Compendium of Critical Incidents

HEALTH, GENDER, SEXUALITY, DISABILITY, BODY

November 2012
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This paper is Result n.9
(Compilation of critical incidents)
edited by Élan Interculturel for the BODY Consortium.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The project, and this publication within it, was funded by the European Commission – DG Education and Culture, LLP Grundtvig Programme.
**Foreword**

The aim of the research phase of the BODY project was to explore the impact of cultural differences in the work of adult trainers involved in trainings related to health, gender, sexuality, interculturality. The chosen method was to collect critical incidents experienced by adult educators / trainers involved in this field during their work following the approach developed by Margalit Cohen-Emerique. The particularity of this approach is that it acknowledges that in all cross-cultural conflict / tension there are two sides involved and that a conflict can never be reduced to or explained by the strangeness of the other, but rather the interaction of two differing cultural reference frames. Through the analysis of culture shock experiences, concrete situations called critical incidents from both the perspective of the narrator and the other protagonists the method opens the space for a better understanding of how our own cultural values, expectations shape the interaction and help us reach some degree of cultural neutrality, allowing for a better negotiation of possible solutions. We have grouped the collected incidents into our five domains: health, disability, gender, sexuality and body in general. Read more about the methodoly and further analysis in the [Critical Incidents Research Report](#).

Enjoy the reading!

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For the collection of *Critical Incidents* we would like to thank all adult trainers and project managers that attended the Focus Groups and local pilot
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “Water”  
[Collected by Élan Interculturel, France, 2012]

### Sensitive zone
The contrast between: a scientific, materialist conception of the world, Cartesian conception of health and the primacy of individual physiological needs over all other needs on the one hand and a religious belief system on the other.

### Culture of the person experiencing the shock
Female, 38-years-old, psychomotor/movement therapist (she helps clients dealing with issues related to movement, coordination and body awareness), working part-time in a hospital and part-time in private practice. In a relationship with a young physiotherapist, has lived in Paris for 10 years, the rest of life in Poitiers. Politically she describes herself as left-wing but non-militant. She comes from a family of health practitioners (mother a nurse, father a physiotherapist).

### Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Young woman aged 18. Student. From Ivory Coast. Practicing Muslim. Comes from a relatively homogenous cultural background (West African immigrants). Referred to the relaxation workshop by her doctor after experiencing back pains.

### Describing the SITUATION
The situation took place at a first meeting in the context of a motor skills and relaxation workshop for a group of 5 women who all came for different reasons. It took place at my office and I led the group. It was very hot and there were two electric fans, but they did not provide much relief unfortunately. The participants were performing an exercise with gymnastic balls, which requires using bodily energy. Given the heat, I handed out water so that they would be kept hydrated and they all accepted except for one young woman who thanked me politely without further explanation. They continued with the activity and a few minutes later I noticed that the young woman was perspiring and pale, so I went over to her with a bottle of water telling her that this time she would absolutely have to drink to hydrate and refresh herself a little, or she would face a drop in blood pressure. The young lady refused, telling me that she could not because she was observing Ramadan and that I shouldn’t worry, that she was feeling fine and that she was used to withstanding high temperatures without drinking water. I was very concerned that she would grow faint so I suggested that she stop the exercise in order to rest a little. The young girl insisted on continuing, so I became stricter, telling her that if something happened to her I would be responsible professionally. I told her that I accepted her beliefs and ideas but that there were rules in my office, too, and that one of those rules was not to put oneself in physical danger. Faced with her insistence, I told her clearly that if she would not agree then she could leave the room. The young woman took her things without a word and just before she closed the door she said “You should know that this is discrimination and I will not tolerate it”.

### 1. Elements of the SITUATION
Office of a psychomotor therapist in a town in the northern suburbs of Paris. The room is about 30m². There are no chairs, simply big and small balls to perform exercises and individual mats. There are 5 women: one is 18, two others around 30 years old and two more around 45. The group was originally heterogeneous with regards to ethnic origins (3 immigrants, 3 French, one of whom was originally from the Maghreb). The participants were in a circle, sometimes lying or sitting on the floor, sometimes on the balls, depending on the kind of exercise. The instructor walked around the room giving instructions and checking that the women understood. Sometimes she stopped with one or another of them to correct a position or to help with certain movements. The relationship between the ethnic groups of the people: the immigrant women and the participant with an immigrant background were from countries that had previously been French colonies (Ivory Coast, Tunisia, Algeria).
### 2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

I felt very disturbed, a little worried because I had the impression that the participant had devalued my professional capacity and that my rules meant nothing. I experienced a kind of ambiguity between anger and anxiousness, anger at the contempt for what I was explaining and anxiousness that the participant might feel faint. Finally, rage at being accused of discriminating against participants. Troubled.

### 3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

For the narrator, while it is very important to have beliefs and a rich spiritual life, there is a limit: psycho-physical health. Physical integrity must take priority, it is the basis on which to have a fuller spiritual life. Also, if a training is being given or if you take part in any kind of workshop, the rules that exist must be respected, and the message and the arguments of the person in charge of the event must be taken seriously, otherwise there is no point in taking part. If religious beliefs are not compatible with the workshop, the workshop must be avoided.

### 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

The narrator had a negative image of the participant in question because of her disregard for the narrator’s rules and her accusation of discrimination. She viewed her as a fanatic capable of anything for her beliefs.

### 5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis 1)

**Religion** is the basis of all our actions, guiding and protecting us. It is everywhere all the time, it is our framework.  
**Hydrating, drinking water** is important but it is not necessary to drink all the time. During Ramadan, it is possible to drink and eat sufficiently at night and that provides energy for the rest of the day. **Perspiring** is a natural thing when it is hot and not a sign of faintness.

Not respecting the decision of the young woman to not drink and making rest and hydration as conditions (forbidden during Ramadan) for continuing with the exercises is **discriminatory**.  

The young woman seemed to be strongly guided by religious doctrine and her superego.

### 6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

It can be difficult to draw the line between respect for others and professional responsibility and to define the hierarchy of needs. Is it possible that spiritual needs take precedence over those of the body? Another issue in this situation is the border between the right of the trainer to determine what takes place during her training and to ensure the safety of the participants and the right of an adult participant to take responsibility for her own actions.

### OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

The young woman never returned to the workshop. The psycho-motor therapist stands by her position.
**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “ACCOMPANYING DEATH IN THE HOSPICE”**  
[Collected by MHT Consult, Denmark, 2012]

<table>
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<th>Professional educational domain</th>
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<tr>
<td>Health / Gender</td>
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**Sensitive zone**  
Professional versus private care of terminal ill family member; Conception of family responsibility; Attitude towards illness/death/body; Professional identity.

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**  
The narrator is a Danish female nurse, 38 years old at the time, working in a hospice. The narrator is part of a nuclear family herself, having 3 sons and a husband. Like many Danish families she has a Christian background, but is not an active believer in daily life.

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**  
The other protagonists are A) A Japanese female patient in the hospice, 72 years old – and B) the patient’s son believed to be same age as the nurse at the time, 38 years old. It is not known whether the son in the incident was the only adult child in the family, but apparently he was the only adult child living in DK at the time. Like many Japanese people they profess presumably to Buddhism or Shintoism. But similar to the Danish nurse they are apparently not very active believers.

**Describing the SITUATION**  
I was working as a nurse in a hospice in the Metropolitan area in Denmark. One day a terminal ill Japanese woman was admitted to the hospice. As staff we expected to deliver the usual extensive, professional care. But we soon realized that the adult son of the woman had planned to stay in the hospice around the clock. The son actually insisted on doing everything for his mother. Even when we tried to persuade him to continue his daily life and let us do our professional tasks, he went on caring for the mother. As professionals we were only allowed to do those treatments, which were painful for her.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**  
The incident took place in a private hospice in the Metropolitan area in Denmark. Like most private hospitals and hospices I Denmark this hospice is very well equipped and with proper staffing. People pay, and the costs cover all necessities in palliative treatment and care. It is not known how many patients were in this hospice at the time for the incident, but usually the Danish hospices are rather small units. It is unknown why and for how many years the Japanese family live in Denmark. The Danish nurse telling the incident had other patients in her daily job.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**  
The nurse – as well as her colleagues - felt restrained and limited in her professionalism, since she was to some degree prevented from performing her professional duties and activities as usual. This also led to a feeling of being repudiated and distrusted in her professional identity and competence. She felt powerless, being a professional, but not able to support the patient in a proper way, seen from her own self-understanding.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**  
The nurse expressed the normative significance as a disrespect and limitation of her professional ethics. This is not at the least a very serious matter in medical world, where people are dependent on nurses and doctors professionalism. Thereby the incident gave rise to more normative dilemmas:  
**The professional identity:** As a nurse, it is the narrator’s task to support the patient; she is part of the structure of the hospice here. By taking over her job, she felt that her expertise is not recognised, and her professional identity is questioned. **The professional authority:** Furthermore, the authority of both doctors and nurses in the medical world is still quite strong. Even though there may have been many examples of medical carelessness, the authority is in general unbroken. Thus, the action of the adult son works as a degradation of the usual authority in the Danish context. This also works for female nurses, not
only doctors. **The attitude towards illness, bodily decay and death:** In Western societies, many laymen are distant from illness, bodily decayed and death. These fundamental human matters have been institutionalized, so to speak. In accordance with this paradigm children - even adults – are not supposed to witness the dying process of a parent or other close relationships. Bodily decay and death are almost matters of taboo. **Concept of a family, role of children:** The Western/Danish family is in general nuclear, which also implicates that generations do not stick together as closely as in the former days. Generally spoken, family members are not so dependent as they used to be in a historical light. This is the other side of the institutionalization of illness and death. **Individualism:** Furthermore, the family structure and diminished responsibility and reciprocity implies that each family member has “a right” to follow her/his own needs foremost. Staying day and night by the mother’s side would in general be perceived as a sacrifice and not a wish to be close in the process of death.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

Seen from the “Western” perspective the nurse and her colleagues got the impression that the Japanese mother somehow dominated her son. It seemed as if the mother wouldn’t allow the son to have his own life. The relationship between mother and son was interpreted as if the mother had excessive expectations and demands to her son. At the same time, the son seemed to be too considerate. The staff maybe looked a little bit down on the son, while he was so obviously given up his own life in this period of time. In their eyes he failed to fulfill his own needs, though he is a grown up man. Thus, the general view on the Japanese family was not entirely negative, but somehow sceptical and dissociative.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?

The interpretation of this incident may follow to directions: A family track and an economic track. **According to the family track,** the Japanese/Asian family in general has other norms, values and traditions as for taking care of each other within the family. These are norms and values as: (i) Respect for elderly people and parents, (ii) Higher priority and primacy of collective family needs for individual needs. In addition, there may still be active hierarchies within the families in the way that elderly people enjoy a special respect and should be obeyed. **According to the economic track,** Japanese citizens are used to a hospital system, where they pay for the care of family members hospitalized. This may represent high costs that the families may reduce by providing some of the daily care themselves. It is reasonable to believe that the Japanese son not only was acting upon family structures and cultural traditions. He may as well be acting upon the economic expenses by taking over the main part of the daily care of his mother in the hospice.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Firstly, there is a significant dilemma between the norms and traditions of the Japanese/Asian family and the Danish/Western welfare system, where “the state” has taken over both the responsibilities and the care of the traditional family in civil life. The incident shows the importance of being aware and conscious of different norms and traditions and expectations concerning care of ill family members. **Secondly,** there may be important economic motivations behind the son’s behaviour. He may believe that he can reduce the costs by taking over as much as possible himself. Seen in this light the incident gives reasons to wonder, whether the son and his mother were properly informed about the Danish subsidy system, also in a private hospice.
❶ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “ABORTION” Cordelia Foundation
[Collected by Ars Erotica Foundation – Hungary, 2012]

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Health / Gender / Sexuality education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Sexuality, conceptions of the body, family roles, gender roles, human life, private versus professional points of view, religion-values on human life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</td>
<td>35-year-old, white, urban, highly educated, independent, left-wing woman, professional, family-counsellor, psychologist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</td>
<td>A religious Afghan family, they are refugees in a Hungarian refugee camp, they live in instable and dependent social and economic situation, clients of the Cordelia Foundation (the narrator belongs to).</td>
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Describing the SITUATION

The incident happened in a refugee camp in Debrecen (Hungary) and involved an Afghan family. The husband was severely tortured and traumatized. The wife suffered a lot, too, and was psychically unstable. They have two young children. The husband is often irritated, loses temper and hits his older son. The husband and wife argue a lot.

The family was attending a family therapy. The therapy had been going on for one year when the wife confessed that she had fallen pregnant by accident. They lived below the subsistence level and under lots of stress. They could not afford to have a third child, however, abortion is prohibited by their religion.

During the therapy we discussed unwanted pregnancy and the options they had. On the one hand, I was aware that a new baby would be a risk to the whole family, on the other hand I was aware of their cultural background and the fact that abortion was not allowed by their religion. As a therapist, I felt that by giving them specific advice and guidance I would cross the line, however, I wanted them to avoid another traumatic situation.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

It happened in the family’s room in the refugee camp. The protagonists were: the narrator (therapist, the family: father, mother and the two children)

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

Inside me there was a conflict between the worrying private person and the professional helper. I was frustrated not being able to help them avoid the situation and that the new baby would be at risk and just aggregate the conflict within the family. On the other hand, I knew I had to respect the family’ standpoint.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

- valuing life over everything else
- respecting, accepting and understanding the other person
- personal vs. professional convictions

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

Ambivalent: wise and obstinate at the same time

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis)

- Respect for human life over everything else.
- Respect for God, following religious rules.
- Superstition as a value that must be followed.
- Faith in human values.
6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Humility, obedience, faith.

Concerning the narrator’s professional practice it is a constant problem how to reconcile the conflict between the private person and the professional helper. How to help clients avoid a situation which just aggregate the conflict within the family. On the other hand how to respect the family’ standpoint, their values and beliefs. The only good answer probably is a mutual conversation between the helper professional and the clients in order to help them adapt their cultural reference frame into their new life situation.

One may also interpret this incident as a thoroughly professional dilemma, since the question of saving life could be seen entirely from the sight of the family.

**CRITICAL INCIDENT:** “CONTRACEPTION”
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

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<td>Health</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sensitive zone</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sexuality and religion</td>
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<tr>
<th>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</th>
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<tr>
<td>25-year-old French woman interested in social/health issues. Considers herself to be open-minded. Not particularly religious.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</th>
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<tr>
<td>Around 19-20 years-old and of North African background. The narrator later learns that the girl comes from a very traditional family and that there are talks of her family arranging a marriage for her. She already has a boyfriend and does not want this. The narrator does not know if the girl is religious herself or not.</td>
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Describing the SITUATION

In a health class, I discuss the issue of contraception and talk about abortion. One of my 1st year social and family economy students gets up abruptly, closes her book takes her things while loudly saying: "It is out of the question that I listen to what you say. You are encouraging girls to have sex before marriage." She then leaves. After 5 minutes of silence, I start up my course again. The student did not return. I thought of organizing a meeting with my colleagues to discuss the incident.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

The incident takes place in a health classroom where the students (all female) are between the ages of 18 and 22. They are a very diverse group, and there is a mix of religious and cultural backgrounds. At just 25, the narrator is not very much older than her students. She had given several lessons to this group before the incident and is used to teaching. She did not have a particularly negative relationship with the student in question before the incident.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

I was appalled and shocked, so much so that I was unable to continue my lesson for a few minutes. I felt that I was teaching a standard health course and was not at all expecting this reaction from a student. I felt attacked.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

Sexuality as a matter of health: scientific reference frame: it is important to be able to deal with sexual
health as an objective matter, outside of the cultural context

Women’s rights and individual freedom of choice: In contemporary European societies, individualism is the dominant orientation, bringing about a set of values such as cherishing the right of the individuals to make their own sexual choices, women’s emancipation and women’s rights. Being able to deal with one’s body – including contraception and abortion are important achievement in an ongoing fight for women’s equality.

“Laïcité”/secularism: The dominant French approach, linked to the republican universalism inherited from the enlightenment period requires the retreat of religion from the public sphere, including the schools. This is an important value, and when it is breached and religious concerns are brought up it is often perceived as a threat.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?
Negative

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

The student’s reaction could be tied to cultural or religious beliefs regarding sexuality before marriage. The narrator later learns that the student had been having family issues involving the possibility of an arranged marriage and was rather sensitive/vulnerable at the time.

Hypotheses on cultural reference frame:

Acculturation, identity threat of cultural incompatibilities: Children of immigrants often struggle with the harmonization of conflicting values. Indeed they have to find a solution to integrate the values transmitted by their parents’ and family socialization and those that they have been socialized to in their social contacts and institutional education in the local culture. These values can often seem really contradictory, as in the case of arranged marriage contrasting with the current Western idea of individual freedom of choice (especially of one’s partner) and the myth of romantic love.

Marriage from a collectivist perspective: If the idea of the individual choice and the cherishing of love stories is linked to a dominance of the value of individualism, in more collectivist societies where the main focus is not the well-being of the individual but of the community, marriage is a means of enforcing links within the community more than a means of personal satisfaction.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?
Yes. In this specific situation, the student never returned to the course. Furthermore, the incident sparked a reflection on questions of intercultural differences, which influenced the narrator’s career path and further teaching practices. It made her aware of an issue she had not considered before.
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<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Cultural norms of proper babycare.</td>
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**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**

The narrator is a Danish female nurse, aged 52 at the time. The nurse has been educated for around 20 years and thus has many years of professional experience from various parts of the health care sector. She has earlier been working as a home nurse, visiting a broad group of especially elderly citizens, who also included ethnic minorities. Normally, she has not been working in the maternity ward.

She is the mother of 3 grown up sons, but wasn´t a grandmother at the time for the incident.

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**

A number of immigrant and apparently Muslim mothers at the maternity ward of a hospital in Denmark. Since the narrator was not herself involved neither professionally or personally in the women´s maternity or further situation, she would not know about their homelands, stay in Denmark, age, education etc. But the idea of the critical incident is that the narrator as a professional “passers-by” in the maternity ward was deeply surprised by the treatment of the newborn babies and thereby experienced a cultural shock at a small distance so to speak.

**Describing the SITUATION**

I was working as a nurse in the local hospital in my hometown. In a short period I was assigned to the maternity ward in order to solve some tasks not directly linked to the care of mothers and babies.

I noticed though that among the new mothers were several women with an immigrant background. I didn´t have much contact with the women, but I assumed that some of them were multipara, who were used to take care of newborns.

Then one day I witnessed that a group of the immigrant mothers were wrapping up their newborn babies very tightly as if the babies were mummies.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

The incident took place in the care facilities at the maternity ward of a Danish provincial hospital. A number of immigrant women – perhaps 4 or 5 – were present, nursing their newborn babies and wrapping them up in towels and similar clothing from hospital equipment.

The women were of different ages, and a couple of them were probably multipara. Some of them or perhaps all of them were probably Muslims. A professional nurse came by and noticed the women´s handling of the baby care. The nurse was not familiar with the women, nor did she usually work at the maternity ward of the hospital. The nurse had a long professional career, though, as a Danish nurse. She also had at least some experiences nursing elderly immigrants.

2. **Emotional reaction**

At first sight the narrator could hardly believe her own eyes, because the treatment of the newborn babies was so unusual in a Danish context. The narrator describes her reaction in this way that she felt as she had fallen into a time warp and watched a scene from the old days.

Her second reaction was a kind of outrage, while the immigrant mothers in her opinion were...
giving their newborn babies a wrong treatment, restricting their freedom of movement.

### 3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

From the narrator`s professional training and experience the wrapping up method seemed very oldfashioned and abandoned a long time ago in Denmark. In her point of view the wrapping up method prevents the newborn child from moving body and limbs. It also prevents the baby from a close body contact with the mother or father in the first period of life, which today is known as a very important part of the further physical and mental development of the child.

Seen in this light and from the narrator`s professional position, the immigrant women did all the opposite of what is emphasized in the care of newborn in a Danish context.

### 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

The narrator got the impression that these mothers with foreign backgrounds were slightly backward in their attitudes to the motherhood and childcare.

The narrator consequently got the feeling that the immigrant mothers were ignorant about children's development and needs, even though they came from cultures with many children and large families. The narrator used the expression herself that it crossed her mind that the mothers were kind of living in another age.

### 5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis)

In earlier times there was also a tradition in Denmark to wrap up babies. The idea was that children were more comfortable being wrapped up tightly. It was also believed that the wrapping up method was important for the posture of the child. Nowadays, the attention of the scientific health research denounced these perceptions, and therefore the nurse in this incident considers the immigrant mothers with great suspicion and perhaps even with a touch of contempt, while they – from a modern scientific point of view – are acting contrary to all scientific knowledge.

