the days, weeks, and months.

**Unexpected findings.**

*Applying intercultural theory without knowing it.* It is noteworthy and surprizing that the responses of the interview participants closely followed current intercultural theory despite that the respondents did not report having formal training in intercultural theory. For example, participants noted their experiences of difference, their engagement with ambiguity, their mindfulness, the use of cultural mentors, social contact,
culture fatigue, dynamic “in-betweenness”, “looking alike but thinking differently,” and being more aware of visibility/invisibility (although not in those words). The responses of the participants echoed the theories even though they had not heard of those particular theories themselves.

The Significance of the Findings

Intercultural Insensitivity: A Recent Example. The purpose of this research is to identify the life factors that people identified as facilitating their development of intercultural sensitivity. In the context of refugee service workers, those who are more interculturally sensitive may be able to make their workplace a more welcoming environment. It would be significant indeed if welcoming environments for refugees of all nationalities and ethnicities in refugee service organizations were available to service seekers, and more generally, if welcoming environments could be found in the communities that receive refugees and other immigrants. A recent news broadcast interviewed a woman who experienced an interculturally insensitive interaction:

A Minneapolis woman said she went to the Minneapolis City Attorney's office for legal help, but wound up leaving insulted and offended after speaking with a female worker there. "I was mad," Hirut May said. "She said, 'If you don't like it here, you should go back to the country you came from.' And I did tell her I'm not going anywhere ..." May said she was born and raised in Ethiopia and moved to Minneapolis about 20 years ago. "Certainly we will deal with this individual situation," City Attorney Susan Segal said. "We have done training already, and we will continue to do that to make sure something like this does not happen again." (Belanger, 2018)

The worker went on to tell Hirut May that May was now “in the best country in the world” to which “May said the sweeping generalizations were hurtful to her” (Belanger, 2018). While the report explained that “training” had been done previous to
this situation, the interaction occurred nonetheless. Perhaps it is more difficult (and perhaps also unethical) to “train away” deeply held values and convictions that could be interpreted as “unwelcoming” than to select people who already have intercultural sensitivity. But how does an organization know how to select individuals with intercultural sensitivity? The IDI, considered by many intercultural scholars to be the “gold standard” among inventories, is not designed to be a selection tool for employment. In fact, the IDI Qualified Administrators (of the inventory) “are restricted in using the IDI for selection (hiring, placement, promotion) or baseline assessments” (Hammer, 2013a, p. 10). Furthermore small community-based nonprofits generally do not have the resources to utilize expensive consultants trained to administer selection tests. The IDI is not the only inventory and researchers propose other inventories that might be utilized under appropriate conditions (Fantini, 2009, 2019; Fowler & Mumford, 1995a; Graf & Harland, 2005; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013; Paige, 2004).

**Suggestions for Policy and Practice.**

This research is focused on the life experiences of people who have been observed to be effective working interculturally. This is not research on human resources policies and practices in the selection of employees. That topic is left to human resource development scholars and practitioners and is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In whatever way organizations obtain an interculturally sensitive workforce, it is important that policies are in place that support interculturally sensitive workplaces. As exemplified in the recent example above of Hirut May, if an organization values a welcoming workplace, selection measures might be implemented that consider a worker’s
intercultural sensitivity. Policies might be implemented that in addition to on-the-job training might include evidence of, or potential for, intercultural sensitivity in addition to education and work-related experiences. Corporations, public and nonprofit organizations might consider whether or not providing an environment that is welcoming to all might become a priority aspect of their mission. If an organization’s mission is to provide services and if the people needing services leave or do not connect with the organization in the first place (due to reputation), is that organization meeting their mission of providing effective services?

Janet Bennett makes a case for having “constructive cultural marginals” in the workforce and gives these important reasons for considering leveraging their abilities:
Leveraging the Contributions of the Constructive Cultural Marginal

1. The cultural marginal can "code shift," using the body language, communication style, and language conventions of more than one culture group. This can be an asset for:
   a. Connecting with a diverse client basis
   b. Providing culturally sensitive customer service
   c. Linking with diverse service providers and suppliers
   d. Managing and leading employees from a variety of cultures
   e. Negotiating with members of different cultures
   f. Conducting effective job interviews across cultures
   g. Coaching members of different cultures

2. The cultural marginal maintains ties to the attitudes and values of more than one culture group. This can be an asset for:
   a. Marketing to different cultures
   b. Protecting the organization from cultural missteps
   c. Interpreting the organization's mission to various culture groups
   d. Recruiting for diversity
   e. Mentoring individuals from nondominant groups

