

The background of the entire page is a collage of hands made from crumpled paper in various colors including red, green, blue, yellow, pink, purple, brown, and orange. The hands are arranged in a circular pattern, with some overlapping. On the left side, a portion of a globe is visible, showing green continents and blue oceans.

# Unpacking Identity on Global Programs

Tools to Help Students Prepare for Their Global Experiences



Global Engagement  
Santa Clara University

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“Owning  
our story  
is the  
bravest  
thing we'll  
ever do.”

Brené Brown

Your global experience is a formative space where your distinct identities intersect in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore a different country and culture. As more students of different backgrounds and identities choose to have a global experience, Santa Clara University asks our community to participate in creating an environment where all students can thrive while abroad.

Thinking about identity abroad and all of its complexities, especially in the context of another culture, is something we hope you'll embrace in advance of departure. It is important to understand how your own identity may shape your experience abroad. This will help you determine how to best acclimate to your host culture. After reflection, you'll also be better able to authentically engage with other students, locals, as well as varying personalities, ideas, perspectives, forms of expression, and backgrounds.



## What Is Intersectionality?

The Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage." Santa Clara University encourages students to reflect on all of the different identities that they hold and imagine them intersecting to create you. What are your identities? Take into account nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religious affiliation, ability, etc.

## What Is Privilege?

The Salem Press Encyclopedia defines "Privilege" as certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups. Within American and other Western societies, these privileged social identities—of people who have historically occupied positions of dominance over others—include whites, males, heterosexuals, Christians, and the wealthy, among others. García, Justin D. 2018. "Privilege (Social Inequality)."

## Intersectionality and Privilege Abroad

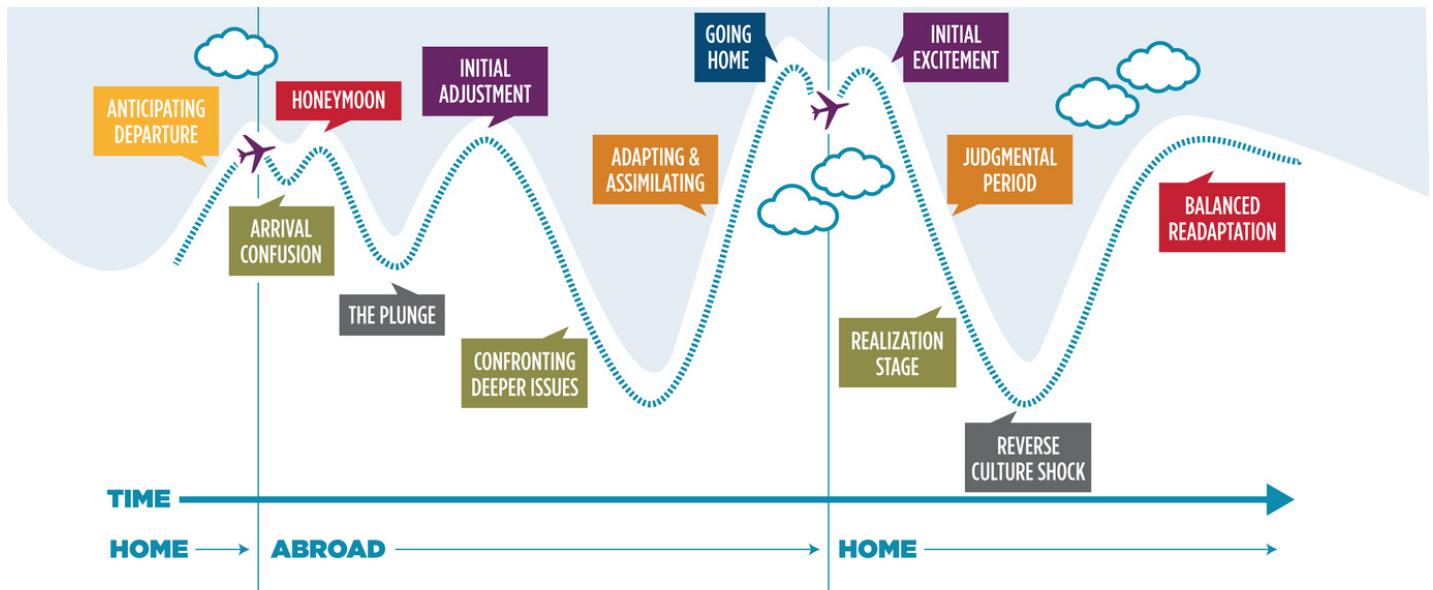
Identities that may be privileged in the US may not experience the same privilege abroad. Similarly, identities that are marginalized in the US, may be uplifted. We tend to define ourselves using different features of our personalities, backgrounds, and physical appearance. When preparing yourself to be immersed in another culture, it is important to consider all the different ways that you identify as an individual, recognizing how your identity might be perceived abroad and away as well as how you want to present yourself to your host community. One example of privilege that all students in global programs will hold is the ability to travel and hold a passport.