The mothers – on their side – may build their practice on inherited traditions and experiences that they do not question, since they are in fact functioning.

### 6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

The incident may reflect a cultural clash between a scientific and a common people`s approach to childcare and newborn babies needs and treatment.

The nurse wasn`t in charge in the situation – and not at all associated to the maternity ward and care of mothers and babies. But it may be important in such situations to confront the women in an appreciative way – asking about the experiences, considerations and traditions which lie behind this practice. In the end, the mothers are free to chose their own methods, but it is known from a lot of courses targeted at immigrant women that they in general are very interested in learning about other (Western) traditions of childcare and parenting etc. This can be done respectfully and without rejection of their own traditions and experiences.
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “SEXUAL PROVOCATIVE DRESS IN LIBRARY”
[Collected by MHT Consult, Denmark, 2012]

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<tr>
<th>Professional educational domain</th>
<th>Gender / Sexuality / Body</th>
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Sensitive zone
Exposure of sexuality in the public sphere.

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
The narrator is a Danish female teacher, 58 years old. She is working at a language centre. She is used to work with students from other countries and cultures for many years. She is known to be a very professional and experienced woman with high standards of professionalism – also with experience from staying abroad in various countries for some years with her family. She may be characterized – and would certainly characterize herself – as a feminist or at least a woman with a strong sense of gender equality.

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
A Bosnian female medical doctor around her late thirties, learning Danish in the language centre.

Describing the SITUATION
In our Language Centre we have a special school library, where all our adult students have the opportunity to work with assignments on an independent basis. One or two language teachers – also being supervisors and consultants - are always present in the library to guide and support the students in their studies. One day I was on guard in the school library, where a group of about 10 adult students were working. All of a sudden I registered a certain unbalanced atmosphere. The source seemed to be a Bosnian female student, who was sitting at a table wearing a very low-necked dress. The female student was from my knowledge a Muslim.

1. Elements of the SITUATION
The incident took place in the library of a language centre. Present in the library was the female language teacher/consultant. Apart from the teacher were about 10 students present in the room, 8 male and 2 female students – all adult students. The male students circled around the table with the sexually dressed Bosnian woman.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
As the teacher and consultant in the school library the female teacher felt herself to have a professional responsibility to keep a certain calm, quiet and concentrated working atmosphere in the library. Thus, the teacher was annoyed by the behaviour of the Bosnian female student for obviously disturbing the concentration in the room. The teacher felt a little bit offensive, while this woman was so openly challenging the male students in a sexual way - and dressed up for a party.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you?
The teacher expressed her own preference for a daily work dress code, being different from the way people dress up for parties. Actually, the language centre has some dress code among the teachers. It is not a very formal dress code. It allows the teachers and other employees in the centre to dress casually to some extent. The teacher herself was used to dress rather casually and not specifically feminine. Also, many of the adult students – both male and female – come from countries, where it would be rather offensive and even forbidden to dress up in a public institution in sexually challenging way. In addition, this incident also brings about more general reflections on the “backdrop” of the normative reactions in the situation:

Formal equality: The Danes emphasize equality in all spheres of life. The ideal is that everyone is equal and must have the same rights regardless of gender, social or ethnic background. This might transfer also in the academic sphere. The dress code in Denmark is rather informal, but the students are still expected to adapt neat, modest and casual attire.

Acculturation: The narrator considers the adaptation as non conscious phenomena that takes place almost
automatically as we learn the new lifestyles, rules, priorities of the new environment. She maybe expects that Bosnian women would adapt to Danish lifestyle and take up established cultural norms quickly but may not consider the fact that cultural adaptation is learning process that in most cases happens through a long period of time.

**Stereotype about a Muslim woman:** The Danish teacher’s surprise might also be caused by widely established beliefs and stereotypes about how typical Muslim women should look. Many times the image that first comes to our mind is that of a fully covered woman, in a traditional dress (‘burka’). We do not think that there might be women, who do not follow this dress code, but are nevertheless Muslim.

### 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

The impression of the Bosnian female student was actually rather negative and offensive. The perception was that this woman did not distinguish properly between working life and private life with regard to the dress code. She allegedly attended the school and the library in order to do some serious language learning, being highly educated from her homeland, and therefore with a clear interest in learning Danish in order to promote her own employment opportunities in Denmark. Dressing up like this she seems to be inappropriate in the environment. This may surprise me even more as she is actually highly educated from her homeland – and also a Muslim.

### 5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?

**Display of femininity:** At scientific conferences in Eastern Europe, many female scientists appear very femininely dressed. It seems to be usual to stress your femininity in public, not to be as much a taboo as in many of the modern Western countries. One explanation for that could be that this trend of gendered dressing is a consequence of the forced emancipation during the socialist period. In general compared to Scandinavian cultures most Eastern European cultures are far more masculine in the sense of greater division between gender roles. **Multiple cultural references:** Each of us has several cultural identities, and our behaviours, values are negotiated between the different cultural positions. The woman in this case, is both Bosnian and Muslim, and her behaviour, dress code does not only reflect her religion (or our representation of it) rather the larger cultural era where she lives. Also, apparently there is no discrepancy between being a Muslim and being a woman dressed in a very female and sexual manner.

### 6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

**Muslim/Religious beliefs:** Even though Islam is a prevalent religious belief in Bosnia, the country has been subjected to a lot of influence from the West, therefore the attitudes towards religious practice seems to be more flexible comparing to some other countries that are traditionally Muslim. Therefore it might not be unusual that a woman of Muslim beliefs dresses up in clothes that are not usually associated with Muslim practice. It may also be possible that other beliefs and values are more important to young Bosnian woman (e.g. such as fulfilling the role that is traditionally expected from woman in Bosnia). **Gender Hierarchy:** Bosnia is one of the countries which is still primarily patriarchal. Balkan family structure was traditionally based on a male-dominated system of regulations in which the worst position in the hierarchy was that of a young woman. Her most important role was seen as a mother and children breeder. Woman who failed to fulfil this role were often seen as worthless and faced discrimination from society, as ability to attract men audience was seen crucial to her identity. Even though nowadays women are gaining more power and independence and are taking up roles others that those connected to family life and structure, their inability to attract men might still be frequently looked down upon. The incident described by a Danish woman should therefore be seen in this socio-cultural context, in which women are still highly influenced by prescribed traditional roles. Although the incident described happened in Denmark, the cultural patterns are often internalized and the transition to more egalitarian society often does not bring the change in perception of women's own role and place in society. Many women still seek their acceptance by following...
the traditionally prescribed social norms. For a lot of them an exception from this existing socio-cultural model would have had much worse consequences than remaining in a subordinated position.

**Masculinity:** In addition to this, despite the fact that women are increasingly gaining access to higher education, higher position in society are still many times reserved for men and women often face – or touch – the so called ‘glass-ceiling’. In conquering this obstacles women might sometimes try to use different strategies. Exposing body parts and dressing seductively could be one of the ways used for that purpose. The described behaviour of young Bosnian women could therefore also been seen as their way to earn a respect.

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**CRITICAL INCIDENT : “Transgender authenticity”**

[Collected by ARS Erotica Foundation, 13 April 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Gender / Body</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Gender relations, body image, gender roles</td>
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**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**

40-year-old, educated, middle-class woman, psychologist open to LGBT issues,

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**

Young transgender woman (a man with a female identity)

**Describing the SITUATION**

A lesbian film club plays films about the life of lesbians and the problems they have. Afterwards the films are discussed by the audience with the involvement of subject-matter experts. Last time I was moderator of the discussion as a psychologist. In the audience there was a transgender woman (a man with a female identity) who actively contributed to the discussion. In one of my interactions, when I wanted to pass the floor to her, I said: “Now let’s listen to a man’s opinion.”

**1. Elements of the SITUATION**

1. (What happened?) Incident with a transgender man who has a female identity
2. (Who?) The narrator (psychologist but a moderator in a film club) and a transgender woman.
3. (What exactly happened?) The narrator made reference to the protagonist’s original gender, ignoring her self-image.
4. (where) It happened in an open discussion in a film club.

**2. EMOTIONAL REACTION**

I was embarrassed and wanted to correct my mistake so I called her female name.

**3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**

**Acceptance of diversity, endorsement of claimed identities:**
- Trainers working in the multicultural field are expected and expect from themselves the endorsement the identity positions chosen by participants, be that cultural, sexual etc. This is a kind of occupational criteria.

**Professionalism:**
- As a psychologist intervening after films dealing with sexual orientations the narrator was embarrassed by her own reaction of not attributing the appropriate gender identity to the transgender participant. She may interpret this incident as a lack of professionalism.

**Gender is not biological, but social and can be changed:**
- Our societies have (to some degree) accepted the idea that people can freely chose their gender identity.
Nevertheless, research has shown that we categorise the people we meet in a matter of seconds without conscious effort according to three criteria: age, ethnicity and gender. Although gender is cultural, making the difference between man and woman seems to be a very basic categorisation in our social perception. In this incident the basic categorisation according to some primary signs preceded the more elaborated learnt categorisation (whereby gender is not biological but chosen).

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?
For the narrator the transgender woman was neutral.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

Identity threat: For any person being addressed as member of the other gender directly questions and threatens their gender identity. Most transgender women face that threat more often than other people due to some of their primary masculine characteristics (height, voice etc.). Furthermore whenever they are addressed as men they can never exclude the intentional re-categorisation and intentional refusing to accept them as women. Gender identity is cultural not biological: For transgender people gender is defined by culture, by subjective identification rather than the primary biological signs. This focus on the cultural aspect of gender is one of the reasons why transgender people do not necessarily opt for the biological transformation via surgery. Between relativisation and essentialisation of gender: The transgender position assumes that gender is always cultural. At the same time it also assumes a male/female binomial opposition, which is different from the contemporary tendency of conceiving gender as not just two extremes but a variety of nuances between the two and that each of us makes their own gender mix. Transgender people move from one gender identity to a precise other gender identity, and for the movement to make sense that other gender identity has to be well defined, not relativized. A male to female gender transition cannot take place of the destination position is a relativized feminine-masculine position, only if it is a somewhat traditional conception of femininity.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

“I had a cognitive dissonance: my slip of the tongue revealed that unconsciously I had a traditional gender conception.” The narrator’s comment points to the fact that up to the present, most people in modern western societies could say the same, having deep down a traditional gender conception. This is reflected by the research on perception, which indicates that we categorise others in terms of gender automatically, without conscious effort and immediately. Whoever slips this categorisation stops the process of automatic perception and we find ourselves wondering: “is this man or a woman?” And though our conscious mind has learnt that gender is indeed cultural and that we would like to have and give the freedom to move between genders it takes time until this acquired freedom is reflected by our automatic perception functions.
**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “GENDERED TRAINING”** Adult education and training, trainer consultant  
[Collected by Ars Erotica Foundation, Hungary 2012]

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<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensitive zone</th>
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<tr>
<td>Non-verbal communication, conception of gender roles</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</th>
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<tr>
<td>25-year-old, middle-class, highly educated young woman, trainer</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</th>
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<tr>
<td>group of 35 men, mostly between the age of 35-55, electrical engineers</td>
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**Describing the SITUATION**

The incident happened in my first group: I had 38 participants (35 men and 3 women) for my training for a large company. The training company I worked for at that time was a conservative American company which favoured male trainers. However, the Swedish client favoured women for being more empathetic. Conservatism was also manifested in the dress code: dark suit, knee-long skirt, skin coloured stockings, classic business attire. So I found myself sitting in front of 35 men whose body language said: “Who are you, chick, and what have you got to say to us?!” All this happened in the early 90s. I was aware that from that time onward I would have to train them for 14 weeks every Tuesday and that potential future assignments for this client will depend on how successful I would be with them. After the third session a team of ‘ambassadors’ came to me saying: we won’t look at your legs only, but now we are ready to work with you.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

   Early 90s, Budapest.  
   A female trainer starts her trainer career.  
   She is 25 years old. She gets a group of 35 men, mostly between the age of 35-55, electrical engineers.  
   They are in the first 3 weeks of a long-term (14 weeks) cooperation.  
   Are they going to accept her as a trainer in a completely new situation, where the purpose is to get them out of their comfort zone for skill development?

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**

   In the first three sessions I felt they refused me as a trainer.  
   I was confident that that the method I wanted to use with them was good and would certainly help them in their work and private life. So their attitude made me upset, especially because I was aware that there was a 14-weeks’ training program ahead of us, focusing on attitude change.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**

   The group challenged the trainer’s professional competence with their male-chauvinistic attitude. The narrator felt that the group even did not try to accept me. According to her value system, the trainer should deserve acceptance from the trainees.

   “I was “just a woman” for most of them – a pretty young woman, acting like a “smartass”. - In the narrator women’s right to teach, to lead, to be independent, leaders or simply equal, intellectual partners to men were all threatened.

4. **Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?**

   The narrator had no positive image of them, as she felt their resistance.
5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

- male-chauvinism
- make the other person feel that you are superior to him
- women should not be leaders, not even in a training environment!
- lack of openness and acceptance

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Yes, particularly because the narrator’s mentor was a man, too, who – as a feedback - tore her performance as a trainer to pieces (beware that she was a beginner at that time): after one or two appreciative comments, he started to enumerate all the things that she should do differently. If her mentor had not been replaced and the team of “ambassadors” had not come to her, she might have stopped her career as a trainer. The consequences are that in a situation like that – as a trainer - it can be helpful to reflect on emotions and the possible differences between values in the group. As to mention it in front the group that “probably it is not common to invite female trainers in your company, but...” – sometimes this “running forward” (make the hidden conflict explicit in an open and friendly way) can extinct the possible tension coming from the group.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

Although the incident happened in the early 1990s, the trainer still regularly keeps contact with 3 participants from that group. (They meet in person, exchange e-mail or talk on the phone.)

CRITICAL INCIDENT: “THE CHALLENGE”
[Collected by CESIE, Italy 2012]

Professional domain
Gender / Coaching, adult training / General intercultural education / Support group for migrants

Sensitive zone
Gender / Religion / Trust in capability /Relationship to others / Standards of concept of respect / Values regarding gender roles

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
Sicilian / Woman / 46 years old / Heterosexual / Unmarried but living with the partner / trainer / Christian religion / first experience with the specific migrant target group.

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Moroccan / Male / Age 25 / Muslim / Living in a migrant centre / open-minded but with gender/intelligence prejudice.

Describing the SITUATION

I was training a multicultural group for about 5 months in Palermo, Sicily on intercultural awareness related to labour access for new-comers in Italy. During the first training sessions speaking about fears and expectation of their learning outcomes Mehmet was openly saying with a smile but still severe and aware about my possible reactions, that he doesn’t trust and recognize a woman as an educator. He will listen to the training but it will be difficult for him to accept and adopt what myself was going to teach them. I was astonished as well as most of the other trainees, even if belonging to his similar cultural background, none of us thought expected him to be that franc by telling his standpoint. I mean, we might have that kind of thoughts crossing our mind but most of the time we don’t pronounce it. I asked to deepen this concept towards the group. He replied: “It’s quite clear, in Morocco no man would follow a woman’s word”. He did not care of my knowledge input because I’m a woman and in his country no man relies on women’s...
teaching, suggestions, knowledge. The class was silent, no one expected this statement and none took position, whether men nor women.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

**What happened:**
During the first introductory session of an international exchange a Moroccan participant aged 25, giving a first impression of being open-minded and quite integrated into the Palermitan society, says openly that he is not going to be cooperative by realizing that the trainer was a woman.

**Where did it happen:**
The critical incident happened in Palermo during a training with an multicultural group compositions in 2009, in a training room with the others participants and trainers.

**Who were the protagonists:**
(i) An Italian woman trainer in international exchange
(ii) A young man participant from morocco

**Was there any history between them (personal or cultural):**
The protagonists while the critical incident occurred where starting to know each other in the context of an international exchange. There is a difference of status in the exchange as one of the protagonist is participant and another one is trainer.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**
First of all the trainer felt shocked, she thought that certain things you can think of - but never to loudly speak it out. She had experience working with people from other cultures but she had never before felt offended personally. As an Italian woman, even if they are a very low percentage of brain-workers that are recognized in society, at least this few have authority for their proofed knowledge. She felt “abandoned” by the rest of the group (men/women – Italians/migrants) due to the silence in the room. At the same time she felt surprised by the frankness and the audacity of the young man in expressing his thinking, almost admiring his verbal courage.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**
The narrator’s emotional reactions were due to her, so to call “cultural standards

**Patterns of Superior/Subordinate Behavior: western countries has a strong respect of hierarchy.** Even with informal and momentary hierarchy ( in the context of a training) keeping a distance and respect is important.

**Respect for gender differences:** Equality of gender in western countries is a valuable norms. It has been recognize through years the role of women as individual and her place in the professional market. Women are not only reduced in domestic and familial tasks.

**Respect for proofed knowledge and competencies:** Competencies should be beyond gender. Your experience is a way to be respected and valued out of any others considerations.

4. **Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?**
The image the narrator had of him was negative on one hand due to the concept in his statement and positive on the other hand appreciating his frankness in expressing his thoughts even aware of possible direct and indirect consequences on herself and the group.

5. **What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?**

**Patriarchal model:** For some culture women and men as separated tasks and role in the society. Men is the decision-maker and women even with knowledge cannot expected to transmit her skills to a man.

**Preference for Competition rather than for Cooperation:**
A women teaching and training a men challenged his pride.
It also can happen that this type of starting conversation is a culturally typical way of “testing” someone...
who is coming from another culture but we (as students, clients etc.) are somehow dependent on this person. Even though there is no need to belong to the another culture this kind of behavior can be typical in some culture (like in Roma culture) among males, for example.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

This Critical incidents was certainly highlighting problems concerning the professional practice, where the narrator can engage in a self-reflection process becoming more aware of her own self-hidden and unconscious prejudices. She identified and developed learning strategies and methods that helped trainees/learners to maintain their motivation and complete their courses, preparing them for further education and training. She could identify and develop ways to support and motivate learners with migration background to fulfill their educational potential. Let but now least together with some of the learners we could identify and develop strategies to tackle gender stereotypes in teaching, learning and career choice. As a solution where the cultural difference can appear in a client-helper, learner-trainer situation it can be helpful to reflect on this difference (as a group leader) openly and pose the possible questions accordingly. In this case, the next time may be useful to start the class with a short sentence that: “OK, I am aware of the fact that I am a woman and some of the participants’ countries it is not that common to accept a woman as a teacher, trainer etc. but now this is the situation let’s see if there was a problem and if yes, why ...”. Or to ask questions concerning the differences between the cultural customs in training situations in the host country and in the countries from participants came from...

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**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “ACCULTURATION”**
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Gender / General intercultural education / Language class for foreigners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Individualism, women’s emancipation, acculturation, women’s identity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**

37-year-old woman, Austrian origins, who has lived in France for 5 years. Has worked as intercultural trainer for 10 years. Has many experiences of international mobility (lived in several European and African countries). Lives with her partner, but has no children. Identifies herself as universalist-feminist.

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**

Women of 60-70 years old, of Tunisian, Algerian and mostly Moroccan origins who have lived in France for more than 10 years. Married mothers with adult children. Most of them have never worked outside of the home. Their French language skills are very basic, they attend a special French language class developed for them.

**Describing the SITUATION**

We are invited by an association as guest trainers for a session within a linguistic workshop. The class is for women migrants coming from Maghreb countries. Most of them have lived in France for more than ten years, yet their level of French is very basic, as their life in France has first of all been the life with their family at home, their main mission being raising their children. When these children grew up, suddenly they became free to start to open themselves up to the new environment. Our mission was to offer a special session for Women’s Day.

The incident takes place when the third exercise is proposed to the group: to make a collage on « their own Women’s Day ». This is explained as a day when they could do whatever they wished. We invite them to create a visual representation of this day using pictures from magazines and drawings, then explain how they would spend the day. Several women start to create a collage on a dinner at home and...
housekeeping tasks. I try to make them understand that they could really do whatever they wished for, that it could be a day not like every other day, but they don’t understand, or do not want to. So we helped them to create the collage on housekeeping tasks and dinner at home. Suddenly I realized the mistake we made when we expected them to take an individualist position of ‘emancipated woman’ who has individual projects for «herself».