3. The cultural marginal has developed skills of interaction and analysis from more than one cultural frame of reference. This flexibility can be an asset for:
   a. Solving problems in a variety of ways
   b. Managing conflict in a culturally sensitive fashion
   c. Exercising creativity from diverse perspectives
   d. Making effective decisions
   e. Leading global virtual teams and diverse intact teams
   f. Conducting multicultural meetings
   g. Working with and influencing diverse stakeholders
   h. Leading global organizations (J. M. Bennett, 2014, p. 287)

With Professor Bennett’s list of assets described above, an important policy might be the inclusion of interculturally sensitive people in a refugee serving workplace. To further emphasize the value of interculturally sensitive people in the workforce, we remember the description of attributes of third culture individuals from chapter two:
ATCKs are helpers and problem solvers. Drawing on their own experiences in new situations, 85 percent of ATCKs say that they reach out to help those who appear unsure of themselves, especially foreigners and non-English-speaking minorities. As one respondent put it, “We know what it is like to be confused in a country where we cannot speak the language well.” Moreover, most report that in situations where there is a conflict or misunderstanding, they are the ones who step in to mediate. When they themselves are facing new situations, the majority claim that they can establish relationships easily; and when confronted with unexpected or difficult situations, nearly 90 percent agree that they can usually figure out a way to handle them (R. H. Useem & Cottrell, 1996, pp. 32–33).

Just as the qualities identified by Janet Bennett, the qualities of Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) found in the research of Useem and Cottrell above would certainly be assets to programs in which people are working one-on-one with people with a variety ethnicities.

**Implications for Practice**

Again, the scope of this study does not include specific human resource practices which are better left to the human resource professionals. However, experiences identified in this study may serve as a starting point in helping identify attributes of people who are effective in working interculturally, particularly, these would be people who have deeply experienced difference and processed their experiences.

As an alternative to pre-employment inventories or post-employment training, perhaps human resource leaders in these organizations might consider implementing pre-employment selection criteria that help them select candidates who already have intercultural sensitivity. In the situation of Hirut May, in the report cited above, the length and specific type of training undergone by the city employee is not specified. Apparently it was not sufficient to help the worker provide a welcoming environment. One may speculate that if one *thinks* in an interculturally sensitive way that one might
therefore *speak* in an interculturally sensitive way. Lee Mun Wah, documentary filmmaker, author, educator, therapist and diversity trainer, reflects:

For the longest time, I was under the impression that discrimination was what you saw, heard or did. As I’ve grown older, however, I have come to understand that discrimination is also what you *don’t see, don’t hear or don’t do.* (Lee, 2018, p. 1)

Rather than training workers “not” to *say* insensitive things (although they might be *thinking* insensitive things) it might be more productive to have workers who do not *think* insensitively in the first place. Perhaps then, in addition to training, selecting people who already are capable of creating a welcoming environment might be an important addition to other selection criteria in the way that teachers need a teaching license, physicians need a medical license, and social workers need a social work license.

**Who might be interculturally sensitive?** In the example of Hirut May, the worker offering services had been trained. This leaves the impression that a more direct approach would be to hire people already possessing intercultural sensitivity. How is this done in refugee servicing organizations? Some managers rely on interpreting signals (Spence, 1973, 2002) given on application forms or found on résumés received. Hiring managers may look for international employment, study abroad, Peace Corps experience, other international living experiences or other types of intercultural experiences such as being a third culture individual or otherwise moving between cultures or other experiences of difference that might signal a pre-existing motivation to experience difference, for a start. Beyond the scope of this study, a study that may also point out helpful attributes, is the SAGE Study, *The Study abroad for global engagement: The long-term impact of mobility experiences* (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josić, & Jon, 2009),
which surveyed 6,391 study abroad participants and found that study abroad had a positive impact on their global engagement as well as their later educational and career choices. The findings of the SAGE study would support that people who voluntarily studied abroad may be good a place to look for globally engaged candidates. This would be consistent with this research in which the majority of participants had studied abroad. Other attributes of the people in this research were people who had parents of different backgrounds, people who had grown up between two countries, and people who were deeply involved with relationships with someone from a different background. There were no people in this research who had been in the Peace Corps or who were otherwise employed abroad, however, as we remember from chapter two, research showed that “those who had been abroad for employment and education were found to have higher levels of CQ. Other types of exposure, such as vacationing abroad, did not increase an individual’s level of CQ” (K. A. Crowne, 2008, p. 394). As stated many times in this paper, immersion alone may not provide an ability to shift worldviews, therefore further investigation of a person’s immersion experience is warranted.