**Check out the videos at [www.scu.edu/studyabroad](http://www.scu.edu/studyabroad) >  
"Diversity & Identity Abroad" to learn more!**



# Culture & Cultural Transitions



Living in a new culture can be exhilarating, rewarding, and stimulating. It can also be disorienting, frustrating, and depressing. Such distress or “culture transitions” is due to the twofold challenge of being in a new environment with unfamiliar customs, language, food, housing, etc., and being away from your familiar home environment with all of the ease and support it provides.

To avoid or minimize the challenges associated with being in an unfamiliar environment, it can help to educate yourself beforehand about the country you will be visiting and to be open-minded about the different customs and environments you will be experiencing. While these matters are typically addressed in program orientations, you are strongly encouraged to do your research and to be proactive rather than passive.

Read through travel forums, guidebooks, news reports, or novels. Talk to people who have been there or -- better yet -- are from there. Get to know as much as you can about what's considered polite or rude (for example, did you know it's rude to step over someone's bag in Madagascar?) and prepare yourself for some of the differences.

## ***What is Culture?***

Culture is a neutral term, neither good nor bad, and refers to the broadest conception about the learned knowledge that humans use to fulfill their needs and wants. Culture may or may not be obvious. You may be able to observe parts of a culture, but there's more below the surface, too.

# The Cultural Iceberg

In an iceberg, only about 10% of the iceberg is visible above the waterline. The majority of the iceberg is hidden beneath the surface.

In 1976, Edward T. Hall suggested that culture was similar to an iceberg. He proposed that culture has two components and that only about 10% of culture (external or surface culture) is easily visible; the majority, or 90%, of culture (internal or deep culture) is hidden below the surface.

## **External (surface) culture (10%)**

- Explicitly learned
- Conscious
- Easily changeable
- Objective knowledge

**Behaviours**

**Traditions**

**Customs**

**Easily observable with touch, taste, smell, sound**

**Core values**

**Priorities**

**Beliefs**

**Attitudes**

**Assumptions**

**Perceptions**

## **Internal (deep) culture (90%)**

- Implicitly learned
- Unconscious
- Difficult to change
- Subjective knowledge

**Difficult to observe**

When one first enters into another culture, one is usually first interacting only with the top 10%—literally, the tip of the iceberg! Sometimes, people make assumptions or develop ideas about another cultural community without really understanding the internal or deep culture that makes up the majority of that culture's values and beliefs. What's in your cultural iceberg?



# Tips for Cultural Adjustment

## Don't Pass Judgement; Ask Questions

Don't judge the people of a country or those on your program by the one person with whom you have had trouble, this is unfair to people as a whole. Ask questions to better understand an individual and their world-view.



## Respect Differences

Realize that other people may have thought patterns and concepts of time which are very different from yours. Not inferior, just different.



## Reflect

Spend time reflecting on your daily experiences in order to deepen your understanding of your experiences. Writing in a notebook or journal can help you process, and remember everything you experienced.



## Have an Open Mind

Do not take anything too seriously; an open mind is the beginning of an amazing international experience. Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to meet and talk with locals.



## Research Your Location

Be aware of the feelings of local people to prevent what might be offensive behavior.



## Act as an Ambassador

Remember that you are a guest in every land; one who treats a host with respect will be treated as an honored guest.



# Navigating Cultural Transitions



Rika Sarkar  
Class of 2021  
Cape Town, South Africa

## **STAGE 1: Honeymoon Phase**

After first arriving in a new place, you'll likely be caught up in all the wonderful things your new chosen home has to offer. During this stage, you are more likely to recognize cultural similarities and be charmed by the differences.

## **STAGE 2: Irritation/Hostility**

Gradually, the euphoria will diminish. You'll get lost. You'll get mad at the apparent "disorganization" of things. You'll become overwhelmed with all the things you have to adjust to, and either feel irritated or compelled to make things go "your way".



## **STAGE 3: Adjustment**

You're finally able to relax. You've come to terms with your new home and have achieved a balance of emotions. Instead of feeling irritated, you're understanding of differences. You'll start to have a more positive outlook, interest in learning more about your host country and make more effort to fit in.