1. Elements of the SITUATION
Linguistic workshop in the language school, within a small town of the Parisian metropolitan area. There are about 9 participants, their usual facilitator and two guest facilitators. The room is small but participants seem to be at ease in it, there is a sense of ownership of the space. They exchange smiles, chat in French – and a bit in Arabic. The climate is welcoming for the two guest trainers.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
Surprised then immediately ashamed for not being able to anticipate what would happen, embarrassed for not having reflected on my own ethnocentrism.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?
Individualism: in a society where individualism is the main tendency it is very easy to imagine an individual point of view (in fact it is the easiest). Easy to talk about “freedom of choice” and “autonomy”. We use a lot the word “I” and “me.” We express our needs, it is even expected from us to be able to express our individual desires. Career planning, family planning, all departs from the individual. The narrator has seldom been challenged in her own individualist position; she expresses and follows her own needs quite autonomously.

Women’s role, women’s emancipation: In modern European societies gender equality is a must (even if it may not yet be the rule everywhere). Women are encouraged by the society to engage in work, and even in careers traditionally considered masculine. When it comes to gender identity, for the narrator, the “norm” is that every individual could construct their own masculinity and femininity according to their own choices and paths. The narrator does not have children, and she is a fervent fighter for the equal distribution of housekeeping tasks at home (tasks that she despises and considers a necessary evil). Accordingly for her a day for oneself would most logically entail reading books that one always wanted to read, learning to parachute, going dancing or any other activity involving personal development and discovery.

Acculturation: As an intercultural trainer – and migrant herself – the narrator considers adaptation as a non-conscious phenomenon that takes place almost automatically as we learn the new lifestyles, rules, and priorities of the new environment. To let yourself be changed by the new environment is perceived as positive: we become permeable to the new environment, we build on it, we change and develop through it.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?
Negative, then neutral

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis)
Collectivist tendencies, centring on family and community rather than the individual:
Moroccan culture – especially in the period when the participants emigrated is probably much less centred on the individual than French culture. It is less automatic to take the individual desires and projects as a priority before the family’s or the community’s projects. There is less talk of «I» and «me» and more talk of «us». The «success» of an individual is not so much her/his own individual achievements and satisfaction, but the respect she/he inspires in her/his community.

Traditional women’s role: According to Hofstede’s results, Moroccan culture is more characterised by
masculinity than French culture. This implies that a greater differentiation and separation of the roles assigned to / taken up by the two genders. The tasks traditionally feminine tend to be monopolised by women. Working outside the home in the generation of the participants was very rare. Their main mission was being a good wife and a good mother. Life revolves around these roles, which are not perceived as oppressive but as reasons for living. An elderly lady would pride herself of having been a good mother and a good wife. It is this image that earns her the respect of the community as well.

Acculturation: Research showed that acculturation is not an automatic nor a linear process. The women in the incident probably did not have a « full immersion » in the French culture and the cultural model of the emancipated woman. Their migration project at the beginning was for a limited period and focusing on work, with an idea of return. They spent most of their time in a cultural environment dominated by members of the same or similar cultures. And even supposing frequent contacts with the French models focusing on freedom of choice and independence of women, nothing guarantees that that model would seem to them as something desirable. It is indeed a model that depreciates what is most important for them: the family and the role taken in keeping the family. The fact that the basic orientation is less individualistic seems to suggest that the idea of the emancipated woman is one that would not be easy to integrate.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

There is no absolute rule for acculturation – we cannot expect that after this or that number of years a migrant would become « adapted » or « acculturated » to dominant patterns of the host culture, even when it is a cultural pattern that to us seems to be a desirable one, such as the empowerment of women, which is the fruit of many years of struggle.

CRITICAL INCIDENT: “STORYTELLING”
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

Professional domain
Gender / Artist in attendance

Sensitive zone
The question of gender. What an African woman can’t say to/in front of a man.

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
French, 59 years old. Ten years experience as a storyteller. Previous leading of workshops/training on storytelling. Experience as an actor. Professional goal: develop a training linking storytelling with the teaching of French as a foreign language. Jean works with a lot with people of different ages/backgrounds. He has an “international identity card of world citizen.”

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Women from sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, etc.). Mothers between the ages of 35 and 40 (the workshop was supposed to take place between when they dropped their kids off at school and when they went to pick them up. In general, they are Muslim and wear veils, but not necessarily ones that cover fully (the veils cover their heads, but we can see a little of the front of their hair and their neck). African-style clothing that is long and baggy. They speak French just well enough to make themselves understood.

Describing the SITUATION
As part of a story collecting project, two storytelling colleagues and I led a workshop in the commune of Trappes (a suburb of Paris) to teach young trainers how to collect stories and lead workshops so that the...
stories could be circulated among the inhabitants of the Mureaux neighborhood. We had formed a partnership with a women’s association. The workshop was open to everyone, but we only had female participants (apparently culturally, this couldn’t be a mixed activity). It was the first time I had worked with African women. The first workshop with these women was led by my colleague T and myself. After a few games and exercises (including a visual memory game), my colleague and I told a few stories and then asked the participants if these stories reminded them of any that they already knew to encourage them to share their own stories. We noticed that they were rather embarrassed. The women said that they didn’t know how to tell stories in French. We thus invited them to tell a story in their own language (Peul, etc.), but they said that they didn’t remember, that they were children’s stories from a long time ago, etc. We said, “Exactly. Tell us a story that you tell your children.” But they said that they were stories for children. We thus thought that they were shy, especially since it was the beginning of the workshop and we decided not to insist anymore and to continue telling stories ourselves and to do the activities in which the women participated without any problem. I then talked to my colleague P., who had more experience than us working with African women. She said that they definitely had stories to share and that we just needed to insist.

The second workshop came along and this time, I was leading with my colleague P. She emphasized her position as a mother and spoke a little Bambara, which facilitated communication with the participants. Still, we found ourselves in the same situation as the first time where the women would not tell stories. This time, however, P. insisted that the women tell stories, so they finally admitted to her that they couldn’t tell stories in my presence. “Where we’re from, you don’t tell stories like that in front of a man,” they said. Nevertheless, we found common ground by having them sing French songs they knew like “A la claire fontaine” (as long as we stayed on our own cultural ground for them, there was no problem). We also did a massage exercise, taking care not to ask them to massage me. I massaged my colleague and she did the same for me.

In the third workshop, only my female colleagues (P. and F.) were present. Later I learned that the participants had easily agreed to tell their stories, which were not about anything private. They only told traditional tales (animal stories, etc.) and sung traditional songs. Nothing new for us storytellers.

1. Elements of the SITUATION
The workshop was held in a small room made available by the association. No furniture. Everyone was sitting down on the carpet. While Jean was careful not to put his feet in the direction of these African women because he had heard that it was frowned upon in some countries, he was surprised to see that these women were completely at ease sitting on the floor with their bare legs facing the storytellers.

The most important thing regarding the location is probably the fact that the workshops took place in the Mureaux district of Trappes. This is the area where cars were first burned in France (during riots). The media picked up the story and the neighbourhood had this negative reputation for several years. Thus, for the storytellers, the goal was to collect life stories that go against this negative image.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
At the first workshop, my colleagues and I thought it was probably because of timidity that the women didn’t tell stories, especially with it being the beginning of the workshops. Then I understood at the second workshop that it was my presence that prevented participants from telling their stories. So, at first I was amazed/surprised at the reaction of the participants and in particular had a feeling of discomfort from a pedagogical point of view. It was a momentary feeling of being at an impasse: how would we continue if the workshop participants refuse to tell stories? But at the same time, I felt a sense of respect for the desire to preserve a tradition (women do not tell stories in front of men in a public space). It was a rewarding experience because this incident was an opportunity for me to learn something new in my storytelling career.
3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

As a French, Parisian, contemporary storyteller, Jean is heavily influenced by a modern Western culture in which words are shared without it being a matter of gender. His modern education makes him see the woman as equals to men. They have just as much right to speak to him, both in the public and private space. Why should it just be that men can tell stories and not women?

However, due to his role as a storyteller, Jean has great respect for traditions and for people who honour their ancestors by respecting their traditions. The refusal of these women drew respect from him because he felt that this tradition was "almost in their fibers and their atoms! ". Jean is always touched by manifestations of these traditions. For him, honouring this little tradition that comes from so far away is a reminder of respect for several generations of ancestors. For him, it is worthy of respect even if it goes against his own values. These are values of equality coming from his own ancestors: generations of women who fought for the right to vote so their voice could be heard in the public space.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

Positive (refusal was polite and have a sense of respect for these women who honour the traditions of their ancestors).

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

Following these workshops, Jean did some research on the incident in order to understand what had happened. In his readings, he found that indeed, African women only told stories to their children (in an educational dimension, among others) and to other women. They never told them to men and especially not in a public space/outdoors because only men could tell stories in the public space (for men and sometimes for children). In addition, the relationship to the spoken word and to history is different in many African cultures: it is more private/intimate. Some stories even have a sacred character: we do not tell anyone, anytime, anywhere. They are told in a certain context (or secret ritual, etc.).

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Yes, because if the purpose of these workshops was to collect life stories, it would have been annoying for storytellers if participants refused to tell stories. Jean would have been obligated to be less involved or even remove himself completely from the workshop to allow for the collecting of stories. Fortunately, it was only a classic storytelling workshop that didn’t require any collecting. Jean was able easily to adapt to the situation and find a compromise (the songs in French). Indeed, he thinks that in this kind of situation, one shouldn’t search for the right thing to say or try to insist on a point when it’s not working. In this particular case, he knew he just needed time and complicity. It was also necessary to accept who these women were and to show respect for their position.

Jean has said that the next time he works with African women, he will perhaps be take a secondary role to prevent his presence from being a hindrance. But the best would be to try to provide a little more time to build a relationship of trust with this kind of public or prepare workshops before-hand to ask those working in local organizations about the cultural characteristics of the target audience because they know the terrain and know immediately, for example if there shouldn’t be any men involved, etc.

So, Jean now knows that when he receives specifications for the collecting of stories, he must first know if the public is willing to talk and tell their stories. There may be cultural or religious constraints or obstacles. He needs to have the prerequisites before-hand because collecting life stories isn’t possible with just any audience anywhere (in prison, for example, people tell crimes, etc.).
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “SEDUCTION”  
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Gender / Theatre workshop</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>The relationship to seduction / sensuality in verbal and nonverbal communication among African women staying at Emmaus.</td>
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**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**  
The narrator is French. He has significant experience (about 30 years) in theater. He directs a theater company that participates in a number of social activities with the goal of giving at-risk populations (whether that be those physically lacking in resources or psychologically vulnerable groups) access to culture and the arts. As an actor and trainer, he regularly works with individuals staying at Emmaus (a French charity that provides shelters).  

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**  
African women (from various countries) who were between 30 and 40-years-old. Staying at Emmaus (the center is not only for foreigners), these women have mostly lived on the streets. Most of them do not have family in France and live alone. The date of arrival in France differs between participants. Generally, they have immigrated fairly recently. Depending on the country of origin, religion could be Islam or Christianity, etc.

**Describing the SITUATION**  
We had to act out a scene from *The Dispute* by Marivaux. One of the characters in it began to feel the first stirrings of love and discover the strategies of seduction. The participants were supposed to act out this seduction and it was to be reflected in their body language. The goal was to teach them how a woman could seduce someone without being a "nymphomaniac". To help them get into the role, I asked them what they would do to seduce someone. The participants were not at all comfortable. One of them (the one who played Eglé) decided to stop the workshop and never returned.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**  
The activity takes place at an Emmaus shelter. Several people are present without having explicitly chosen to come to the workshop. Seeing the workshop as they pass by, they either decide to participate or not. The doors are left open.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**  
Disappointment. This event made me realize that, in addition to the theater workshop, important work must also be done on the body. I decided to give them a parallel activity in a fashion show. This would give attention to their bodies while helping each woman cultivate her singular expression.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**  
The narrator has a Western conception of the theater and of the relationship to the body acting. According to this conception, the actor must put his body in the service of the text. In addition, acting does not involve the person behind the actor: if you try to seduce someone on stage, it does not mean that you are trying to seduce him "for real." Acting is just a "game". Philippe has also noticed the lack of emphasis on the body in his own culture. The latter is dominated by the intellect. The body itself seems to be more present in African cultures (especially sub-Saharan Africa, and North Africa), even if religious and cultural constraints bring certain limitations when it comes to seduction/sex. Indeed, for him, these last two notions are neutral or even positive, while they may be very negative connotations in some cultures for religious reasons. From his point of view, sensuality and seduction are a part of life. He thinks it is a shame to repress this natural need. Except in the case of certain mental disorders, seduction shows that we feel good enough about ourselves to think that we can seduce someone.
In theater, especially in the “commedia dell’arte”, seduction occurs in the body of the actor through the movements of the chest and pelvis. When a character turns his chest towards another, this demonstrates this erotic attraction. In contrast, when the chest moves, it is a sexual attraction. The influences of the commedia dell’arte appear clearly in the characters of Molière and Marivaux. This is what he was trying to find in his workshops through putting emphasis on the contribution of the body. It was also to encourage the participants to regain some confidence and show them that a woman can seduce without being a nympho (or anything else). Obviously, the concept of freedom is also at stake here because, from the point of view of the narrator, seduction implies a certain moral freedom and religious freedom which acting requires (at least in the West).

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?
Slightly negative

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? *(Hypothesis!)*

Even though they are still young enough to seduce, these women did not give attention to their bodies and were closed up/guarded because of past traumas but also because of a lack of resources and especially a lack of self-esteem. Sometimes, having lived on the street for a long time, these women had learned to hide and conceal their bodies by wearing baggy and heavy clothes to protect against the cold and some men who might try to abuse them. They have developed a kind of denial of the body probably already present in their cultures of origin. Indeed, the cultural aspect (required modesty of women) prevented these women from indulging themselves in the practice of seduction and sensuality. Coming from Christian or Muslim backgrounds, these women seem to have integrated the negative connotation that seduction and sensuality have in monotheistic religions. Women caught in the act of seduction are considered as being nymphomaniacs or even worse...

Finally, there is the notion of the status of the actor and of the work of fiction: in the West, the work of the actor remains in the realm of fiction. Feelings and gestures have no relationship with the person who act and no moral implication. This is not the case in other cultures where the boundary between reality and fiction is not as clearly defined. In the specific case of the participant in question, Philip think that after all this work on the body, she obviously did not want to continue to act because it went too far for her considering her cultural frame of reference (the place of the body in her native culture) and her experiences on the street. Being used to hiding (or denying) her body, she was afraid of revealing herself while acting.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?
Yes, it is important to restore the concept of "innate culture" at the center of cognitive, motor, sensory and aesthetic transformation processes. It is therefore crucial that a trainer adapts his methods and exercises to the target audience: 1. - A keen sense of observation (to identify the manifestation of differences including non-verbal differences); 2. - Empathy: instead of ignoring the manifestation of a difference or force the other to comply with the requirements of an exercise, we should try to put ourselves in that person’s place to understand what the problem is for him/her.
Negotiating skills: Trying to find a compromise that allows for the accommodation of this difference.
**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “THEATRE WORKSHOP”**
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Gender / Visiting storyteller</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Artistic questions about gender and the mingling of the public and the private spheres.</td>
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**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**
French. 59-years-old. 10 years of experience as a storyteller. Previous experience as an actor. Leading workshops/training courses about storytelling. Professional project: build a training course combining storytelling and teaching FLE (French as a Foreign Language).

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**
An unspecified number of fathers and young men of varying ages of African descent. (North African and Sub-Saharan Africa).

**Describing the SITUATION**
When I was an actor, I organized a 6-week theater workshop in Bobigny for young people with professional and social difficulties. These workshops were paid for by PôleEmploi (French national employment agency) and were designed to motivate young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who had dropped out of school and/or were unemployed.

We had created a play together and held two performances: one for the teachers and the other students and one for the families. The latter was held at the foot of the high rises in Bobigny. I had asked the young participants to get their families to come along: fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. Only the women came with their very young children. The fathers, brothers and teenagers watched the show from afar, at the foot of the high rises, on the other side of the square, in a row. I can still see myself waving to them to come over. They politely waved no. I then asked one of the youngsters who was with us why they refused to come and he told me that the men (young adults and fathers) would not come while the mothers were present because you do not mix private relationships with the public arena. If they were to come over, they would go right to the back and not with their mothers because “they’d be ashamed....”

**1. Elements of the SITUATION**
It took place in a room where the chairs had been taken away. The room was in a hall used by local associations where various different activities were held. There was a table football in the room, bookshelves on one side, computers, a badminton court, etc. There were also workshops with help on how to write a resume....lots of different activities for young people, women and families in general.

**2. EMOTIONAL REACTION**
I felt slightly disappointed and a bit confused until I was able to get an explanation from the trainees themselves.

**3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**
As a contemporary French Parisian artist, Jean is steeped in modern Western culture where art is not about gender. His modern education makes him see women as equal to men. Why would a man be ashamed to be seen with his wife in public? This goes against his values.

Values of equality between sexes that come from his own ancestors: generations of women who fought for the right to vote in order to have the right to be in the public arena on the same footing as men. However, Jean is aware of the necessity to disregard his assumptions, letting go of his presuppositions. Fortunately, his potential for adaptation and strengths in listening to others (the result of having participated in several trainings on listening techniques) help. He was very attentive, listening to what was said in the room, and observing expressions, with the distinct impression that he was in a context radically different from what he is used to (he lives in the suburbs and comes from a middle-class background).
first day of the workshop, he was very attentive with his work because he knew he was not on his “territory” and that he was only accepted as a visiting artist involved in the ASSEDIC training.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

Neutral, slightly negative

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

We do not know whether there is a religious dimension to this incident in terms of the question of mingling between men and women. However, we know that it is a very special cultural conception of art. Outside of these workshops Jean met young people from the neighborhood (the brothers and cousins of the participants) and he tried to invite them to the workshops. They declined, saying that such things were for women, children (considered to be sexless) or effeminate men. This is a fairly common cultural phenomenon (even in Western society in certain social categories) that associates art with the female gender (or homosexuals), with the emotional, the “unserious” and therefore the “unmanly”. The practice of art becomes therefore unworthy of a man who cares about preserving his virile image.

Teenagers especially try to distance themselves from their mothers in order to make the transition from childhood to adulthood (from the phase of child to that of Man). In the West, mothers often quickly lose this power, while African and Maghrebian mothers conserve this power for a long time, sometimes even after marriage. Their word is law and respected by their sons, even into adulthood. Adolescents therefore need this distance to affirm themselves, to join the men’s territory and to exercise their new power as men, out of the shadow of “Mom”.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

No, nothing like that. The presence of the people in question was not necessary for the workshop and performances to be done properly since they were not part of it. It would have been a problem if it had been a workshop for families because we would not have been able to be together in one place for the same artistic activity.
| CRITICAL INCIDENT: “MEETING AT THE TURKISH HOUSE” |
| [Collected by MHT Consult, Denmark 2012] |

**Professional domain**  
Gender / General intercultural education

**Sensitive zone**  
Gender relations in the public sphere.

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**  
The narrator is a Danish male social worker, 45 years old at the time of the incident. The social worker is used to deal with integration efforts as part of his professional tasks. He has earlier had some contact to ethnic minorities in the local society, but he is a bit unfamiliar with visiting representatives from the ethnic minorities in their own environments.

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**  
A number of Turkish men and women in a Turkish House of Culture in DK

**Describing the SITUATION**  
I was going to deliver a speech at the local Turkish House of Culture in order to propose a new community project together. I was accompanied by a female colleague with Iranian background. The new project was going to involve both men and women from the ethnic minority groups in our local society.

When my colleague and I arrived at the Turkish House of Culture the meeting room was already full of men, but no women to be seen. I was a little surprised by this attendance, since I had expected - and talk to - both men and women, in accordance with the project idea. I asked one of the spokesmen from the Turkish community, why no women were present. He answered that the women were present alright, but they were seated behind a curtain.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**  
The incident took place in a Turkish House of Culture within a rather large meeting room. Apart from the narrator and his female colleague, the assembly included about 50 male listeners, sitting in rows in the meeting room. The participating women could not be counted, as they were hidden behind a curtain.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**  
The narrator found it very strange and alienating to be speaking to participants, who were sitting behind a curtain – and in fact being invisible. This feeling of alienation was that much stronger, while the speech was especially targeted the women in connection with the new local project being announced at the meeting.

Thus, the narrator felt really uncomfortable in the situation. He was also somewhat confused and a bit strayed, while he and his female colleague didn’t get a chance to go into a dialogue with the women about their needs and expectations from the new project. He didn’t get any feedback as expected from the meeting. All his plans for a democratic discussion and consultation went down the drain.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**  
First of all: An open, democratic communication was not possible. The narrator and his colleague did not get a chance to have feedback from the female attendants. As a social worker in vulnerable residential he had strong principles about democratic communication forms and empowerment in decision making in local communities. He was a supporter of “bottom-up” models instead of too strong “top-down” models in community efforts. Especially he was eager to build up trust and inclusive citizen practice towards ethnic minorities in the local society.