Further examination of applicant qualifications might warrant an in-depth interview. Interviewing can provide an opportunity for applicants to discuss their intercultural effectiveness. One technique, with considerable potential, used by hiring managers in interviews is to create scenarios (Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2006a) or critical incidents (M. J. Bennett, 1995; Dant, 1995; Flanagan, 1954; Fowler & Mumford, 1995b). Several intercultural scholars refer to Flanagan’s foundational definition of critical incident:
The critical incident technique consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. The critical incident technique outlines procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance and meeting systematically defined criteria.

By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects. (Flanagan, 1954, p. 1)

Perhaps not adhering strictly to the academic definition, the practice of using critical incidents or scenarios as part of the interviewing process in refugee service organizations might look more like posing real-life challenges previous workers have faced in working with their refugee clients. By framing a scenario and asking the candidate what he or she would do in a similar situation, the interculturally sensitive manager might listen closely in an interview for language and attitude appropriate for working closely, unsupervised with people from a variety of cultures. For example, if you asked an applicant to describe a time when they felt like they were culturally competent but realized later that they were missing something culturally, you might be able to hear a story such as Michael Paige’s Kenyan wedding story. If you listen carefully you can hear elements of intense cultural competency, cultural humility, and receptiveness to shift frameworks from that of valuing time as most precious to that of valuing people as most dear—as in the wedding will start when everyone who needs to be there has arrived rather than at fixed time regardless of who is missing (a common cultural clash between refugee service workers and their clients):
Michael Paige’s Kenyan Wedding Story

This real story occurred during the year I was serving as a Senior Fulbright Scholar at Kenyatta University (1993-94). A very good Kenyan friend of mine, Robert Kilonzo, was getting married in Machakos, about 2 hours’ drive from Nairobi. My wife and I were invited to attend the wedding ceremony and reception. A few days before the reception, I took Robert aside and asked when the ceremony, scheduled to start at 10, was actually going to begin. Being culturally savvy, so I thought, I knew the event probably wouldn’t start right at 10. But because we had an engagement back in Nairobi that evening, I needed to know when we would likely be back on the road. And Robert knew American culture; he had spent a number of years in the U.S. as an international student and had also been the in-country coordinator for the U of M’s Minnesota Studies in International Development (MSID) Kenya program. I was certain he would be the perfect cultural informant. Just to be sure, I even said, “Robert put your American culture cap on and remember how time oriented and direct we are. And then just tell me when the ceremony is really going to start.” Robert thought about it for a moment and said it will start at 11. Fine, I said, and thought to myself. It will probably start at noon which would be OK in terms of our plans.

In fact, the ceremony started at around 2 in the afternoon and went late into the afternoon, long past the time when we could leave in a culturally appropriate manner and be back for our evening event in Nairobi. Later, Robert and I got together and I was teasing him about the late start. He provided me with a cultural insight about time that has stuck with me since then. Robert said, “Michael, we could not possibly have started the wedding until everyone was there who needed to be there. So, I could only guess when it might begin but had no way of really knowing. Then, everyone who had come needed to be fed and the celebration might go on for 2 or 3 days. A wedding is a huge event in our culture. It begins and ends when it needs to....”

I, of course, had asked a question from an American perspective and thought he knew enough about my culture to answer the question. He thought I knew enough about Kenyan culture to know the answer.

This is one of my favorite personal experiences with monochromic and polychromic time. Monochromic time places everything into specific time segments and time becomes a highly valued commodity. Being “on time”, for example, is a virtue. We orient ourselves to time. Polychromic cultures view time as something that is available to be used as needed. Time is more oriented toward the context and needs of people, per the wedding. (R.M Paige, personal communication, November 02, 2009)
We remember one of the findings of this research is that once the bonds of a single worldview is shattered, that participants may be able to apply their ability to shift worldviews to unfamiliar cultures. Therefore, selection managers may provide opportunities for applicants to tell stories and listen carefully for people with cultural humility, “defined as having an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused, characterized by respect and lack of superiority toward an individual’s cultural background and experience” (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013, p. 353). Applicants may have experiences in which they have been effective in working interculturally and those skills may be transferability:

An intriguing aspect of cultural humility is its transferability to experience from one culture to another. Having questioned the primacy of their own culture and having understood the validity of another’s culture, those with cultural humility often entered a new cultural setting in a learning mode, listening to verbal communication and watching nonverbal expressions for the cultural and noncultural substantive differences. They most likely did not make assumptions about their ability to automatically understand another; rather, they likely assumed that they might be ignorant of what is really being communicated and, therefore, asked questions intended to clarify what was actually meant and expected. Cultural humility means making physical and verbal approaches in a humble manner, allowing hosts to direct individuals in adapting their behavior. A perspective based on cultural humility allows people to acknowledge that the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding is great and this reality must be continually respected. (Guskin, 2015, p. 163)

Limitations

Generalizability. The primary limitation of this study is lack of statistical generalizability; however, that is not the goal in this study. This rich qualitative study was done with the goal of creating deep verstehen (understanding) and gaining insights into the development of intercultural sensitivity through informal learning, specifically
through life experiences. The intention of the study was to determine the mechanisms by which intercultural sensitivity might be attained through an examination of the life experiences of people observed to have this capability. While it is hoped that the findings may be of applicability in other settings (Yin, 2018), the study, of course lacks external validity and no statistical generalizations are possible.

**Social desirability.** In qualitative studies researchers must always consider the whether interview participants display a tendency to answer questions in a way that will be viewed favorably by others. In this study social desirability (Callegaro, 2011; Constantine & Ladany, 2000; D. P. Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Myrdal, 1969) did not seem to be a major limitation since respondents openly shared negative as well as positive stories of their intercultural interactions. In fact, many of the respondents humbly and candidly reported stories of their difficulties and challenges with intercultural sensitivity.

In addition, there was not a power differential between the people being interviewed and the interviewer, specifically; there is no formal relationship between the interview participants and the researcher. Therefore, there was nothing to be lost or gained by answering in a particular manner and nothing could be withheld by the interviewer if a particular answer was not considered desirable. Also anonymity was strictly guaranteed.

**Influence of the literature.** This is a study that implements “the discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 2017, p. 1), a grounded study, done with *inductive* data analysis, an approach that uses “detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts,
themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data” (D. R. Thomas, 2006, p. 238) by a researcher. Familiarity with the intercultural literature might be a conscious or unconscious factor in seeing themes related to the literature. This could pose a limitation to conducting a grounded theory study. Being drawn to categories, logic and frameworks of known intercultural scholars (even if unconsciously) could be a limitation.

**Thoughts about Future Research Needed**

As mentioned above, it is possible that a person might be able to utilize their ability to reconstrue experiences according to a new worldview that they are not familiar with once they are able to break through the bonds of a single worldview. This topic would be intriguing for future research. Another topic for future research would be to make distinctions between bridging differences which is found in the position of adaptation (leaving people feeling valued and involved), and finding common ground as found in the position of minimization (leaving people feeling unheard).

**Need for tracer studies.** “Internal validity is the basic minimum without which any experiment is uninterpretable…External validity asks the question of generalizability: Both types of criteria are obviously important” (Campbell & Stanley, 1967, p. 5). Because there is no external validity in this study and no ability to generalize statistically it might prove worthwhile to conduct a large retrospective tracer study such as the SAGE study mentioned above, that would include large numbers of people who serve refugees or work with immigrant communities:
Tracer studies take a retrospective look at the evolution of the situation of a sample of [people] already provided with or exposed to a specific intervention. It is an enquiry approach at a single point in time that generates data on already achieved impact. (International Labour Office & ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2011, p. 3)

**Control group study.** Another suggestion for future research would be to conduct a study using a classic experimental control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1967; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2001). In this style of study, researchers could examine two groups of participants, a control group of people with random résumés or application materials and those with résumés that signal experiences of differences or intercultural sensitivity as described above. Using this traditional research paradigm with a control group, for one group proxies suggesting intercultural sensitivity would be assessed, while for the other group traditional selection procedures would be used, ignoring proxies and signaling. The intervention would be in applying a “sorting” based on the signaling found in résumés, application materials, or during scenarios or critical incidents during an interview. Random résumés applicants could be compared to people with résumés that signal intercultural sensitivity and learn if there is any difference in their later professional performance.