Jacqueline Ibarra Garcia  
Class of 2021  
Barcelona, Spain

## **STAGE 4: Adaption**

Reaching a high level of comfort in your new home is the final stage of culture shock. The order of things makes sense, you can talk to strangers with ease, and you understand cultural nuances. Your routine is more natural. Sure, you still miss your friends and family, but your new friends and activities have become part of your daily life.



Bassam Boulos  
Class of 2019  
Auckland, New Zealand



# **Navigating Cultural Transitions**

## **Ask Your Program Coordinator for Advice**

Whether you're studying, volunteering, or interning abroad, you'll likely have a point of contact. Don't hesitate to ask them what others have had a hard time adapting to and what they've done to cope. Each country has its own nuances, so you're going to face a different situation in France as you would in Thailand. Ask those who know best!

## **Stay in Contact with Your Support System**

Plan so that you can be in contact with friends, family, mental health professionals, etc., back home. Research cell phone plans abroad, time zone differences, etc. Of course, try to avoid spending so much time in contact with home that it interferes with the opportunity to engage your new culture. Balance is key!

## **Adjusting to Your Program/Location**

Just as you may have challenges adjusting to your new culture, your host culture may have challenges adjusting to you. Stereotypes go both ways. American students can be perceived as loud, arrogant, crude, promiscuous, alcohol-obsessed, rich, cheap, politically naïve, shallow, etc. Please avoid reinforcing such stereotypes. Remember you are an ambassador of the United States and SCU – respect others and act responsibly.

Also consider the nature of the political climate and relations between the U.S. and your destination, as well as other countries you plan to visit. In some cases, Americans living/traveling abroad may be singled out as objects of resentment, intimidation, or even violence because of U.S. government policies. In this case, it may be prudent to adapt your style of dress and behavior as much as possible to local norms.

# 5 R's of Change While Abroad

Discovering new and different cultures while abroad is one of the most exciting parts of travel. However, sometimes adjusting to new routines and ways of living can be very difficult to navigate initially. Thinking ahead will better prepare you to navigate such challenges.

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b><i>Routines</i></b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How might your routine change when you go abroad?</li><li>• How difficult will it be to adjust?</li></ul>  |
| <b><i>Reactions</i></b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We do things we're accustomed to doing at home, but might get a very different reaction than we expect in a new culture.</li><li>• How might these reactions be different?</li></ul>                 |
| <b><i>Roles</i></b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What roles do you fulfill now?</li><li>• What responsibilities do you hold? (e.g., student, club member, etc.)</li><li>• How might these roles &amp; responsibilities change while abroad?</li></ul> |
| <b><i>Relationships</i></b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How might relationships be different?</li><li>• How might current relationships with family/friends at home change?</li></ul>  |
| <b><i>Reflections</i></b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How might you change as a person because of this experience abroad?</li></ul>  |



# Activity: 5 R's of Change

Reflect on each of the 5 Rs of Change for your situation. What are the changes you expect to face as you move between cultures? Try being as specific as possible as you participate in this exercise.

**What change?**

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**Why is this significant?**

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**How do/did I respond?**

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**What now?**

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# Unpacking Self-Culture & Identity



## Who am I?

“Who am I?” is a question all of us ask at some point in our lives, and it is a particularly critical question for students’ own social, moral, and intellectual development.

Our society—through its particular culture, customs, institutions, and more—provides us with language and labels we use to answer this question for ourselves and others.

In the next section, you will explore the factors that make up your individual identities and how the ways in which you perceive yourself are **similar to and different from** the ways others may perceive you.

Through this process of reflecting on your own identities, sharing your stories, and hearing from others, you will continue the process of getting to know yourself as an individual while at the same time contributing to the process of building a community of learners where all students are known and understand that their ideas and experiences matter. Through the next few exercises, you'll reflect on the following guiding questions:

Who am I?

What factors shape  
my identity?

What parts of my identity do  
I choose for myself?

What parts of our identities are determined for us by  
other people or by society?