All these principles were strongly challenged, when he had to face the fact that the local Turkish community didn’t play after the same rules as for women’s democratic rights.

Instead, the narrator experienced an example of a gender division that he had not seen in such a clear form for many years, if ever in his work.
4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

The narrator had a negative image of the male participants, since they so clearly were dominating the women in a patriarchal way, making them literally invisible and thereby reducing them to silent statues. As a “soft” modern Danish male the narrator felt sorry for the women, who were deprived of personal independence and possibilities to speak out their reactions and expectations of the new project – a matter concerning their daily lives. At the same time the narrator had a feeling of helplessness, since he didn’t know how to protest and insist on the women to be part of the direct meeting.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? *(Hypothesis!)*

Maybe women have to be covered in the presence of other men. But it may also be that this particular immigrant environment was especially traditional and old-fashioned in respect of the gender division. Men and women are very often separated in Muslim countries in the public sphere as well as in more private parts of everyday life: while they are praying at mosques, at political demonstrations on busses and ferries, swimming etc. Sometimes women even live in separate areas of a house. It is a religious prescription as well as a sign of religious fidelity like wearing the Islamic veil. In the case of the critical incident the Turkish women are immigrants and might need a continuity in their religious practice. Evolving in a country where the values appeared being so far from their home country.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

It is a problem if a man cannot have a conference with Muslim women on subjects concerning their specific welfare as well as the family welfare. But by second thought the incident also reflects the need of a stronger sensibility for “state of the art” in more traditional Muslim communities, functioning as “parallel societies” without much social and cultural exchange with the surrounding society. In this case, the narrator might have suggested that his female colleague got the opportunity to go behind the curtain and have a more direct communication with the women. Actually, afterwards the narrator and his colleague succeeded in arranging a special meeting for the women, where only female social workers were present. It turned out to be a great success and the start of a good collaboration for some years thereafter. Thus, the initial recognition of the local rules in the Turkish community may have paved the way for a collaboration between the ethnic minority communities and the local authorities, which also included the women’s voices at a later point.

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**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “FOREARMS”**

*Collected by MHT Consult, Denmark 2012*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Gender / Sexuality / General intercultural education</th>
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| Sensitive zone      | *Religious as well as gender-related restrictions to expose parts of the body in a public space.*  
|                     | *Cultural-related sexualisation of all parts of the female body.* |
| Culture of the person experiencing the shock | A Danish male director of a local Integration Centre. The director is 62 years old at the time, married and having both adult children and grandchildren. The wife of the director is also well known in the Integration Centre. |
**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**

A Palestinian woman in her late thirties, being one of the adult female students and users of the Integration Centre. The Palestinian woman has a Muslim background. She is married and lives in a family with more children.

**Describing the SITUATION**

As the overall director of the Integration Centre I was one late afternoon attending the activities in the absence of the female teachers and adult supervisors. The adult female users of the Centre had all left except for one woman, who usually stayed in the Centre late in the afternoon, until she was picked up by her husband. The woman suffered from depressions at that time, but in shared agreement with herself, her husband and her caseworker, it was useful for her to get away from home for a few hours each day, even when the rest of the female users had left. Thus, she usually spent a couple of hours together with one or two of the teachers, while her husband had the opportunity to go shopping and picking up the children from kindergarten etc. Her husband was very pleased with this solution and had a very high opinion of the Integration Centre. He also knew that there was a man – and actually an older man - in the management of the Centre.

The incident took place in summertime, and this particular afternoon the weather was very hot and sunny. But the woman was – as usually - wearing a veil and long black dress. Therefore, before leaving the Centre for a professional meeting – the female teachers had persuaded the woman to sit outside in the sun with exposed forearms. Apart from the heat, an argument was also that this woman – like many of the other immigrant women in the Centre – suffered from lack of vitamin D. Knowing about her situation I would like to communicate with her and also ask, if she needed something to drink or eat etc. So, I went outside the Centre to sit beside her for a while. But as soon as she saw me, she rapidly covered her arms and looked frightened.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

   2 persons were present in the situation:
   - A male Danish teacher/overall director of the Integration Centre, replacing the usual staff one afternoon, but being known by all users in the Centre.
   - A Palestinian woman, being one of the users of the Centre on special terms, where she attended the Centre after the normal training and opening hours as a result of her disease and family situation.

   The woman was sitting outside the Integration Centre, and the male teacher/director went outside in order to communicate with her and assist her professionally. The woman knew the director beforehand and has been informed properly that he’ll be present all afternoon, while the female teachers were attending a professional meeting elsewhere.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**

   The male director had a very odd and strange feeling, because the mere presence of his person seemed to represent a challenge to the woman. As a professional with many years of psychological and pedagogical experience he wanted to help and assist her. But she reacted as if he were an enemy.

   The director did not at all pay attention to the exposed forearms and would never dream of touching the woman or sit too close against her will.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you?**

   In a way the male director felt professionally castrated: He has attained a high level of professional competence, which he cannot use because of his gender.

   Also he felt a bit stigmatised as a male, as if he would automatically be sexually interested in woman by the very sight of her forearms. He somehow felt reduced to a “sexual creature”, being as a man only occupied by the woman’s body and sexuality.
4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

The director felt sorry for the woman, because she could not allow herself some sunshine on her forearms in the presence of a male professional. He felt that she had chosen to be somehow a victim of traditional religious-cultural restrictions and commands. The director also felt that the woman in a way reacted in an ostentatious way that did not necessarily correspond to her real feelings about exposing her forearms. The director intuitively got the feeling that her reaction was like a kind of grandstanding.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis)

The main norm may be that Muslim women in principle have to cover themselves outside the family. This is a general norm that is in particular enhanced in the presence of other men. Exposing any part of the body – even the forearms – can be seen as a display of the female sexuality and represent a lewd behaviour that in worst case limits to adultery.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

The exposed forearms become on one hand the symbols of the forbidden and tempting female sexuality, but on the other hand it seems appropriate to interpret the situation as a sexualisation of the female body, which in this case the woman imposes on herself. In an intercultural light it may be said that the woman with her reaction takes over the traditional male condemnation and ambiguous attitude towards the female sexuality.

The Danish professional, on his side, feels himself brought into a dilemma, where he is somehow forced to respond on the woman as a sexual creature. He becomes involuntarily a part of a cultural “gender-game” that might not even occur if the woman had exposed some other parts of her body. Thus, somehow the protagonists are both victims of cultural and gender related norms, which prevent them from communicating in a appreciative way as adult people.

It can furthermore be added that the Muslim Palestinian husband really wanted his wife to visit the Integration Centre, even though he was perfectly aware of the fact that she might encounter male professionals. He was very worried about her depressive isolation, and apparently he would approve of any communication with male or female professionals that might facilitate her situation. Despite this the woman chose to react from a number of general norms in the situation. Her reaction reflects that people can to a certain degree choose their ethnic-cultural identity, depending on how standards and social control works in the local environments. Perhaps the local standards made this woman choose a rather rigid and compulsory interpretation of the religious commands in the situation, where she in a way was forced to spend some time alone with a Danish man.
Describing the SITUATION

I’m at a course concerning handicap and sexuality. There is a mother of a boy of 28 years old with a severe physical disability. They live together with the father and the two brothers. The mother says that her son a few years ago had a need to be sexually satisfied. They invited several people offering sexual assistance, specifically people with a disability. But the boy never felt at ease, because he didn’t know those women. They decided, after a consultation with the whole family (the family who lives together – so the brothers and the father), that the mother would carry out this task (hand job) and thus sexuality satisfy her son.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

We were with more than 200 people listening to the woman who told the story about her son. All of the participants were professionals. I just knew my colleague who was also there. I didn’t know the mother. She told the story in a large auditorium. She was sitting in front. It was a learning course for professionals. The audience didn’t know the woman in front, they just listened to the testimony. It was the start of the day, after this testimony, the audience was divided in groups to discuss and learn more about sexuality and disability. The audience didn’t have to give a solution or their meaning. They could ask questions to the mother, what happened. One of the questions was how she feels by giving the hand job to her son and what she thinks about these questions in institutions – if this kind of service is a part of the job of people who work in institutions.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

Surprised, uncomfortable.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

Respect and integrity of the body, respect of the boundaries of assistance. The taboo of incest: in most cultures having sexual relations with members of the family is one of the strongest taboos.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

The mother wants to help her son no matter what, which one can only respect. The question here is whether this is a correct way of acting, even if the son also wants this and the rest of the family agree. The mother doesn’t cause a negative image, but it’s hard to accept.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?

Empathy, respect for the needs of the other. Sexuality is subordinated to human emotions and answering the needs for someone how is emotionally very close. Sexuality is treated as a body function, somehow independent from “romantic” emotions.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Sexuality and disability are still taboo. It’s a very hard to discuss the topic. Training /information evenings for family, friends and assistants of people with a handicap and for those with a handicap should ensure
that the importance of this matter is seen and perhaps people would be more open to communicate about this. Especially, because the definition of sexuality is completely different for people with handicap – professionals, caregivers should pay more attention to each person and family, and be able to neglect the traditional social conceptions of sexuality. It also raises questions on how far assistance can go. What boundaries are there. What is a person prepared to do without crossing his/her own values.

**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “COMING OUT”**
[Collected by Ars Erotica Foundation, Hungary, 21 April 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional educational domain</th>
<th>Gender / Sexuality / LGBT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Sensitive zone**
 Disclosure of one’s sexual orientation - where, when and how, professional versus private personal social roles

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**
The reference frames of the two protagonists are more or less the same. The areas relevant to the incident include: sexual orientation, and how to disclose it; the limitations and framework of the disclosure. 34-year-old lesbian, middle-class, intellectual woman, LGBT activist, trainer, also a mother, living in a relationship

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**
31-year-old lesbian, middle-class, urban, educated woman

**Describing the SITUATION**
The incident happened a few days ago at a sensitisation and communication training for social care professionals, during a session on minority groups, in the warm-up exercise. We played the “Take a step forward” exercise where each participant gets a role card and has to answer questions about minority-related stereotypes from the perspective of the minority-character indicated on the card. In the evaluation part, I asked the participant holding the “lesbian” card what context she placed her character into. And she said she did not have to use her imagination very much as she was a lesbian herself.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**
The exercise is used to set the stage for the minority groups presentation and discussion. It serves to map out the relations (implicit or explicit prejudices) about minorities, where all the participants are asked (21 of them this time) what additional qualities she added to the 1-2 traits written in the role card to build up the character. And the trainer (the narrator) was asking them what they responded to the questions posed to their character. After the lesbian woman’s coming out the evaluation went on in the usual way. But later when we discussed lesbians, this woman left the room and came back when the topic was finished.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**
Two participants got homosexual role cards (one lesbian and one gay card). First I was shocked for a moment. First I feared for me then for them. Then I went on asking questions in the usual way, raising the question “who else got a homosexual character card?” (because up to that point she was the first) and I told them that the subject would be discussed later in more detail. Fear, conflict. Why did I fear? I feared because I started to feel the urge to come out (as an expression of empathy).

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**
**Empathy, empowerment of particular identities:** The question of the protection of privacy could be relevant. Is it part of the job description of a sex educator/intercultural trainer to unveil all aspects of their identity in an effort to promote those identities and contribute to their empowerment? Or should some level of privacy be preserved for the protection of the person of the trainer/researcher?

**Separation of professional / private spheres, preservation of personal identity:** It is an important principle that in a training situation the narrator doesn’t talk about his or her personal involvement in any minority
groups, only about her professional involvement. A trainer should keep nearly equal distance from any minority group – we are outsiders /we must look outsiders. This is the only situation where to be an outsider is of value. In all the other walks of life, open disclosure is a positive value. These two approaches led to a serious conflict of values.

**Professionalism?** Reacting well to the “coming out” of the participant. The narrator talks about her own urge to come out as a means of empathy with the participant. However, there may have been other means of endorsing the coming out of the participant that does not necessarily entail her own coming out. The embarrassment of the situation kept her from being able to find such a solution and she went on with the debriefing as usual. She may have felt the need to something.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

She was brave. The narrator admired how simply she said it. Although the narrator had liked her (Gaydar phenomenon, based on mere stereotypes), at that moment the narrator started to respect her. She had seemed a confident and healthy personality from the beginning, but the incident even reinforced the narrator’s presumptions. Sense of community – not only because she was lesbian, but because she disclosed it.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behavior that caused the shock experience?

**Mission to assume / promote particular identities:** The fact that the a participant “came out” in a training situation in a completely natural and simple way made the narrator conclude that they had shared values. As a participant of a training, the narrator also normally reacts in a similar way.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

“**This is primarily a professional issue. I was surprised by my own reaction:** I saw a participant react in the same way as I usually do, and funny - as a recipient - I was shocked by it. I’ve got to do something about it, but for now I don’t know what.”

In general professionals involved in action research / training in the domains of interculturality or sexuality would easily face the tension between different values, needs, such as

a) between the preservation of privacy and the promotion / empowerment of particular identities

b) between the need of neutrality / objectivity and the need for sensitization and their mission in general

c) between professional and personal spheres.

There may not be a general recipe, what’s more drawing a general recipe may not even be a good idea. In fact punctually, depending on the case some movement between professional / personal spheres can be a resource in the training / research activities. In each case the trainer / researcher has to evaluate the conflicting values, and be prepared for the possible identity conflicts – threats.
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “LESBIAN PRIVACY” LABRISZ Lesbian Association, Raising awareness about homosexuality
[Collected by Ars Erotica Foundation – Hungary, 2012]

Professional domain
Gender / Sexuality

Sensitive zone
Gender relations, sexual identity-orientation, power relation, political standpoint

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
37-year-old, female, lesbian, left-wing researcher, living in a relationship

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Heterosexual teenager girls, students in a grammar school

Describing the SITUATION
As part of my fieldwork at schools I was interviewing 3-4 pupils, asking them questions about their sexuality, and they often asked me personal questions, too. In such situations I have to decide how much I want to disclose about myself as a lesbian living in a relationship. In one group, for example, the girls asked me if I had a boyfriend, whether I wanted to have a child and they wanted to know other details about my relationship. As I had told them at the beginning of the interview that they were free to ask me questions, I had to answer. In my response I referred to my partner as if he was a man. I thought if they found out that I was lesbian, it would undermine my research. So I chose to put this consideration higher in my priority list than honesty.

When the girls found out that I had a boyfriend but I did not want a child, they were shocked and said that I probably didn’t want a child because my boyfriend did not want one either. This was a “cultural shock” for me to see that teenagers consider relationships as a hierarchy between man and woman and that for them it was just obvious that every woman wanted a child.

1. Elements of the SITUATION
This incident and similar ones happened between 2009 and 2011 in secondary schools in Budapest. It was taken place in an empty classroom where during the interview we were in an intimate, secure environment, but in the school building. We were 5 persons: the interviewer and 4 female pupils.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
I had to make a decision in a very short time as to how much I want to disclose about myself in that situation. I was under time pressure. The situation filled me with uncertainties and doubts, just like any other situation where I’ve got to act quickly.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?
Honesty, consistency, professional and personal credibility, the risk of losing control over the situation as a researcher, mutuality, the Objectivity vs honesty vs Activism? Mission of sensitisation?
Researchers are usually expected to not influence / bias the outcomes of their research, unless this bias is built in the research methodology. At the same time as a lesbian left-wing researcher the narrator may have felt the need to make explicit her own position concerning her own sexual preferences, but also concerning her opinion about power dynamics in a heterogeneous couple.

Safety of personal boundaries, the balance between keeping a distance and being open, “professional and personal credibility”?: Beyond the potential bias of the research outcomes the question of the protection of privacy could also be relevant. Is it part of the job description of a sex educator / intercultural trainer to unveil all aspects of their identity in an effort to promote those identities and contribute to their empowerment? Or should some level of privacy be preserved for the protection of the person of the trainer/researcher?

Neutrality=heteronormativity? Finally a third level of tension may be between the researchers subjective
expectation of a non heteronormative society and her supposition that in order to be neutral she should “blend in” and declare herself as heterosexual, conforming to the (supposed) expectations of a heteronormative society.

### 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

The incident did not change my perception of the respondents, instead I was happy to be able to create a open climate where they felt free to ask me questions. It meant that they were speaking openly about themselves, too.

### 5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis !)

Heteronormativity, - we don’t know!! The narrator avoided the possible explosion of tensions between heteronormative and multicultural approaches by avoiding the situation and declaring herself heterosexual. The only source of tension that really appeared concerns the expectation of the girls for all women to want to have children and the only acceptable reason for not wanting one being if the male partner does not want one...

crossing the boundaries of one’s role, although I encouraged them to do so.

All women want children:

The girls in the incident have a very clear interpretation of a situation where a woman in couple does not want a child: it is probably because the male partner does not want one. This logic lies on the assumption that women genuinely want to have children, i.e. the mother’s role is an unavoidable part of women’s role.

### 6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

It helped me reflect on my position as a researcher, and raised the question of to what extent do I need to/ should I meet the perception other people have about me in order to achieve my goal (i.e. make a successful interview).

In general professionals involved in action research / training in the domains of interculturality or sexuality would easily face the tension between different values, needs, such as

a) between the preservation of privacy and the promotion / empowerment of particular identities

b) between the need of neutrality / objectivity and the need for sensitization and their mission in general

c) between professional and personal spheres.

There may not be a general recipe, what’s more drawing a general recipe may not even be a good idea. In fact punctually, depending on the case some movement between professional / personal spheres can be a resource in the training / research activities. In each case the trainer / researcher has to evaluate the conflicting values, and be prepared for the possible identity conflicts – threats.
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “TRANSGENDER MIRROR”  
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Sexuality / General intercultural education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Non-verbal communication and a transgender woman’s relationship to her body</td>
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**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**

Twenty-seven year-old Moroccan woman. Heterosexual. Left-wing. Studying intercultural communication. Working for an association specializing in interculturality, she co-led workshops on cultural differences surrounding the relationship to the body with people having an interest in these differences.

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**

G. is a transgender woman, probably around 40 years old. From what the narrator was able to understand, her change in sexual identity from male to female is pretty recent.

**Describing the SITUATION**

Since it was a workshop on the body, the plan was to do some warming up exercising which would allow the participants to channel their energy, promote concentration and give a bigger place to the body, which is often dominated by the intellect. We first organized a game in which each participant was supposed to give their first name accompanied with the gesture of their choice. This gesture was supposed to allow the participants to memorize each other’s names. I noticed then that G. hesitated longer than the other participants and that the gesture that she ended up choosing illustrated this indecision (she scratched her head, keeping her eyes to the ground with a nervous smile). As a facilitator, I then asked the participants to form pairs to do a number of fun activities, including a “mirror” activity. This activity consisted of imitating the gestures of one’s partner and vice-versa. The person being imitated was to move freely without any directions. My partner, the transgender woman, was incapable of making even the simplest gesture. She stood still with an embarrassed smile and her eyes fixed on the ground. She seemed to be thinking about the first gestures to make, but was visibly unable to find one that suited her. To reassure her, I told her that she was free to move in whatever way she wanted and that there was no need to think about it so long. After a few seconds, she began to make a few timid movements, broken up by small moments of reflection. She became more and more at ease, particularly when it was her turn to imitate my movements.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

The workshop on cultural differences in the relationship to the body took place in a large room of about 30m². The team of 3 facilitators had moved the tables and chairs to make a large enough free space for the exercises and interactions. The participants (about 6) had freely chosen to attend the workshop either because they worked in the diversity field or because they themselves represented a cultural diversity (in the broadest sense). The participants didn’t know each other before the workshop. The age range of participants was from the late twenties to mid forties and they were all either French or had lived in France for a number of years. All of the participants were women (including 2 transgender women).

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**

When I noticed the hesitation of the participant during the first exercise, I was a bit surprised, but since a lot of people hesitated during this exercise, it seemed rather understandable as it consisted of making a gesture that represented one’s first name and thus identity. On the other hand, after the second hesitation (a lot longer, during the mirror exercise), I was very surprised by the participant’s reaction because I thought that the first part of the exercise didn’t seem to present any particular difficulties given that it consisted simply of moving freely. I felt the embarrassment that this woman felt and tried to reassure her and encourage her to continue the exercise. Then, I took the time to analyze the incident.
3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

The narrator considers herself to be an open-minded person who is very interested in difference and intercultural communication. She is heterosexual and even though she doesn’t have any prejudices against transgender people, she had never worked with one or met one before. She was thus happy to have this new experience, but she also had a few apprehensions about her own behavior. She was conscious of the fact that she had to pay attention to how the situation presented a different set of codes and that she must be careful to avoid breaking them to have a successful communication. Notably, she had to avoid referring to the transgender participants in masculine rather than feminine terms.