**Conclusion**

Much of the extensive literature on the development of intercultural sensitivity focuses on formal education and training. This dissertation research in contrast makes its contribution to the field by trying to understand how experiences (rather than formal educational experiences) and related informal learning may assist in the development of intercultural sensitivity. A case study was conducted of the population of effective
refugee service workers in a program in a nonprofit organization in the United States. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and related informal learning that help to shape an individual’s intercultural sensitivity and to identify those experiential factors that contribute to the cultivation of an interculturally sensitive state of mind. The key research question guiding the study is: “What prior experiences influence the development of intercultural sensitivity?” The overall answer to the research question is that participants unanimously reported that they had experiences of cultural difference. In addition, several themes and sub-themes emerged from the interviews. Specifically participants were reflecting on the differences that they experienced, engaging in meaningful interactions or relationships with people different from themselves (going beyond the ‘iron law’ of social homophily), “a preference for interacting with other individuals with similar traits” (Alstott, Madnick, & Velu, 2014, p. 1). Other common themes discovered were: confronting ambiguity, developing mindfulness, constructing new ways of viewing the world, better understanding cultural value dimensions, modifying and refining their weltanschaung (worldviews), receiving cultural mentoring, continuously questioning their biases, experiencing culture fatigue, looking alike/but thinking differently, being more aware of visibility/invisibility, and bridging differences.

Interviews were conducted to the point of data saturation and revealed two basic findings: 1) the participants’ experiences echoed the intercultural literature despite that they had not had specific training in the intercultural field; 2) it is conceivably possible that interculturally sensitive people may have the ability to break the bonds of a single
worldview and apply their skills to breaking the bonds of unfamiliar cultures if they have been able to successfully bridge two or more cultures.

The significance of the findings are that selecting refugee service workers who are interculturally sensitive may help refugees feel more welcome in the refugee serving organization and prevent them leaving with hurt feelings as in the Hirut May case illustrated above. As presented in chapter one, the U.S. Census “estimated the number of foreign [sic] born [people] in the United States to be nearly 40 million, or 13 percent of the total population” (United States Department of State, 2018).

By the end of 2016, 65.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. That was an increase of 300,000 people over the previous year, and the world’s forcibly displaced population remained at a record high. (UNHCR, 2017)

“Stanley Tambiah (2000) at Harvard argues that the study of such groups is at the most cutting edge of contemporary social science research” (Fry, 2016). With 65.6 million people displaced worldwide and increasing (UNHCR, 2017), the need for refugee services workers who are interculturally sensitive will also increase dramatically. The case of Hirut May is not unique. Ms May had the determination to follow-up with her insensitive service provider, but how many newcomers would do so?

Service workers in small nonprofits serving refugees are poorly funded. Workers receive appalling low wages for long work hours under challenging conditions (such as middle of the night airport pick-ups and assisting clients trying to rid their homes of bed bugs). Often these workers (even with advanced degrees) receive only the legal minimum wage, frequently with no health insurance, retirement or customary benefits other workers are commonly offered. Despite the difficult working conditions, it is
noteworthy and surprising that these interview participants had never been observed to have been become bitter, cynical or angry during their work with their refugee clients. However, they may have moved on to different types of work more quickly than people doing less challenging work with better compensation packages. Improved compensation and working conditions may be a policy consideration as a means to improve the longevity of services workers tenure as they develop knowledge of social services and cultures and are therefore better able to provide higher quality services to new immigrant and refugee communities.

It is essential to make each interaction between service worker and newcomer an effective and meaningful one, so that refugees do not simply leave an agency without receiving the beneficial or effective services guaranteed to them by governmental regulations. Refugees often arrive from refugee camps with a single bag of belongings and a debt for their airfare to the United States. Although some refugees are doctors, nurses, pharmacists and teachers, it is not easy to become re-licensed for professional work in the United States. Some refugees were farmers back home and most are resettled into cities. These difficulties to resume their profession make it important, at least during the first years, to have support from family, friends or refugee service workers. To provide the highest quality and most effective services it is important that refugee services workers not only have social service skills in their given profession, but also have intercultural sensitivity. It is nice to feel understood, but it is essential to be treated in a culturally respectful way and receive culturally appropriate (Khalifa et al., 2016) services. Perhaps this study can illuminate some of the qualities that employers might
consider when selecting people to work with people from many different cultures. Refugee services administrators might make it a priority to provide culturally sensitive services. To do so, part of their selection protocol might include selecting refugee service workers who are interculturally sensitive. Optimistically, doing so will make relationships between incoming and receiving communities more effective and more harmonious. It is imperative to provide culturally-sensitive and appropriate high quality services to our growing immigrant communities (including refugees). Hopefully this research in a small way will provide some useful (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Ravetz, 1987) empirical data and related insights to facilitate and inform attainment of this lofty goal.


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