With regards to gender, she didn’t have any idea what it meant for a man or a woman to become transgender. She didn’t know that changing gender meant finding a deeper identity that had been hidden by biological laws and social conventions or that it meant identifying with a gender that one preferred to belong to for whatever reason. She thinks that the traditional man/woman distinction was far from taking into account the numerous cases that illustrated the complexity of gender and sexual identity. Basically, she doesn’t think that one sub-group of human beings is 100% men and the other 100% women, but rather that there is a masculine and feminine part in differing levels in all of us. She also thinks that one’s biological identity/appearance doesn’t necessarily correspond with one’s internal identity.

Regarding the workshop itself, she had adopted the vision of the association that the contribution of the body through physical exercises made sense during a workshop focused on the body. Basically, this method seemed the most efficient because it allowed for a better interaction between the participants as well as a greater involvement of each person. But perhaps the participants were expecting the workshop to just involve « reflecting » on the body and were not necessarily used to non-formal pedagogical tools, notably the games and the exercises involving the use of their bodies,

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

Neutral

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

With the analysis of the incident, we were able to uncover some hypotheses concerning the participant in question. It is important to consider all possible reasons for the embarrassment of the participant and not just assume it is tied to her identity as a transgender woman. For example, imitating a gesture, or consciously “doing” something with the body can be embarrassing for many people and has nothing to do with gender and identity. In this particular situation, however, the narrator was able to observe that the participant brought her transgender identity to the forefront in her interactions and exchanges during the workshop. She freely discussed the difficulties she faced as a transgender woman with the other participants.

With this in mind, it becomes clearer how the participant’s transgender identity may have played a role in this situation. The change of gender/sexual identity (from man to woman in this case) implies several deep changes in her way of being, that is to say: the way in which she manages her speech, her movements, her gestures, her mimics, etc. It is thus probable that, even if the new identity corresponds with her deepest identity, she has to get used to behaving like a woman and the transition is not simple.

As the change in identity seemed to be recent, the narrator assumed that the participant was being very careful with the simplest movement that she made because for her, each movement represented her (new) identity in the perception of the others. There was thus no (or hardly any) room for spontaneity in the requested exercise.

We can also assume that the participant’s conception of femininity and more precisely of feminine gestures consisted in thinking that each movement that a woman makes must translate her femininity and that a woman must be careful of her simplest movements, particularly a transgender woman. Transgender women must thus show their femininity more than other women as a way of affirming an
identity that certain people will continue to contest (according to remarks she made during the workshop). This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the tradition and even caricatural vision of the woman’s role in a household (traditional household tasks, etc.) illustrated in her remarks and those of her friend (who was also a transgender woman). Furthermore, this woman may not have expected to participate in physical exercises instead of just a reflection on the body.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Certainly. In a general manner, this incident shows that those working with/on diversity must be prepared to face cultural differences that are not always easy to understand. Regarding gender, this incident allowed the narrator to better understand how gender identity can influence one’s relationship to the body. The analysis of this analysis taught the narrator how to practically address this issue from a professional point of view. She also learned that she must take the difficulties faced by each participant into account and take the time to define the “rules of the game” of any proposed activity as well as the methods and tools that will be used.

◆ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “SLEEPING BAG”
[Collected by KVG Belgium, 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality / Gender / Training concerning disability</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sensitive zone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability, sexuality, conception of body, gender relations</td>
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<tr>
<th>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young woman (22 years old), doing educative studies, no disability, heterosexual</td>
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<tr>
<th>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental disability, young men (2) of 16 years old, sexual orientation not known, Belgian</td>
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<tr>
<th>Describing the SITUATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I caught two men with a moderate mental handicap in the same sleeping bag. They were touching each other. Other people were also in the tent.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Elements of the SITUATION

| There were 12 people in the room, but just two of them were awake. The supervisor came into the room alone. It was the tent on the camp. All people know each other. The supervisor is the person who supports and organizes the camp for people living with a mental disability. |

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

| The attendance felt indignant and speechless. She was angry with these men because they didn’t take account of the rules and the other people who were present in the tent. |

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

| Privacy, respect for the body, respect for others. For the narrator it was a norm, that any kind of intimate body contact between two people is not allowed where there are also other people are in a room – and they don’t know about it. It was not because it were two men doing this, but overall that this happened between two people. These people don’t really even know the consequences of this behaviour, because of their disability. And so it wasn’t respectful for themselves, their own body, the body of the other person and the other persons in the tent. |

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

| They didn’t respect the rules and their mates. |
5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis I)

No respect for one’s own body, privacy isn’t important. They could feel a desire to be intimate with someone, like every human does.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Privacy and respect for the body are important matters where assistants or parents have a prioritising role in teaching this. Assistants need to focus on this, but they should also realise how necessary it is to inform the people they help of this. Besides this it does raise the question if two people with a mental disability should be allowed to be intimate with each other (in private). This is a basic desire of a human. The question is however if they understand it and what consequences it might invoke.

❖ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “LESBIAN PARTY”  
[Collected by MHT Consult, Denmark 2012]

Professional domain
Sexuality / Gender

Sensitive zone
* The preconceptions about the influence of sexuality on the general communication and contact.
* The confusion of gender engagement and sexual orientation.
* The exclusion of “the others” (in this case heterosexual women) and stressing of the “us-and-them” syndrome.

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
The person is a Danish university female student, 28 years old at the time, being on a fieldwork in the UK as part of the studies of social science and geography. The person was part of a Danish group of around 14 students and teachers, visiting other researchers and students in Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield. The main person – together with 3-4 of the other female students from Denmark - was deeply engaged in gender politics, gender division of labour and women’s societal possibilities etc. Thus, they had a strong wish to be presented for women within social science with the same gender interest. This was arranged as part of the fieldwork.  
As for family conditions and sexual orientation the person can be characterized as heterosexual and being part of a traditional nuclear family with one young child at the time.

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
The other person – “causing the shock” – is a British female student of social science in the mid-twenties with a similar engagement in gender politics and hereby one of the founders of a women’s house and women’s cultural activities in Sheffield at the time.

Describing the SITUATION
I was attending a university meeting in Sheffield as part of the fieldwork together with the whole Danish group and local teachers and students. We were exchanging experiences and approaches around actual tendencies in city planning and social development etc. – especially in the wake of Margaret Thatcher’s newly acquisition of political power in the UK. From the Danish group some of us especially stressed our interest in the gender political approach to the general social development etc. This caused an invitation the very same evening to a local women’s party. Three of us from the Danish group – all female – were very pleased to attend the party, which was only open for women.  
At the party I fell in deep talk and discussion with one of the British women, who had earlier that day been one of the most enthusiastic advocates of our participation in the women’s party. So, there was a great...
“chemistry” between the two of us, and we were both very engrossed in the conversation. After a while the British woman started asking me about my background, and I told her spontaneously about my little 1 year old daughter, whom I had left at home with her father and my parents. In the very moment I mentioned my family conditions the British woman was strongly dismayed and answered in an angry and reproachful voice: ...“Then, why on earth are You here...” And then she turned her back against me. I was very shocked, confused over her reaction - and completely lost my voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Elements of the SITUATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the situation the protagonists were surrounded by a lot of other women – approximately around 25-30 – all joining the women’s party. The protagonists were standing in a corner, while people were talking, laughing, eating, drinking and also dancing around them. But the protagonists were like in a “bell jar”, both very concentrated in the discussion. The Danish woman noticed from the very arrival at the party that a lot of the women were probably lesbian.</td>
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<tr>
<th>2. EMOTIONAL REACTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>In the very moment of the critical incident – when the British woman turned her back – the Danish woman (the narrator) felt a confusing mixture of embarrassment and anger, guilt, shame and unfairness. The Danish woman felt unfairness and anger, being treated by the British woman, as if she was only worthy of the British woman’s interest and engagement, if she had been a lesbian as well. The Danish woman felt – quite unreasonably – ashamed and guilty, as if she had given the British woman a wrong impression of being sexually interested in her. As if she – and the two Danish colleagues as well – had joined the party on somehow false premises.</td>
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<tr>
<th>3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?</th>
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<tr>
<td>The incident touched the dilemma that characterized many women’s organisations at that time – namely the question of lesbian and heterosexual women had equal positions in women’s liberation movement.</td>
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<tr>
<th>4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Danish woman – the narrator - had the impression that the British women “turned on a plate” and all of a sudden turned all her prejudices against the her. The narrator became the exponent of the less radical heterosexual women.</td>
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<tr>
<th>5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The British woman in the incident was part of a larger movement, where women all over the world were fighting for better personal and social possibilities. But she was also integrated in an environment, where lesbian and heterosexual women had some differences in defining the goals of the women’s liberation. This was not only a political, but also a very emotional dilemma from time to time. Probably, the narrator just touched all these dilemmas in the British woman. But probably, her reaction on the personal and emotional level also expressed her attraction to the Danish woman, the narrator. Thus, the narrator disappointed the British woman on more than one level.</td>
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<tr>
<th>6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?</th>
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</table>
| From a professional point of view this critical incident may not be so clear. It did, indeed, involve professionals (social scientists debating on social and political problems etc), but the protagonists were professionals on an equal level, not a teacher towards a student. Anyway, the incident may show the need for a more sensitive reaction and empathy in professional situations, where the professional/political discussion may also have a more personal/emotional and even sexual level. It reflects how the professional engagement and eagerness may be confused with personal attraction as well as sexual prejudices “behind the back” of the professionals. Therefore, the learning
point may be that professionals should be able to reflect on both the personal and professional part of their identity. Professionals should also be able to sense the impact that both their personal and professional identity may have on other people in given situations – other professionals as well as adult students a.o.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITICAL INCIDENT: “NAKED SON IN THE GARDEN”</th>
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<tr>
<td>[Collected by MHT Consult, Denmark, 2012]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Fear and prejudices around homosexuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Need of cultural conformity in a new country.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The narrator is a Danish male sexual therapist, 51 years old at the time for the incident. The narrator himself is born and brought up in Denmark. He is originally educated as a social pedagog with later training and certification within psychology and various forms of therapy. He has many years ago chosen to specialize in sexual therapy, engages among other issues in sexual deviations from a liberal point of view, being strongly defending people’s rights and possibilities to sexual diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The other protagonist in the incident is a father from the Philippines and secondly his son. The father was apparently around 42 years old at the time for the incident. The son was 16 years old. The family is living in DK for some years. The family seems to have been doing well economically in the Danish society, being able to buy their own house. This seems to indicate a high degree of integration – or at least assimilation – in the Danish society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing the SITUATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I visited a Philippine family to help them with problems connected with the 16 years old son of the family. The problem was actually that the son went to school with lipstick and high heeled shoes. I myself became involved in this situation on request of the boy’s school. The teachers found it very difficult to cope with the son’s strongly sexualized behaviour and dressing. But at the same time they didn’t know how to react or perhaps to guide the young man in order to sort of conform his behaviour and appearance in the school’s environment. Therefore, I made an appointment with the family in order to investigate the problem and the son’s situation a little closer. When I arrived to the family’s house, the father invited me into the living room. I understood that the mother would be absent during our meeting. Immediately after, I also realized that the father had forced his son to stay naked in the garden as punishment for his behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Elements of the SITUATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation takes place in the family’s home, where the narrator is welcomed. The mother is not at home at therefore not present during the incident. The narrator is invited into the living room of the family’s house. When the narrator enters the living room together with the father, it occurs to him that the son is standing naked in the garden outside, while being banished to the garden from the father in order to learn to behave normally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. EMOTIONAL REACTION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The narrator felt deeply shocked, while considering this treatment of the young man as strongly humiliating and unworthy. Even though the narrator came to the family as an experienced professional in the field of sexual advisement, he was deeply shaken and outraged in the situation.
### 3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

- The individual integrity and dignity of the son was violated.
- The son was deeply humiliated, and his needs were met by the father without any kind of empathy or attempt of understanding.
- The son was in fact treated as a criminal and not as a child to be guided.
- The son was treated as if he was threatening the dignity of the family and thereby also threatening the family’s right to be worthy members of the Danish society. The son’s sexual preferences are seen as a threat against the family’s recognition in the new Danish society.

### 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

According to the narrator the father in the incident emerged as a brutal patriarch without consideration and human feelings for his own son.

This may also indicate that the father seemed to be more concerned about the family’s status in the Danish society than the happiness of the son.

In the light of the fact that the teachers in school actually reacted with serious concern about the son’s behaviour and impact on the environments in the school – the father may have realized that the school really distanced from the son’s behaviour and thereby more or less directly sent a signal that the school had to disapprove of this kind of behaviour.

### 5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

There may be various motives behind the strong reactions of the father in this incident:

**Firstly,** there may behind the father’s strong reactions be hidden a deep dread and disgust of homosexuality may be the motives behind the fathers strong reactions.

**Secondly,** there may behind the strong reactions be hidden an idea that sexual behaviour – or “misbehaviour” – may be changed by punishment and humiliation.

**Thirdly,** there may behind the strong reactions be hidden the fear that the son’s deviant behaviour may lead to the schools strong disapproval and even a condemnation that may hinder the family’s recognition and integration in the Danish society.

### 6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

The incident shows how deep the dread of homosexuality can be in some cultures. It is important to notice that “culture” in this connection is not linked to nationality or ethnicity. This may arise in many different environments, but the punishment like in this incident may obviously differ.

The incident may also stress the fact that many immigrants hold a strong fear of any kind of disapproval of the institutions of the new society. This fear may be stronger than the fear of molesting Your own flesh and blood.
**Critical Incident: “Icebreaking”**

*Collected by CESIE, Italy, 2012*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional educational domain</th>
<th>Disability / Interculturality / Arts (theatre, dance)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensitive zone</strong></td>
<td>Disability, education, artistic expression, verbal and non-verbal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</strong></td>
<td>Sicilian / Female / Woman / Age 31 / Married / Heterosexual / Studies in theatrical disciplines / artistic theatre subculture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</strong></td>
<td>Sicilian / Female / young adult / living with a disability / wheelchair driver.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Describing the SITUATION**

In 2008 I taught theatre in a workshop for adults in Palermo. During the first lesson I met my students, among them there was Francesca, a woman in a wheelchair. I prepared various ice breaking and team building activities but at the beginning of the lesson I got into a panic because all the activities that I had prepared were in a standing position and Francesca would not be able to participate. The following lessons were terrible because I only gave my students activities in which they had to sit in order to let Francesca participate in the activities. I didn’t understand that this methodology caused discomfort in all participants and in particular in Francesca. I was convinced that remaining seated was the only solution to work together but I didn’t understand that I was emphasizing Francesca’s disability and I was creating a barrier in the creation of the team. Speaking to my colleagues, they helped me to understand that the problem was my perception of the disability.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

The critical incident occurred in 2008 in Palermo during a theatre lesson I was teaching adults. The protagonists were myself as the trainer, Francesca that brought in her wheelchair and the rest of the group they were indirectly involved in the situation. It was the first encounter for the whole group. I was not prepared and my proposed activities had not been thought through for the attendance of a differently able participant, that I was honestly not expecting.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**

I felt uncomfortable – uncomfortable for not having thought of the possibility of attendance from a person living with disability. And I felt even more frustrated by seeing that my second attempt, of doing only seated exercise, was even a bigger flop given that the whole group was subject to my lack of experience with the specific target group. Later on I felt motivated to re-skill my pedagogical competences and to update and enrich my repertoire of activities with exercises that respect all kinds of bodies. Towards the end of the several months lasting workshop I felt empowered and more confident to ask the person about his/her needs on regards of activities, what the person can and can’t do. Relieved!

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**

I was struggling with my idea of verbal and non-verbal communication – I thought it was disrespectful to ask verbally what she could or couldn’t do, in terms of movement and participation. It also questioned my idea of social composition in society, I mean – The idea of having a disabled person in my class never crossed my mind. I wrongly thought they didn’t participate in theatre.

4. **Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?**

I had a very positive image of Francesca – she is full of life even thought she in a wheelchair. I also found her very courageous and determined in her wish to be part of a group and to express herself through theatre.
5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?

Francesca is used to this kind of situation where people don’t expect her to be present and participative. Belonging to the subculture of disabled people, to her it was not shocking that I was not “prepared” for her presence in the group. To have a collaborative approach to all situations in life for her is a norm – she helps the able-bodied, like me, to feel comfortable in asking to what extent she can participate without feeling we are not politically correct or lacking respect. Francesca thinks it’s more respectful to ask then to just assume that she would like that everybody has to adapt to her. She also wants to adapt to others. She looks at it from situation to situation, it depends what is possible. But talking about it verbally, is the most important thing. Talking with her AND with the other participants.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Surely yes, I was so focused on Francesca that I was not really professional in her regards nor towards other participants. I have to see people living with a disability like others, but also highlight the difficulties AND strengths of having them in a workshop. It’s not working to just ignore or find solutions yourself. I have to communicate these issues with the participants. Don’t see myself as the only professional, because sometimes other people know more what to do/say in some situations/about some subjects.

CRITICAL INCIDENT: “NEW YEARS SPEECH”
[Collected by KVG, Belgium in 2012]

Profession code
Disability

Sensitive zone
Disability, conception of body

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
Middle aged female, no disability, educator, Belgian, catholic

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Woman, around 30 years old, with physical disability on her face, Belgian

Describing the SITUATION

We have an annual New Year’s reception at work. We asked someone of the Association of Equal Opportunities to give a talk. We’d frequently spoken on the phone and e-mailed, but then the woman came to the reception. Her face was mutilated. I hadn’t thought this when I heard her on the phone. I’d had a different image of the woman.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

There were around 15 people, most of them were volunteers (around 7). The other ones were professionals of our organisation or people of another organisation were we work with. And then there was the woman from the council. It was a reception at our working place. A place with 5 desks with computers, a kitchen and a little garden. We all know each other, except for the woman from the council that we invited.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

My very reaction was that I jumped. I hadn’t expected this. Afterwards I was ashamed of this reaction. That I, as an employee at an organisation for people with a handicap, respond in this way. The voice had given me a totally different physical image of the woman.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you?

This made me realise that meeting someone with a disability at the most unexpected moments isn’t normality yet. Perhaps the image that people with a disability need to be helped by us and that they don’t often practise these types of professions. Importance of the face: In individualist societies (such as
contemporary Belgium) the face has a great importance. It is meant to express our individuality, our uniqueness, reflect our personality and character. Scars, wounds, mutilation of the face can distort the image that other people form of us more than other body part for this relative importance of the face. Our representation of beauty creates the expectations towards symmetry, smoothness, harmony of shapes, in contemporary society also the freshness and youth of the face. In western cultures during interaction we usually look into the face of the other. Interacting with someone who has distortions, mutilation on the face is often a particular experience that teaches to look behind the scar, the mutilation to find the person. For the same reason there is an absence of contact with people whose faces are altered are different from the average. In particular there is a lack of representation of such people in the role of public speakers.

Implicit attitudes: Everybody holds certain cultural beliefs and prototypical images of people that we interact with. Since probably most of us do not have contact with impaired people on a daily basis the image of them does not often comes to our mind when we first think of somebody whom we have not met yet. Even though the narrator works with impaired people that does not necessarily mean that she overcame the feelings of surprise when seeing another person with disability. She might not have been used to seeing them outside professional context, as even nowadays they are still marginalised. One can easily forget that disabled people do not exist in isolation.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

A normal, positive view of the woman. She was extremely pleasant and friendly.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?

Fight against discrimination, full inclusion: As a member of the Association of Equal Opportunities, the woman in the incident probably has a strong sense of mission toward the promotion of equal rights and opportunities, probably referring to a variety of minorities, people with disability included. Empowerment to full participation: In accordance with her mission she may consider it important to empower people with particular identities, as well as people with disability. She may feel it important to give an example to go against the stereotypes and show that people who have mutilations on their faces can be just as competent as others.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

“There is still an image of people with a disability as being ‘helpless’, not independent. There should be more of a focus on the capacities of this target group, instead of always concentrating on their limitations.” Although according to a Social Attitudes Survey 2009 published by the British Office of Disability people nowadays more likely think of disabled people as the same as everybody else (85 per cent compared with 77 per cent in 2005) there is still a belief that prejudice towards disabled people is widespread. Almost 8 out of 10 respondents felt that there is either a lot or a little prejudice towards disabled people. The reason for these judgements might be that people with impairments may look or behave differently from other people. Although everyone looks different, most cultures have a model of ‘normal’ appearance and behaviour, reinforced through images in art and the media, and this can create unease when interacting with people who are different from this ‘normal’ model. Although the narrator was used to having contact with impaired people she still experienced a shock when the person with whom she had the conversation over the phone did not fit the image of the women that she created in her mind.
### CRITICAL INCIDENT: “KISS”
[Collected by Ars Erotica Foundation – Hungary, 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Training concerning disability / Health / Gender / Sexuality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Sexuality, conceptions of the body, privacy, non-verbal communication, norms of the client-professional relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</td>
<td>Helper, professional - young, healthy (not-disabled) woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</td>
<td>Disabled man, client,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Describing the SITUATION**

I went out for a beer with a disabled young man. Having drunk a few pints, the boy (let’s call him Pál) asked me to kiss him on the lips. I said “no”. But we spent the rest of the evening together anyhow. We talked and laughed a lot. Since we had drunk lots of liquid (alcohol), I also had to help him change his urine catheter. At the end of the evening, he asked me again to kiss him. I said “no” again and left for home.

**1. Elements of the SITUATION**

The protagonists of the incident include:

- Pál, who had a spinal cord injury 7 years ago and has been a wheelchair user since then. He is resident of the institution I work for.
- The other protagonist is me. I work as a social worker for the institution where Pál lives.

The incident I described above happened in Budapest, in the summer of 2011.

**2. EMOTIONAL REACTION**

I was embarrassed but also impressed that he made passes at me. I was longing for him but also disgusted by him. I felt he had great confidence in me as he asked me to help him with changing his urine catheter that was not my duty. I greatly liked him.

**3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**

The relationship between the social worker and the client was greatly compromised. They have crossed the line. The social worker was stretching the boundaries of her job description and the rules of the Code of Ethics. If she had given in to temptation, she would have got involved in a friendly or even love affair with a client. She was risking her job.

**4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?**

For the narrator, he was just a young man with good cognitive capabilities who tried to make a pass at a girl who tried to be friends with him. For this reason, her opinion about Pál is rather positive.

**5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)**

Pál probably liked the idea of a young girl going out with him for a pint. He had always looked for the opportunity to be with the narrator, probably because he liked her as a woman. He did not look at her as a helper but as representative of the other gender. He probably didn’t have any relationship with a girl since he was injured. In addition, he involved the narrator in an activity (changing his urine catheter) which required intimacy and great confidence.

**6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?**

From a professional point of view, the narrator should not allow such a close relationship to develop between the herself and the client (if it is forbidden in the Code of Ethics). However, the narrator understood and accepted the fact that he made passes at her. But the narrator felt that she may not allow...
such situations to develop. So when she finds herself in a situation where a client is trying to make passes at her she feels “I've got to step out of it”. (taking a distance from Pál as a patient/client). However in a helper-, social worker-, care giver-client interaction it may often happen that the professional and the client build up an emotional and intimate human relationship – many times this is simply inevitable. The question – either from a professional or a personal point of view – is how these emotions are communicated in the situation and later how they are solved for the professional. Case discussions and regular supervision for professionals can help to analyze, understand these emotions and handle them.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

Pál has been impotent since his accident. He was unable for erection. So PV (penis vagina) sex could not have taken place anyway. Since that evening their relationship has weakened and the narrator concluded for herself that in such situations she should not give in at all.

❖ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “COOKING LESSON”
[Collected by CESIE, Italy 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Training concerning mental disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Perception and treatment of handicap, disability subculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**
Sicilian female (Palermo) that has been living abroad for a while and in the north of Italy / Age 28 / Heterosexual / Studies in political science / first working experience with people living with disability / baptized as Catholic Christian / unmarried

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**
Sicilian male / Age 70 / unmarried / living in a shared house with other people living with disability, managed by a local charity / Hobbies: gardening and cooking

**Describing the SITUATION**
In 2009 I was working as an educator with people with cerebral palsy in their daily lives. So that I attended a cooking course with Giovanni (the person in need of an Accompanying person, a seventy years old man in the wheelchair, with serious difficulties in movement and very little speech. In the kitchen of a College, the cook told us to prepare some biscuits and he gave us a list of ingredients and the kitchenware. I was very concerned of my task, being very focused in preparing nice biscuits for Giovanni, thinking that he was not able to manage the ingredients and above all knives, spoons or plates. During the two-hour course, Giovanni was very agitated, moving his arms and complaining of something I could not understand. When biscuits were ready, I put them in the oven, waiting for them to rise. But they had never risen!

Giovanni was complaining and indicated the ingredients that I forgot to add in the biscuits, when I realized that I had not involved him in any part of the cooking lesson. My assisting approach with people with a disability was far away from Giovanni’s expectations. He was expecting me to empower his cooking skills. My approach with a disabled body made me think that he was not able to do things (cutting, mixing, etc) that he had always done on his own.
### 1. Elements of the SITUATION

**What happened:**
The different cultural references frame in terms of disability, conception of the body, misunderstood non-verbal communication and Giovanni’s advanced age made the communication flow counterproductive between Giovanni and myself.

**Where did it happen:**
In Palermo, Sicily - in the kitchen of a College open in the afternoon for educational activities with adults living with disability.

**Who were the protagonists:**
(i) A professional adult educator but with little experience with disable people,
(ii) A disabled 70 years old man with cerebral palsy in wheelchair.

**Was there any history between them:**
The two protagonists had met previously a couple of times, but they were never involved in joint activities.

### 2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

When the narrator realised that Giovanni was trying to draw her attention on the missing ingredients and on the correct use of these, she felt that she has not been able to listen and understand his complaints, his (non)words. She felt as she has acted only driven by her conception of disability as a form of incapacity, when actually he was much more capable than her. She felt like she has judged his capacity to use his hands before to make him try. She felt very disappointed with herself.

### 3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you?

The elements of her cultural reference frame questioned were.

- Their presentation of the daily activities and opportunities for people with disabilities / The representation of the human body, of its limits and capacities.
- An able person see at first the handicap as a limitation in the everyday life forgetting the alternative way to reach the same result for a daily activities but in another manners and the different resource the body can develop.
- The different value of respecting the persons we are collaborating with, listening his/her points of view, opinions and ideas, when the modality to express themselves is different (non-verbal communication). The socializing process teach us some precise way to communicate and collaborate with each other. When it appears that his process has been developed in a different manner for a disabled person, it can lead to contradict way of communication.

**Norms referring to team-work**
When persons without handicap collaborate, the division of task is made according to the possibility, knowledge and skills of each other in order to be the most competitive. In the critical incident her disability particular subculture, linked to an “assistance-focused approach” and far from the idea of empowering people with disabilities, supporting a further development of the already acquired competences.

### 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

Giovanni taught me to be positive and patient - which is the image of him I gained through this experience

### 5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behavior that caused the shock experience? (*Hypothesis*)

Giovanni’s norms and values:

- Different approach of problem solving and different body language (body language / Facial expressions)
- Giovanni lives in a society where his disability is considered just a different way of living a normal life: his
daily life includes sharing the house with friends, attending cooking lessons, watching football matches at the stadium, going shopping etc. This representation of his disability and values linked to mutual listening and understanding, led him in expecting in the critical incident to a collaboration in the kitchen during the cooking lesson. His behaviour was also led by the conception that Giovanni had of his own body.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

The situation highlights the difficulties that can rise when there are differences linked to the understanding and the facing of daily life events with people living with a disability. The disability subculture is lead not just by personal perceptions but also by the national social policies in the field of disability. In south-Italy very often people with a disability are not involved in social activities, meaning people usually do not know their potential and resources. There are some exceptions, like in the case of Giovanni’s centre, that try to make generally disable people very active and integrated in the civil society. The cultural differences have led the two protagonists in a problematic situation were disability was a insuperable limit of communication.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

This critical incident, together with some others, provoked the change my approach on disability and on perception of body’s limit.

❖ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “FINGER”
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

Professional domain
Disability

Sensitive zone
Physical contact and disability

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
Woman, 45 years old, physical therapist, 2 children, women’s rights activist, left-wing, passionate about her career, French with a German background. Lives in Paris, but if she could, she would live closer to nature.

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Woman, around 60 years old, married without children, retired, former teacher, pretty athletic. She participates in the workshop to rehabilitate her knee after a bike accident. Middle class/bourgeois.

Describing the SITUATION

The situation took place during a balancing exercise that I have been leading for a number of years in a rehabilitation center for people at risk for falling, either because of a problem involving the loco-motor apparatus (the system of bones, joints, muscles and nerves responsible for posture and movement), neurological diseases, aging, vision problems, or a reduction in muscle strength. Most of the exercises are individual: move around by avoiding obstacles, stay standing with one’s eyes closed, remain balanced on one leg, etc. This time, I asked them to form a circle by holding hands with each other (to practice balance on the group level). They all went towards the center of the circle, then, towards the outer edge. They went to the right, then to the left. They laughed, some people sang. There was a very happy and relaxed atmosphere. Suddenly, one of the participants left the circle, excusing herself and saying she had to leave immediately because she had forgotten a very important appointment. She seemed to be nervous. I asked her if she was okay and she said yes, leaving quickly. We were all a bit confused. I tried to continue the activity and keep the same atmosphere, but I must admit that it was pretty difficult.

A little later, this lady called me on my professional cell phone and, a little upset, explained that the story
about the appointment hadn’t been true. In fact, she had left because she couldn’t bare to hold hands with someone who had an amputated finger and that she had to leave like that because she had almost fainted. I told her that I was really sorry and I tried to calm her down but she told me that I should have been careful with the type of activity that I chose given the presence of this person with an amputated finger and that she had had a very distressing experience. I tried to apologize, but she wouldn’t let me speak. She told me that she would call me back and she hung up. I was paralyzed.

She never came back and I never tried to contact her either. I decided that it wasn’t a logical reaction. I found it rather disproportionate. The following session, one of the participants asked me if I had heard from this lady and I told him no...I didn’t dare talk about it. I was afraid of hurting the feelings of the person with the amputated finger.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

The situation took place in the recreational room of a private rehabilitation center located 30 minutes from Paris in a rather wealthy suburb. The room is nice: the walls are white, but there are two large windows that open onto the garden, which gives the feeling of being in nature. In the room, there are a number of plastic objects in different colors and shapes (triangles, cones, little balls, etc.) that can be used as obstacles. On one side of the room, there are parallel bars and the other has a large mirror. The group of participants is mixed (5 men, 7 women) and the average age is 65 years old. All the participants live in the area, which means they are all rather well-off. Most are retired, except 3 people who work independently (the workshop took place in the morning two times each week from 10:00 to 11:30am).

Concerning the psychological context, the group consisted of individuals having a light motor handicap which was transitional for most, while for others it was permanent or even progressive. This context can create a psychological fragility in the participants, especially for those who see their autonomy diminishing.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

In the moment, when the lady left the room, I was a little confused. The excuse about the appointment didn’t make much sense to me, but I couldn’t imagine anything else because the atmosphere was so nice.

After, when I spoke to her on the phone, I was completely shocked. My first reaction was to apologize for making her have a very bad experience. I felt guilty. However, as she continued to accuse me of not having been careful when choosing the activity, I felt attacked, insulted even, especially because of the way in which she was talking to me. In the end, I felt powerless because she basically hung up on me without giving me a chance to defend myself.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

Disability doesn’t exclude working in groups. To the contrary, for the narrator, the best condition for completing rehabilitation is as a group. An amputated or handicapped body can be a beautiful body. It’s the way of approaching the body/of experiencing it that will make the body beautiful or not. There is no need to hide a disability. People with physical or psychological handicaps must be integrated into the group. They need to be included in our daily lives.

Universalism: Same treatment for everyone, without discrimination. We must not modify the program or the proposed activities because of the presence of a person whose handicap doesn’t prevent him or her from executing the exercises.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

Negative

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis I)

- Beauty is incompatible with disabilities or an amputated body.
- + Hypothesis: Disability is a taboo, you have to pretend not to see it. At the same time, touching the
disabled reminds draws attention to it and makes it impossible to ignore. By touching the disabled it is difficult to pretend that it doesn’t exist.
- The Encounter: Physical intimacy with a disability is a broken mirror that reflects an image of vulnerability of one’s own body. In a way, disability makes the body more visible, more carnal. It is more difficult to erase it and to deny its importance.
- Amputated or disabled areas of the body may be more sensitive. Do not touch them.
- A health professional must make sure that patients/participants are protected/preserved from bad moments, especially upsetting experiences. He/she must know how to prevent them.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Physical contact and disability. Working as a group with people living with different types of disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITICAL INCIDENT: “AUNT”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Collected by KVG, Belgium 2012]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Professional domain |
| Training concerning disability |

| Sensitive zone |
| Disability. Lack of concern and empathy of other people’s needs. A way of being very self-centred. |

| Culture of the person experiencing the shock |
| Female, 55 years old, Belgian, introvert, no disability |

| Culture of the person “causing” the shock |
| Woman, 70 years old, physical disability |

| Describing the SITUATION |
| My aunt has a physical disability and has one sister, my mother. My aunt lives alone. It was Christmas. My mother had worked very hard and was more focused on serving her guests than enjoying the party and the food. Eventually, my mother wanted to take the last piece of turkey during the party (when all the other family members had finished, and she didn’t yet had tasted the turkey herself). The aunt responded: Oh, I’d hoped to take it with me for tomorrow. Her parents also wanted the aunt to take this home, so she didn’t have to cook. So my mother didn’t get to eat it (didn’t have anything to eat). |

| 1. Elements of the SITUATION |
| It was a Christmas dinner. They were with 9 persons: grandparents, mother, aunt, narrator, husband and three children. They were at the house of her parents. It’s a nice, wide house. They were sitting in the dining room to eat. They all know each other very well and see each other at least once in a month. |

| 2. EMOTIONAL REACTION |
| The narrator felt indignant and a little angry. The narrator also on behalf of her mother felt somewhat exploited of the rest of the family. |

| 3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you? |
| People with a disability can also do many things themselves and should not be considered as any less. As all humans, people with disability are able to perform adequate actions according to their level of performance. It is therefore fair to expect them to be social to a reasonable degree. |

| 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person? |
| The grandparents mean well, but give preferential treatment to the aunt and barely took notice of the efforts the mother made with the dinner. They feel sorry for their disabled daughter. But the aunt is taking advantage of this situation and this is not acceptable. |
5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? *(Hypothesis I)*

People with a disability have more rights. They have so much bad luck already, so we should spoil them in areas they can still enjoy...

People with disability may develop a self-conception as victims, which make them expect special care. This may also be a case in a lot of other families where no members are disabled. The incident, thus, seems to reflects a more general “family issue”, where some family members have a role as the “providers”, and other family members play the role as the “recipients”. So, it also seems to be a question of balance and especially of lack of reciprocity in this family – like in many families. The disability of the aunt may just stress the lack of balance.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

It should be clarified that people with a handicap have the same rights as others. Not more rights. A handicap may not be misused to get or achieve things. Neither should parents treat a child without a disability less than a child with a disability. They deserve the same amount of love and care.

Parents should also try to empower the child with a disability to take care of her own if she is able to.

**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “PARTY”**

[Collected by KVG, Belgium 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Professional domain</strong></th>
<th>Training concerning disability / Physical education / Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensitive zone</strong></td>
<td>Conception of the body, disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</strong></td>
<td>Young man (around 28 years old), Belgian, leader of a group, catholic, no disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Describing the SITUATION**

I was a guide at a camp in Slovakia for people with a physical disability. On the final evening there was a party. The people who join the camp are mainly wheelchair users. When we were in the room with our guests Slovak students came to ask us if we could leave the club, because they wanted to dance and didn’t have any room because of the wheelchairs.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

There were a lot of people. The Belgian group were with 9 persons: 3 helpers and 6 clients. On the party there were over 200 people.

It was in a place where there are given a lot of parties, something like a youth cafe. The Belgian group didn’t know the other people there, only their group. They also didn’t speak the language the Slovakiens spoke.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**

The groupleader was angry, furious.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you?**

Respect for others, equality of people. Everybody had the right to dance, to enjoy, to go out, also people in a wheelchair. The Belgian group was asked to leave the place, because the wheelchairs took too much space on the dance floor. This causes an inequality. Because they take more space, they have to leave. This is not correct.

Discrimination. They believed they had more right to dance, enjoy and have fun than people in a wheelchair.
4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

A very negative image of these youngsters. They had no respect at all and are shameless. They show no empathy towards the people in a wheelchair. They only think of themselves.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (*Hypothesis*)

**Negative/passive representation of people with disability:** There is a form of prejudice in our society that surrounds disability, a discomfort, a subtle fear of that which is different and unfamiliar. It manifests as pity, avoidance or mockery, sometimes even ignorance.

Naturally, many people, especially young people, tend to avoid those who make us feel uncomfortable or guilty. It seems that managers of the club did not know how to act or respond to the group of impaired people. Maybe this could be also due to the fact that we are not used to seeing them in a disco, we do not think about the fact that they are also a part of our society, with the same needs for acceptance, party, playfulness as all others. This fact shows that there is still a big need for a lot of people in different countries to get to know the group of disabled people. So they get used to them and learn to respect them.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

In society people with a handicap should fit in the normal street scene. Slovakia is a step behind Belgium in this regard, but there should also be respect for this target group. These youngsters should learn from the start to be respectful and not merely selfish.

Bringing people with disabilities into real life may result in bigger acceptance and less prejudices from society. We should nurture inclusive attitudes and encourage their participation and integration in every aspect of our daily lives. The narrator expresses anger and disappointment is in this case the outcome of their attempt to bring disabled people to public space was not successful.

**OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION**

We continued to party in the hall until the early hours. In the morning they asked us to clean up the hall. I then asked one of the camp people to say this isn’t possible, because we are disabled. We could have also discussed what we could do. But we never came back. If this would happen here at a youth club, we would of course have handled this differently.

One of the commonest responses to impairment is to perceive it as an unmitigated personal and social disaster or tragedy, a loss or deficiency (some countries define disabled people by percentages, i.e. one can be 50 per cent of a “normal” person). These powerful negatives elicit either fear, pity, or admiration, depending on how the disabled person “copes.” The negative response of most non-disabled people to disabled people is based mainly on ignorance: they assume that disablement is a catastrophe, and they fear it; fear creates awkwardness, avoidance, and prejudice (Coleridge, 1993).
**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “CINEMA”**  
[Collected by KVG, Belgium 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Training concerning disability / Physical education / Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</strong></td>
<td>Young woman, 25 years old, no disability, social worker, catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</strong></td>
<td>Middle aged woman, no disability, commercial manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Describing the SITUATION**

I was at a café for people with a physical handicap and a woman in a wheelchair came in rather angry. She joined us and said she just wanted to go to the cinema to see the film “Hasta la Vista”. This is a film about three young men with a physical disability who go to Spain together. It had just come out. She couldn’t see the film, however, because it was playing in a room that isn’t accessible for wheelchair users. I then went to talk to the cinema’s manager who told me that it was more interesting commercially to play this film in an inaccessible room, as it allows more people, because places for people in a wheelchair require a lot of space.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**

   There were 6 people, 4 of them had a physical disability, 2 of them were professional workers.
   
   The café where they sat is a large one, a very open space where you have to get your drinks yourself. In total there were around 25 people in the café.
   
   The people around the table didn’t know each other, because it was the first time they met. Only the professional workers knew each other and one other guest at the table was already known by the social workers, but not in personal. Also the other guests didn’t know each other.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**

   The woman was indignant and angry.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**

   Equality of people, empathy. Lack of understanding that money isn’t always the most important factor.

4. **Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?**

   The people who decide which film plays in which room should think logically and realise that people with a physical disability would like to see this film. They gave any thought to this and only considered their income.

5. **What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis)**

   Materialism/making a profit comes first. Equality and understanding are considered less important than money.

6. **Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?**

   Society should learn to take account of everyone. In the cinema people with a low income e.g. get a special pass so they can go to the cinema cheaper. This is a great initiative, so they can also enjoy this piece of culture. Society should realise that people with a handicap also want to integrate, but this is only possible if people are open to this. Every room should be accessible for persons with wheelchairs.
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “NOSE BLOWING”  
[Collected by Élan Interculturel, France, 2012]

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
French woman in her early twenties working in South Korea as a French teacher in a military school. She already had experience living abroad having taught in both urban and rural contexts in India. She has a love for cultural exchange and at the time of the incident, she regularly contributed articles to an English newspaper about her cultural gaffes or shocks experienced while in Korea.

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Young students in a military school. The narrator did not have any individual background information on the students at the time of the incident, but they seemed to have a great respect for order, hierarchy and rules. While the school is mostly male, the French class had a more balanced number of male and female students because female students seemed particularly interested in the French language.

Description of the situation
I was a French teacher at a military academy in South Korea. It was winter and I was giving my lesson as usual, but I couldn’t help noticing that most of the cadets had colds and quite a few had runny noses. None of them attempted to blow their noses and just continued to sniffle throughout my lesson. I was a bit annoyed by this as it made it difficult to concentrate on my lesson. Finally, I took out a packet of tissues and attempted to distribute tissues to the students with runny noses so that they could blow their noses. I was quite surprised when they all refused the tissues because they clearly needed them. After they refused the tissue, I continued my lesson as usual, but I remained confused by their reaction. Afterwards, I spoke to the commandant (the director of my department) about what had happened. He explained to me that in South Korea, it is considered rude to blow one’s nose in public. I was very embarrassed when I finally understood the reaction of my students.

1. Elements of the SITUATION
The incident took place in a classroom with 25-30 students. The room was set up with several rows of desks facing the front and the narrator standing in the front of the classroom. The narrator was roughly the same age as her students and had recently begun her position as French teacher. Around 30-40% of the students were female.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
I experienced irritation when the students would not blow their noses, considering their behavior to be rude. After this initial reaction, I thought that my students maybe simply didn’t have tissues with them, so I assumed that offering them the tissues from my bag would solve the problem. But when the students refused, I was confused and a little embarrassed. I was even more embarrassed after speaking with my boss and learning why the students had refused my offer.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?
Hygiene: For the narrator, a runny nose can contribute to the spread of disease. Tissues offer a way to prevent this spread by providing a clean, discrete means of addressing a runny nose. She was not only annoyed by the act of her students’ sniffling, but also slightly disgusted.
Manners/Politeness: In addition to hygienic concerns, blowing one’s nose in public is considered to be good manners in French culture. It allows the sick person to address a runny nose in a discrete manner so that they can continue with the task at hand.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?
Lightly negative. The narrator was initially a bit irritated by the behavior of her students.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behavior that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)
In Korea, as the narrator later learned from her boss, it is considered rude to blow one’s nose in public. Thus, just as the narrator perceived the behavior of her students as rude, they considered it vulgar to blow their nose in a classroom setting. This politeness code could be related to the idea that natural bodily functions are to be removed from the public domain. In blowing one’s nose in public, Koreans may feel that they are drawing attention to, rather than discretely addressing their runny nose. For them, it may be best to ignore the runny nose while in public, or to sniffle without the use of a tissue and then to blow their nose once they are in private.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

For the narrator this experience caused her to question a practice that she always considered to be “natural”. In seeing that when it comes to blowing one’s nose, the opposite idea of hygiene and politeness apply, she realized that how her own notions of hygiene are culturally influenced. For her professional practice as a teacher, she realized that it is important not to force things on her students, even that which may seem simple or unimportant to her and to be open to adapting to a new cultural context so as not to offend those with whom she works or interacts.

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**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “THE HUG”**

[Collected by CESIE, Italy, 2012]

**Professional educational domain**
Body / Interculturality

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**
Sicilian / Female / Woman / Age 28 / heterosexual / unmarried / living with a Muslim-Bay Fall man / Catholic Christian worshipper but no churchgoer / Studies in Psychology / International NGO employee

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**
British male / volunteering in Palermo, Italy / Age 24 / accustomed to respect the rules / being detached and underdemonstrative / polite and reserved (not being accustomed to the confusion and disorganization have been the crucial elements at the base of the shock experience). Arriving in a country completely different in terms of habits, way of living, relation and contact with people etc.

**Describing the SITUATION**
A young man from UK came to Palermo for an internship in our institution. When he arrived he appeared really lost and frightened. I was the coordinator of his project and therefore I was worry about him and I tried to be warmly welcoming talking often with him. In those situations, our cultural peculiarities have met and crashed, especially relating the physical distance that I put between me and the man. The Sicilian people are really friendly and close each other, hugging each other so often, so I hugged him being attentive of him. My warm attitude towards him made him more shocked and it did not help him to overcome the feelings experienced. After some months, he was integrating to the city and he felt better, he was more opened and he told me to have felt uncomfortable at the beginning due all the differences experienced admitting me that also my close and warm attitude toward him made him embarrassed and not able to talk honestly about his intercultural shock. We discussed a lot and we finally clarified each other the cultural diversity that we carried and how it has created misunderstanding.

**1. Elements of the SITUATION**

The incident happened in Sicily, Italy. As I wrote above, the misunderstanding came up because, from my side I did not realise how much different was living in Palermo compared to UK. I was not really aware that starting from the traffic to the weather, passing people, relations, way of living, a new language could be really a shock. In particular I did not take into account, that my warm Sicilian attitude could have a strong impact to him. From his side, I can say that he was not really open minded at the beginning, he was fixed
on the differences without appreciating the new things he was experiencing.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
I felt frustrated during this period. Later on when I resolved the misunderstanding, I found myself with more intercultural awareness. It helped me to analyze always how foreigners could live in a new country, the difficulties they could face and I understood that it’s really non functional assuming your point of view without putting it into questions, especially if you work with foreign.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?
“It touched just my idea of the relation with people. I was used to be in a close contact with the people with whom I was working. I understood that people from other countries could have another relation style, being colder than me or not available to an immediate confidence." Reciprocity – in cultural anthropology reciprocity is a way of defining people's informal exchange of goods, labour and even non-material things, for example responding to a positive action with another positive action. Physical contact means hospitality and caring in Southern cultures. As reciprocity is an important value in society, the refusal of this (the welcome gesture of the hug) can cause frustration. Externalisation of emotions: showing emotions is accepted in Southern countries, and in general it is an important sign of recognition of the others. Proxemics (E.T.Hall): the required personal/social space between people is different in the different cultures. If you step too close to the other person, you can hurt his/her personal sphere. It is related to physical contact which is different in the different cultures, in the ‘warm, impulsive’ cultures, physical contact and externalising emotions are important, while these can cause discomfort for other people.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?
Rather negative and critical: I had an image of the other person as a strange person, not open minded and not enjoying live.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?
Many aspects of the new context made him live a shock experience. My approach to him, warmer than how he was used to experience in his country made him feel embarrassed and with some prejudices about me (the crazy coordinator, I supposed). “Non-verbal communication - proxemics – personal/social space: keeping a certain distance with unknown persons is necessary, especially with future colleagues. This is related to the fact that in certain cultures personal and professional sphere are strictly separated, and it cannot be mixed up (for example no hugging of a future colleague). Verbal communication has priority, it is more important to formulate the things in words, clearly, directly. Non-verbal communication – not showing emotions: instead of the externalisation of emotions, it is rather their hiding that is preferred in many cultures. Hiding emotions is understood as being able to master them, not being the victim of them; in interactions it is a sign of politeness. From this perspective, the externalisation of emotions can seem insincere or even childish.
6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

“Both of us didn’t take into consideration or gave importance to the differences of culture and their peculiarities and the effects of these on the professional level. He never asked for further explanations regarding assigned tasks afraid of being hugged also in this kind of situation and I was not able to encourage him to be more active and participative.” “These kind of misunderstandings happen but the important thing is to keep ourselves available for feedback by others or critiques which could make us more aware of ourselves and others behaviours and ways of approaching. We should understand that our point of view is not absolute and especially, if we are educators, it’s necessary to work on it.”

Reciprocity is a key issue in all interaction: it implies that we recognise each other as respectable interaction partners, while the lack of reciprocity implies precisely the opposite: a lack of recognition. It is for this reason that breaches of reciprocity has such an impact even in the most ordinary simple situations, such as not smiling back at someone, or not addressing the other with the proper politeness formula.

CRITICAL INCIDENT: “PRIVATE ROOM”
[Collected by CESIE, Italy 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Family roles, family values / General intercultural education / Barriers of privacy / intimacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Personal space / privacy + relations with others / Family concept: Very big families are a common thing, including children, parents, grandparents, uncles, cousins and nephews. In Senegal a family can count more than 60 people living together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</th>
<th>Female / Sicilian / Age 26 / Christian Catholics / first experience in an African context / volunteering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</td>
<td>Senegalese family / Christian Catholics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describing the SITUATION

I was doing my volunteering period spending 10 months in Senegal collaborating with local NGOs, sharing the experience with other 10 young adults from different European countries. Myself and the other volunteers lived with local families under the same roof and there were many “critical incidents” happening in this time, due to living in confined spaces with many people from a very contrasting culture who had very different approaches to communal living.

The particular (almost ongoing) critical incident that to me was the most invasive into my personal sphere was related to my private space. I was living with a large family with many young children, I had a room for my own - but with a curtain instead of a door, and the children used to come in without “knocking” or asking permission. For them it’s normal to live all spaces of the house, no boarders between walls. I felt undressed at any time being home, I just didn’t feel free enough to enjoy the experience as I should have.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

What happened?
Living with a large family with many young children, the volunteer had a room for her own but with a curtain instead of a door and the children would often come into her room without “knocking” or asking permission.

Where did it happen? In Senegal.

Who were the protagonists? (i) An Italian volunteer and a (ii) Senegalese family.
Was there any history between them (personal or cultural?)?
The family hosted her in their house for ten months, but before her arrival they didn’t know each other. The cultural pre-departure training was preparing her and the other volunteers to the existing difference – but the living it, it’s different!

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
The emotions of the narrator were frustration and anger from having her personal space invaded consistently. The emotion from the family were confusion as they did not understand why I was so angry and frustrated with the situation.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you?
The value which was questioned was each person’s notion of personal space and privacy in the space which surrounds us.

Conception of family: the northern/occidental conception of family tends to be more nuclear (including less generations, usually parents and children) and also tends to include a smaller number of children.

Proxemics: the physical distance from other people (who are not our intimate friends of family) could be bigger in Italy than in Senegal.

Individualism (rather than collectivist, interdependent orientation): Most European societies have an individualist tendency, meaning that the basic unit of society is the individual: the priority is the individual’s needs, point of view, and feelings.

Privacy: The individualist orientation also show in the need for autonomy and privacy: Europeans tend to need “their own space”, being able to separate physically from others, being able to take actions without being seen / heard / disturbed by others.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?
The volunteer found the family strange because they could not understand or perceive the notion of privacy which is a concept that they had not experienced before.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience?

Extended family: Very big families are common, including children, parents, grandparents, uncles, cousins and nephews. In Senegal a family can count more than 60 people living together. That seems improbable, nevertheless there is no space for privacy and no one complains. Everyone has a clear role to play in the house.

Interdependent / collectivist orientation rather than individualist: the basic unit is the family, the priority is the family’s needs and interests. The individual roles are distributed to create a well functioning unit of family.

Proxemics / physical contact: the physical distance between people is smaller, physical contact is common. The child carrying practices are telling: the most common carrying style is to attach the babies on the back of the mother to ensure permanent physical contact during the mother’s daily activities.

Privacy: In accordance with the above the need for a separate private space for the individual is less important. The physical separation, isolation from the others is less of a value than the proximity to the others.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

- Professional practice → need to promote intercultural understanding not only with the person “entering” a different culture but also those living in the different culture who welcome the other person.
- Understanding and respect of cultural differences comes from both sides.
OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

The mediation involved meeting and talking with the different hosting families and helping them understand how to live with people from different cultures.

The development of simple rules helped resolve the situation. In the case of the critical incident the volunteer has shared her feelings with the group of European colleagues and she got to know that this kind of emotional reaction occurred to almost all project participants even of the following project editions. The group of European volunteers after her, in 2010 went for a publication that deepens and explains the social characteristics of Senegal for the use of future participants and anyone interested in the Senegalese culture - so to analyze better the cultural differences.

http://cesie.org/media/2012/01/Guide-Sedhiou.pdf

❖ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “CORPORAL PUNISHMENT”
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Body / Summer youth leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive zone</td>
<td>Conceptions of appropriate use of violence, protection of the child, values related to discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of the person experiencing the shock</td>
<td>An American woman in her early twenties, the narrator had lived in Egypt before, but generally stayed in mostly American/expat environments. University student. Well-travelled. Passion for social issues and the arts. The incident takes place while she is in Egypt for the summer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of the person “causing” the shock</td>
<td>1) Sudanese refugee students in their tweens to early teens. Escaped military violence in Sudan to be exposed to racism and discrimination in Egypt. Little education. 2) School director. Also Sudanese. Middle-aged man.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describing the SITUATION

I was a summer leader of youth activities with Sudanese refugees from a refugee camp near Cairo. Because I was so close in age to my students, I sometimes had discipline problems from certain students when we did some classroom activities. One day, two students were being particularly difficult and I sent them to the director’s office for disturbing my class. I later learned that the director had beat the children for their misbehavior. I was even more shocked by the students’ nonchalant behavior regarding the incident the next time I saw them. After this experience, I didn’t know how to handle discipline issues in my class. On the one hand, I did not want to send any more students to be beaten by the school director, but the students didn’t take my forms of discipline (mostly trying to talk/negotiate) seriously. That summer was a real challenge for me.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

The classroom was small and not very well equipped with supplies. There were about 15 students. They had a lot of energy and were very active. They seemed to like the narrator, but she found them difficult to control. Besides knowing that they were refugees, the narrator knew little about their pasts and it was rarely discussed in class.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

Shocked, angry, guilty.

I was shocked that the director would beat students simply for being disruptive in class and even more disturbed by the fact that the students seemed unfazed by this punishment. I felt guilty for having been the one to send the students to be beaten, even though I had not known in advance that they would be
punished in such a manner. I felt uncomfortable around the director and that I should speak out, but I did not quite know how. Finally, I felt frustrated because discipline continued to be a problem in my class and I did not know how to resolve it.

### 3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

| Protocols of children: In western cultures children are considered – at least in theory – autonomous entities having the same rights as adults. Children are to be protected/cared for and never dealt with violently. Treating children violently only teaches them to be violent. In the case of refugee children, the need for protection seems even stronger. |
| Physical integrity: punishment/discipline is sometimes deserved but it cannot entail any threat to physical integrity, it cannot include physically hurting the child. |
| Rejection of violence: Even when it doesn’t involve children, violence in all forms is wrong. |
| Differences in pedagogical/methodological approaches. When young people are difficult to reach in the classroom, in a Western context, the answer would typically be a pedagogical one – how to increase motivation and interest in the subjects being taught. The solution would thus involve changing teaching methods. Thus, this is not only a question of different points of views on socialization and childhood, but also on learning and teaching. |

### 4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?

Negative. The narrator was deeply troubled both by the disciplinary methods used by the school’s director and by the reaction of the students.

### 5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behavior that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)

| Corporal punishment: The use of corporal punishment seems to generally be accepted by both the students and the school director as a form of discipline. The students may have acted out in the narrator’s class because they were not used to verbal communication as a form of discipline. Similarly, the school director may dissociate corporal punishment from the notion of “violence.” Perhaps to him, he considers physical punishment to be the only valid way of disciplining children. |
| Relationship to individualism, physical integrity: Underlying the approach to corporal punishment is probably a less individualistic orientation to the person, the children included. Thus, the students did not take the punishment personally, and thus, they did not harbor any resentment towards the narrator afterwards, even though her complaint was the reason for the punishment. |

### 6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Yes. The narrator ultimately preferred to sacrifice some control in her classroom to prevent the use of violence as punishment by the school’s director.
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “THREE KILOS PLUS”  
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

**Professional domain**

Worked for an environmental agency as a liaison to foreign companies

**Sensitive zone**

Gender relations: norms on of female beauty, role of women; Conceptions of the body: how it should look; individualism/privacy: keeping certain things private and being able to decide what those things are

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**

French, twenty-six-year-old woman; had already lived in New York, experience teaching French as a foreign language; very independent; love of cross-cultural exchange

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**

Japanese man in his fifties; fairly wealthy; boss of narrator; Has a particular fascination with western foreigners

**Describing the SITUATION**

At the time, I was the only foreign employee in a Japanese company. I had been told three months after my arrival that I would have to take a medical examination. The examination takes place and a few days later, the CEO calls me into his office. He has received the results of the different exams I had taken and he wants to inform me of them. I’m thinking he will hand me an envelope, but no! He hands me the sheet and begins to discuss the results! Apparently, I’m three kilograms overweight. It became his mantra for several days. "Three kilos, three kilos "[he says] every time - or almost - as I pass in the hallways or lunch when we eat together.

1. Elements of the SITUATION

The boss repeated his new mantra regularly, either when he was alone with the narrator or when they ate lunch together. At lunch, there were about 10 other colleagues of the narrator (all women). No one ever said anything when the boss made these comments. He would also say it when he passed the narrator in the hall in front of other employees. The company was rather small with about 35 employees total. The narrator’s position in the company was very unique in that she wasn’t an expat working for a foreign company, but hired locally by a Japanese company, which is very rare. As such, there was a greater expectation that she conform to the norms of the company, even if she was an “outsider” because she was not Japanese.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

Embarrassed, angry, powerless, exposed

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?

Independence: The narrator greatly values her independence and felt that the boss was not honoring this by trying to monitor her weight.

Privacy: For the narrator, it is rude to talk about someone else’s private information in public without their consent, specifically regarding personal medical information. She did not feel that it was the bosses place to look at her medical results, let alone share them with the office. She thought that the doctor would just inform him of her health in a general manner and did not expect him to be informed of details that she considered private and none of his concern (i.e. the fact that she needed to lose a little weight).

Rejection of beauty norms: The narrator does not feel that she should be expected to conform to particular beauty norms regarding the size or shape of her body. She said that as a westerner, she felt that her boss (and others in different situations) made her feel that she was too big, whereas she knew that in the west she would be considered average or even small. She thus felt it was not necessary to try to conform to a standard that was not her own. Culture has a large role in determining what is considered average or normal. For example, the average recommended temperature in Japan is lower than in France.
A Japanese doctor could thus easily assume she was sick at her normal temperature!

**4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator you have of the other person?**

Negative. The narrator was very bothered that her boss felt comfortable discussing her private medical exam results and angry that he repeatedly shared this information with others in the office.

**5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behavior that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)**

**Role of company as family:** The company is there to support and protect employees. It is not rare for Japanese companies to find spouses for single employees or to rent them their apartment. In return for this security, the employee “belongs” to the company. The narrator’s boss had helped her out in the past: hiring her, even though she didn’t speak Japanese well yet, inviting her for weekly dinners (which also served as a chance for his daughter to practice her English). In return, he expected her to be completely obedient.

**Japanese standard of beauty:** According to the narrator, in Japan there is a fixed image of how a woman should be (speak softly, dress femininely, etc.). Women in her office were treated differently than the men. At lunch, for example, the women all had to eat with the boss at the office, while the men could do as they please. The secretary, who was a “tom boy” (a woman who is not particularly feminine in her dress or behavior), was expected to answer the phone in a very high voice. The narrator had friends who worked in companies that required the women to attend makeup lessons. The boss seemed to share these beliefs about the how a Japanese women should look and behave and expected the narrator to conform to these standards.

**6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?**

Yes. The narrator says that sharing her personal health information was just one of the ways that her boss intruded into her private life. She felt infantilized, which made her doubt herself professionally. As her job was to try to form partnerships with foreign (western) companies, she was expected to interact with high level executives regularly. The fact that she didn’t feel respected in her own company negatively affected her confidence when she had meetings with executives from foreign companies.

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**❖ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “PAKISTANI COUPLE”**

[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

**Professional domain**
General intercultural education / Intercultural mediation

**Sensitive zone**
Non-verbal communication

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**
French woman in her fifties. Left-leaning. Experience in intercultural mediation.

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**
Pakistani couple in their fifties. Probably Muslim. From a traditional environment.

**Describing the SITUATION**
I had to deal with a criminal mediation between a married couple of Pakistani origin: Mr. and Mrs. X. The subject of the complaint was: violence. The two kept a straight face during a good part of the mediation. Nothing seemed to reach them, including their own history and the consequences it could have. Generally, there are a lot of emotions during exchanges of mediation, especially when it comes to family matters. Usually it shows on the face and through non-verbal signals (posture, gestures, micro movements, etc.). But this time, nothing seemed to be reflected in the physical and non-verbal actions of the couple or...
rather, I realized that my reference point for understanding non-verbal communication wasn’t working. I told myself that I had to find a way to resonate/connect with them. So I matched my breathing to that of Mrs. X. It is difficult to accurately describe the breathing, but I felt it was short and shallow. We were in the process of discussing their family when I noticed breaks in her breathing rhythm at this moment in the conversation. I felt that there was something important - without really knowing what. I then asked her about her family, something like "for you family is important? ". Suddenly, though nothing seemed to move, I saw a tear in Mrs. X’s eye. A single tear rain down her face without a single flick of the face or body. From that moment on, I realized that a connection was made between the two spouses. The discussion took a different direction: instead of blaming each other, they shared their difficulties in French society, the difficult weight of their families, the importance that everyone had for each other, the need to support and help each other, etc. Everyone apologized explaining that even though they didn’t have the words to say it, that they didn’t want to start over, but to find a way together to improve their behavior. The complaint was lifted, mutual commitments and a Memorandum of Understanding were signed.

1. Elements of the SITUATION
The mediation took place in an office. The mediator was sitting in close proximity to the couple, which allowed her to feel the breathing rhythm of Ms. X.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
The mediator was very surprised at the impassive attitude of the couple divorcing (for violence, most importantly) because this attitude contrasted with the usual attitude of many couples with whom she had worked. When she realized that her non-verbal references did not work, she changed her strategy adapting to her interlocutor’s codes, which allowed her to get to the point that posed a real problem.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?
Being female, French, European and Western, the narrator has the values of individual liberty (regardless of family pressure; that will not determine the individual's behavior or lifestyle choices), equality between the sexes and the rejection of violence, which is a crime in the eyes of Western laws. However, as a mediator, she works on being non-judgmental and not jumping to interpretation: do not judge the violence, do not judge the "aggressor" (she knows from experience that there are often two victims and two attackers in a conflict) etc. She also learned that not judging codes/cultural practices (arranged marriage, for example) was essential in her work. Thus, for this incident, it’s mostly the non-verbal aspect that was a culture shock for her, because she had the impression of not having "access", not being able to "get into their emotional world." It’s through the body (without relying only on vision or hearing, which are generally used most in communication) that she could find a way to "understand" Mrs. and then Mr. X. She did this through techniques of calibrating and matching the breathing rhythms of Mrs. X.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?
Neutral. Because she has learned to not judge the cultures of those with whom she works during a mediation, the narrator did not have any negative preconceptions about their cultural beliefs. She had taken a similar non-judgmental position regarding the violence that was the reason for the mediation.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)
The narrator thinks that Pakistani society is patriarchal and that women have a reduced public role. Mainly organized on a tribal basis, Pakistani society operates according to norms and traditions established by men. Thus, all decisions involving the participation of women in society, for example, education, marriage, work, travel, etc., are made by the men of the family. This is why, as is the case with many Pakistani couples, it is their families who chose the spouses (arranged marriage) for the couple in question. As a result, marriage and divorce become a family affair in the broadest sense.
In addition, the narrator assumes that the opinion of others (especially the family) matters enormously. Divorce is such a source of shame and dishonor. Regarding the non-verbal, the narrator has heard that Pakistanis do not make many gestures when speaking and do not exhibit negative emotions in public. Public displays of affection are not acceptable, even between a man and his wife. Pakistani couples maintain a certain distance between themselves in public. In general, women abstain from even pronouncing the name of their husbands in conversations. Moreover, the Pakistanis do not like to discuss their wives in public. The narrator believes that Pakistanis prefer to control their anger and emotions. Demonstrations of anger or emotions almost always draw a considerable gathering of people, who are not concerned, but are curious. This again posesthe problem of exposing oneself to the opinions and ridicule of others. This is probably why Pakistanis tend to avoid violence during physical altercations. The above explanations are just one possible hypothesis proposed by the narrator. It is important not to assume that the above is true for ALL Pakistanis or that there are not other possible explanations/reasons for the behavior of the couple involved in this incident.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Yes, because a cultural mediator must constantly question his/her cultural codes of verbal and non-verbal communication to see if they work. He/she must also be prepared to set them aside in order to adapt to his/her interlocutor. Ultimately, it is essential for him/her to learn not to judge other cultural codes even for sensitive issues like domestic violence and arranged marriage. This distancing of the personal frame of reference is essential in conflict resolution. At the same time, the narrator must be careful not to rely on cultural stereotypes to explain the behavior of individuals.
**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “KISSES”**
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

**Professional domain**  
Body / Language teaching

**Sensitive zone**  
Physical contact through kissing, social convention governed by different codes such as gender, age, hierarchy, the context, the nature of the relationship (professional / private, formal / informal, familiar, friendly, intimate, etc..) These codes differ across cultures.

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**  
Flemish/Belgian/Dutch man in his 40s

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**  
Young French students taking language courses.

**Describing the SITUATION**
As a Flemish, Belgian, Dutch man (quite an intercultural program already), I had noticed that my fellow Francophones would kiss upon their arrival at the workplace. This is a relatively rare practice in a Flemish environment where kisses are reserved for true friends. Having recently arrived in France, I was invited to a gala organized by my students. Upon arriving in the room, I saw some of my language students and wanting to greet them, I gave each a kiss. They were good sports and played along, but they died laughing.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**  
A student gala where students of the narrator were present, including students to whom he gave language lessons. The situation was more or less informal from the point of view of the narrator.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**  
Today, I still feel embarrassed when I think about it. In any case, I have become more selective when distributing kisses.

3. **What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?**  
From a Flemish environment where kisses are reserved for real friends, the narrator had noticed that his fellow Francophones exchanged kisses upon arriving at work. Wanting to adapt to his new cultural environment, and noticing that kissing on the cheek was almost systematic in France, he decided to mimic this behavior, even though it was not at all part of his own culture. His views on hierarchy are rather similar to the French concept. This hierarchy somehow lost its importance in a context he considered informal (that of a gala, in this case), which suggested a more friendly behavior.

4. **Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?**
Positive

5. **What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis)**
The narrator realized that there is a hierarchy in the elaborate ritual of the kiss in France: a teacher is not supposed to give kisses to his students, even in a more or less informal situation. He had over-generalized a very specific code. French culture is visibly more formal than Belgian/Flemish culture. The formal nature of certain relationships (particularly hierarchical) persists even outside the professional context.

6. **Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?**
Yes, because it could cause problems in his professional practice as a teacher of these students, who could react badly to his gesture. In this case, it was not enough to try to adapt to cultural differences in order not to violate the codes. He needed to take into account how the environment was perceived by others (less informal than he thought) and the implicit rules of social relations and hierarchies (teacher-student) in practices related to politeness.
CRITICAL INCIDENT: “TOUCHING ART”
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

Professional domain
Body / Museum guide

Sensitive zone
The notion of a museum is different according to the culture. The problem surrounded the necessary distance to respect when in front of a work of art and also the possibility to touch it.

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
Twenty-two year-old French woman studying art history.

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
Chinese visitor in his forties (so educated in the post-Mao period)

Describing the SITUATION
We were in the red room (paintings from the 19th century) of the Louvre when a Chinese visitor began to touch a painting of Ingres. I was so stunned that I practically screamed “Don’t touch!” (the phrase that the Louvre guards repeat several times per day). He seemed surprised and moved away.

1. Elements of the SITUATION
The context was that of a museum: lots of people in movement... Sara was in the center of one of the red rooms, which are two symmetrical rooms separated in the middle by a square room. She was sitting in a chair with her back to the square room from which the visitors entered. They are very popular rooms and the team is usually under-staffed (as is the case in general in the museum). There were only two people for a very large room.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION
Sara was very surprised. She really wasn’t expecting this type of situation and thus didn’t know how to “react professionally.” It was personal for her because she respects works of art. For a moment, she was no longer a museum employee, but just a shocked observer.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?
Having studied art history and European culture, Sara considers a work of art to be almost sacred. It is unique and to be respected. This respect is shown by keeping a certain distance from the artwork and not touching so as not to damage it. A work of art is unique and should be conserved as best as possible for generations to come. A museum is a calm space where one must remain quiet so as to allow other visitors to interact with the artwork. At the Louvre, however, the size of the museum and the decoration give a “Disneyland effect.” Starting from the entry, the museum is not intimidating and doesn’t demand respect because it’s not austere, which is why some people break the rules.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator you have of the other person?
Neutral because she didn’t understand the reason for his act.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)
She thinks that for Chinese people, the vision of art must be different. For them, Western pieces of art may be decorative pieces and thus available to be touched. Furthermore, museums and cultural heritage are very recent in China. Only paintings are considered as art. But the style of painting is very different in China, putting emphasis on Taoist notions of emptiness and openness. For them, full paintings (where the entire painting is covered) are considered decoration and not art.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?
Yes, because even though the rules of museographics are universal, the conception of art differs according to the culture. When working in this type of place, one has to constantly interact with people coming from
different cultural horizons and it is sometimes difficult to respect this difference when it goes against fixed professional rules that must be respected above all else.

**CRITICAL INCIDENT: “BOTTTOM”**  
[Collected by Elan Interculturel, France 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional domain</th>
<th>Body / General intercultural education</th>
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</table>
| Sensitive zone      | The posterior - Morphology: the curve of the waist  
A representation of sensuality |

**Culture of the person experiencing the shock**
Female, 34 years old, bi-cultural French / Burkina Faso, born in France but spent 20 years in Burkina Faso. Educated in communication/public relations and inter-cultural relations. Feminist tendencies, profoundly sensitive to questions of male/female equality, Pan-Africanist, committed to valorizing African cultures

**Culture of the person “causing” the shock**
2 protagonists in 3 different situations:
1st situation: Female, white, 38 years old, bi-cultural French-English, born in United Kingdom but lives in France. Not much previous contact with Africans or African cultures but has recently become fascinated by Africa.
2nd and 3rd situations: Male, French, 38 years old, born and bred in France. No contact / particular knowledge of Africa, lives in a Bohemian chic, multi-cultural area. In a relationship with a woman of African origin.

**Describing the SITUATION**
From a standing position I bend down to pick something off the ground. My legs remain straight and my back is completely bent towards the ground. My bottom is pointed backwards and my arms stretched out to pick up the object.
My companions seem wary, wrinkle their brows and make these remarks:  
“Why are you bending like that? You’re going to hurt your back. That’s a strange position to adopt!” And one of them follows up with “You shouldn’t show your bottom like that”.

1. **Elements of the SITUATION**
Physical and social context
The first time: the narrator and her best friend as they walk down the street  
The second time: the narrator and her boyfriend as they walk down the street  
A third time: in the street, on a bicycle (with her boyfriend)  
In the three situations, there is an intimate relationship between the protagonists, which allows the questions raised to be addressed openly.

2. **EMOTIONAL REACTION**
I wasn’t expecting a remark like this for a movement that I feel to be natural, so I felt surprise. At the same time I was thoughtful because I was perplexed by the reaction.
I asked: “How would you do it? Show me”.
Each of my interlocutors made the same movement, bending the knees, their bottoms lowered to the ground and their arms stretched out to pick up the object.
Apart from surprise, some other reactions:  
- A bit cross at being accused of wanting to show myself off, of having an intention of coquetry when there was no such intention
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in the narrator?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The narrator’s imagination, social perception:</td>
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<tr>
<td>-The bottom has a social function, a strongly suggestive power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The narrator grew up in an environment where women wiggle their bottoms and roll their hips in an explicit way when they walk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Morphological heritage,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curve of the lower back underlines the rump and makes the posterior stand out from the rest of the body which is more noticeable and visually obvious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of the morphology of most African women, walking naturally requires a pronounced swinging movement. This physical constitution influences the “social game”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>-The relationship with the female posterior for the narrator can be summed up as the “Myth of the generous posterior”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representations: criteria of beauty, good health, sensuality, eroticism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This part of the body is celebrated for its movements!</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Explicit gaits (wearing traditional grass skirts, in dances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Daily chores performed in a bent position (sweeping the floor with a short handled broom, preparing meals in the pot on the traditional hearth, washing clothes by hand, working the land for farmers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Ease of movement of this part of the body, the art of setting it in motion: dances, and videos that celebrate the bottom (bust stuck out in front, bottom pushed out made to stand out). There is an actual dance of bottoms and pearls in several African countries. In Burkina Faso, the “Kiegba” dance (the bottom dance) is a traditional dance practiced to this day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baudelaire: “When they walk, they look like they are dancing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-The esthetic of the bottom: artistic representations abound, showing the importance given to this criteria of beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-A myth: A women has a bottom or she isn’t one!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Symbolic of the feminine curves: good health, femininity, fertility, maternity, sensuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-A freedom of speech and the simplicity to bring up everything related to the bottom (comments by men or women, mothers, friends etc.) celebrating its generous forms or on the contrary, devaluing a figure that isn’t generous enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Some women take pills to make their bottoms grow.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image does the narrator have of the other person?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A little sad: the bottom has become a negated body part</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of comprehension of a paradigm that somehow negates the relevance or the place of beauty</td>
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<tr>
<th>5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis!)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with the posterior: A body part to be hidden away, moderated. Showing off the bottom = coquetry, open and intentional sensuality, vulgarity, indecency, extravagance, lack of refinement, overt sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred behavior: discretion, hiding body parts considered indecent, the body is disciplined/domesticated in order to be “presentable” in the public arena. Especially because the female bottom is a sexual object. The controversy in Western society is also interesting: on the one hand people (mostly men) are allowed to see the female posterior in a sexual light, but on the other hand women are judged if they draw attention to this “special” body part (also the case with breasts).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Representation / rapport with the body: traditional Judeo-Christian separation of the body and the mind, a more positive value attached to the latter. In everyday public interaction, a ritualized effacement of the body dominates: putting behaviors in place which hide the carnal functioning, the body. Above all, do not
6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

Change in behavior – cultural learning:
The narrator was influenced by the reaction of her friends, which happened on two occasions. Now when in a public place (the street, the subway...), when she picks something off the ground she is careful to bend in the “Western” way in order not to shock. Self control – cultural adaptation.
Questions about the relationship between the body and its link to culture
Questions about the relationship with the body in our movements.
The narrator realized that she had always lived with people who carried out this movement for various reasons. And equally that she had a perception of the posterior that was free from the weight of any taboos or negative cultural meaning. For her, it was a body part that was not at all shocking. But it also had a different cultural significance, which came from a different cultural context that was “natural” and taken for granted for the narrator.
The Chicken-Egg relationship between physiology and culture: which came first? Is a morphological distinction at the source of a practice or does a cultural value form a body?
The question of intention and attribution: cultural behaviors are often interpreted as being intentional, even when there is no particular intention.

❖ CRITICAL INCIDENT: “JAPANESE HANDSHAKE”
[Collected by MHT Consult, Denmark 2012]

Professional domain
General intercultural education

Sensitive zone
Non-verbal communication, body-boundaries, privacy

Culture of the person experiencing the shock
The narrator is a Danish middleclass female teacher, 38 years at the time. The narrator is working as a language teacher in a Danish Language Centre in a borough nearby the Capital area. As an obligatory part of the language teaching the narrator also teaches in the subject Cultural Understanding with focus on teaching newcomers and immigrants about Danish social and cultural traditions etc. In this connection she is approached by other professional acquaintances from the community, asking her to welcome two Japanese visitors and inform them about Danish educational systems, Danish cultural traditions etc.

Culture of the person “causing” the shock
The other protagonists are two Japanese female teachers from the region of Fukuoka, around 30 years old. It is known, that the Japanese teachers were for the first time in Denmark, but apparently they had been to other European countries on some kind of study travel.

Describing the SITUATION
I had accepted to guide and counsel two Japanese visitors, who had come to Denmark in order to study Danish education. At the first meeting at my office, I started to greet them with a normal handshake. They looked in a surprised way at my outstretched hand. Then they reluctantly took my hand, both of them holding my hand between their fingers, as if my hand were dangerous.
At the end of our meeting the same action took place, when we were departing.

the SITUATION
includes three people, a Danish female teacher and two Japanese female teachers visiting Denmark and probably some other parts of Europe on a study tour.
The three persons are gathered in a relatively small school office, having a meeting for the first time. The
Danish teacher has accepted to spend some time informing and guiding the two Japanese teachers about Danish educational systems, didactic principles etc. Meeting the foreign guests for the first time and being the hostess for the meeting, the Danish teacher – in her self-understanding – greets the visitors politely by reaching forward the hand to a formal greeting and handshake. The Japanese visitors did not react adequately, but clearly demonstrated with both body language and facial expressions that this way of greeting made them a bit uncomfortable. The Danish teacher thought that the Japanese visitors perhaps needed some more training to get accustomed to this way of greeting, and that it would ne easier for them next time. Thus, she repeated the greeting and handshake at the end of the meeting, still having the same reaction from the others.

2. EMOTIONAL REACTION

The Danish teacher felt embarrassed, as she stood there with her arm outstretched in the air. The Danish teacher perceived the situation like this that two very nice and smiling women were actually behaving very impolitely by ignoring her friendly and welcoming greeting. The Danish teacher had not expected to be treated like that from visitors, who actually came to her office in order to get some informations and advice etc. She offered her time volunteering, and then she was met with a somehow rude attitude. Apart from feeling anger, she felt a little used. But it also puzzled her that the Japanese women – being professional teachers and used to guide others – did not explain why they felt uncomfortable by following the Danish rules of polite greeting.

3. What norms / values / representations did the incident touch / threaten / question in you?

A number of norms and values about hosting and guest status were at stake in this incident:

- **Reciprocity and respect for the host:**
  Accepting and returning the handshake (the welcoming gesture) means accepting his/her greetings, and by not accepting it the social pattern of reciprocity was hurt.

- **Handshake in western societies:**
  The ritual of the handshake is important in European societies. It can vary by culture, but in general it is commonly done upon meeting, greeting, expressing gratitude or completing an agreement. It has its choreography, where it is coded who should initiate the handshake, how strong it should be etc.

- **Politeness:**
  You shouldn’t express refusal towards someone who you haven’t met, and who is going to be your host. But you are also welcome to say if you do not like something.

- **Show signs of “cooperation”:**
  As the host, there are certain expectations towards the foreigners about assimilating to local rules (such as the handshake ritual). Accepting the handshake offered means adapting to the hosting culture in a way, which can be the sign of the will of cooperation.

- **Direct communication:**
  In Western European cultures, people in general communicate directly. They say what they mean, and gestures have importance, too, but words have priority.

4. Based on the analysis of question 3 what image do you have of the other person?

The situation raised an impression of an ambiguous image, mostly negative. At the surface the Japanese teachers were very friendly and smiling. But at the same time they in the situation appeared as tactless and without any empathy towards their hostess and her need to welcome them in a polite and “correct” way according to her norms and traditions.

5. What could be the norms / values / representations of the other person / culture that led to the specific behaviour that caused the shock experience? (Hypothesis I)

In general, the body has a more private character or “status” in the Japanese society. The Japanese people – in general – do not hug and kiss in the public sphere and towards people they are not very closely linked to. They prefer to hold a certain physical distance towards other people.
Also in Japan, in general, it is considered to be very rude to communicate very directly about one’s needs and one’s dislikes. It is important to avoid hurting other people by being very directly in the communication. Therefore, the Japanese women in the incident received the handshake. But this incident became critical for all three women, while the Japanese women actually didn’t succeed in hiding their discomfort by the handshake. Thus, quite opposite the intentions, the Japanese women were, in fact, hurting the Danish woman. She, on her side, was not able rapidly to “read” the others discomfort, instead, she insisted on shaking hands with both of the Japanese women by the start and the end of the meeting.

6. Does the situation highlight any problem concerning the professional practice, or in general about the respect of cultural differences in intercultural situations?

The situation shows how important it is to be aware of non-verbal communication and of different conceptions of politeness.

**Non-verbal communication:** Greeting ritual is different in Japan. Bowing would be the general greeting gesture. Bowing represents many nonverbal messages such as introductory greetings, farewells, thankfulness, degree of familiarity, social rank and gender. These messages are expressed by the depth of the bow, the position of the hands, the frequency of the bow and by who initiates. Many Japanese will often offer a handshake to foreigners. Sometimes they will try a combination of handshake and a bow.

**Indirect, contextual communication:** Communication strategies differ in cultures. In societies with indirect, high-contextual communicational style (like the Japanese), people tend not to verbalize everything, for them it is more important to keep the relationship with the partner in the communication, and meaning is conveyed by suggestion, implication, nonverbal behaviour, and other contextual references.

In Japanese culture the physical distance is very important. People don’t express feelings in public (They do not hug, kiss and hold by the arm in public).
The project, and this publication within it, is funded by the European Commission – DG Education and Culture, Grundtvig Programme.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.