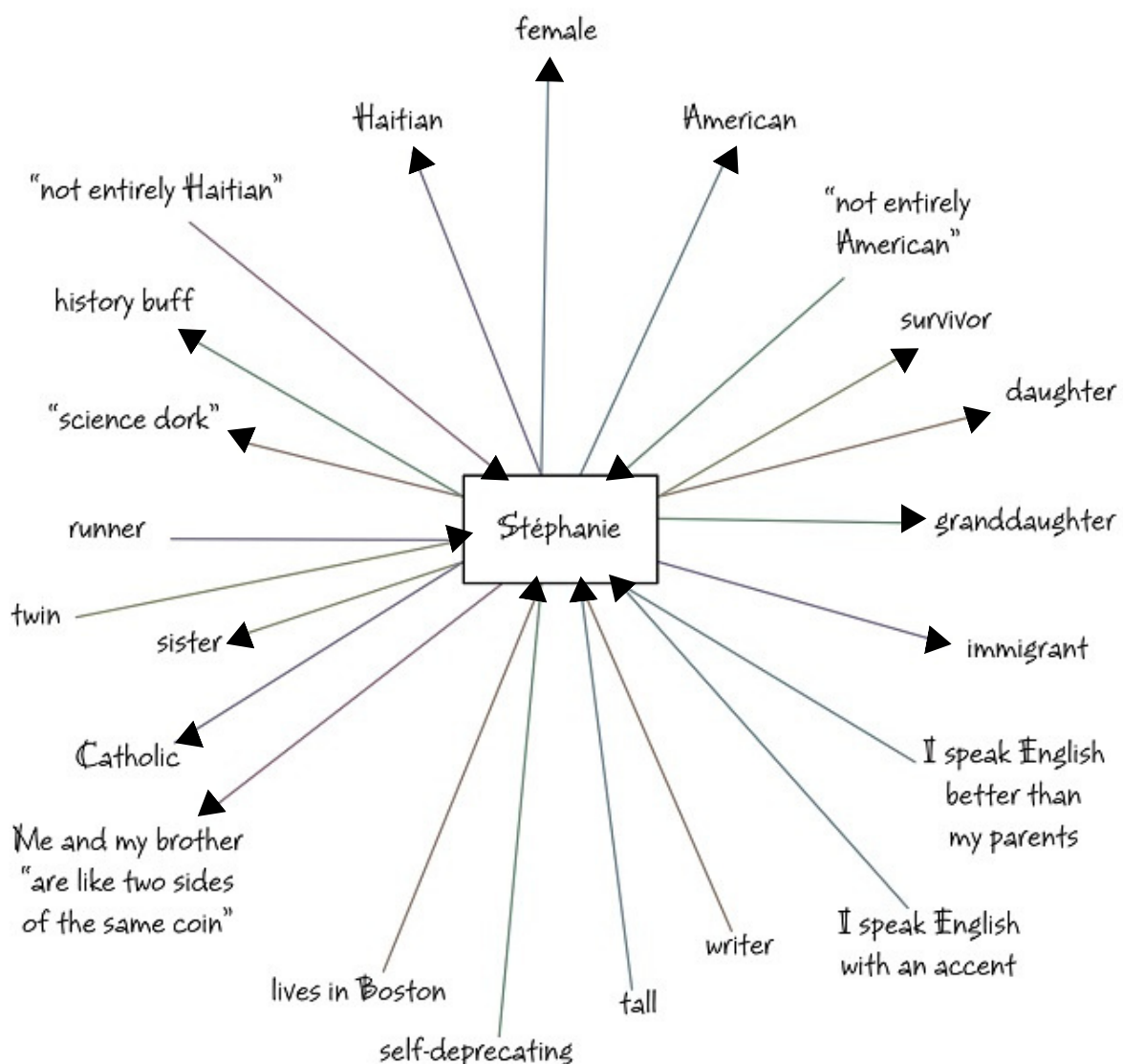


# Starburst Identity Chart

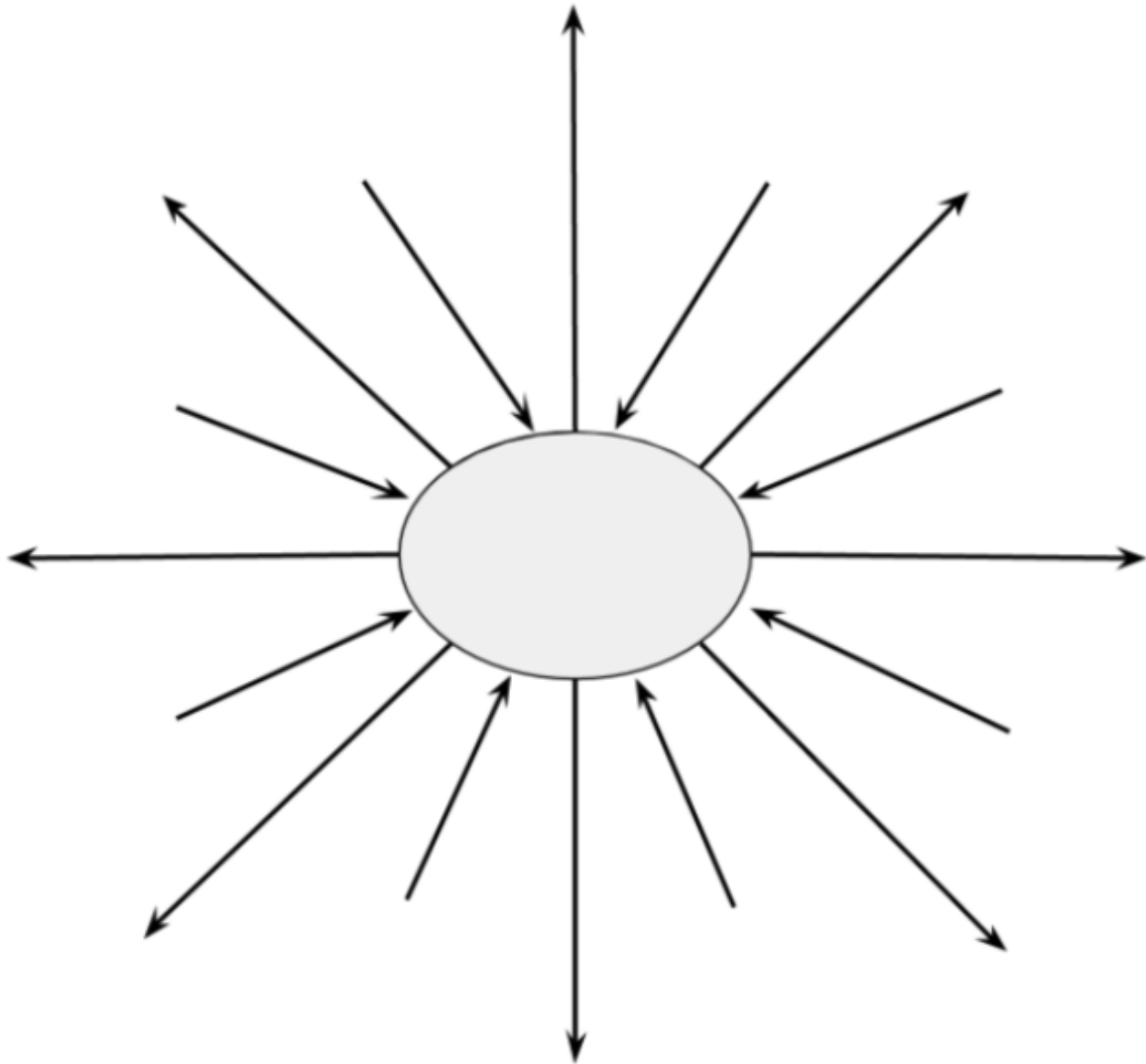
In this exercise, students will identify social and cultural factors that help shape their identities and then create their own personal identity charts. To get started, write your name in the circle.

- At the ends of the arrows pointing outward, write words or phrases that describe what you consider to be key aspects of your identity.
- At the ends of the arrows pointing inward, write labels others might use to describe you. Add more arrows as needed.

## Example:



## Activity: Starburst Identity Chart



# Starburst Identity Reflection

Now that you've written words or phrases that describe what you consider to be key aspects of your identity, and labels others might use to describe you, let's take some time to further reflect.

*What is the most important part of your identity? What is a story that explains its significance to you?*

*What is one thing that you want other students in the class to know about your identity, and why?*

*What is one way that how you think about yourself is different from how others might describe you?*

*Who is a historical or fictional figure that you identify with or admire, and why?*



# Unpacking Identity



## How Others Perceive Us...

In social psychology, the term "**person perception**" refers to the different mental processes that we use to form impressions of other people. This includes not just how we form these impressions, but the different conclusions we make about other people based on our impressions.

**Consider how often you make this kind of judgment every day!**

When you meet with a new friend, you immediately begin to develop an initial impression of this person. When you visit the grocery store after school, you might draw conclusions about the cashier who checks you out, even though you know very little about them. This allows us to make snap judgments and decisions, but it can also lead to biased or stereotyped perceptions of other people.

Let's take a closer look at how person perception works and the impact it has on our day-to-day interactions with other people.

# How We Form Impressions

## Person Perception

Person perception is a very subjective process that can be affected by a number of variables. Factors that can influence the impressions you form of other people include the characteristics of the person you are observing, the context of the situation, your own personal traits, and your past experiences.

People often form impressions of others very quickly, with only minimal information. We frequently base our impressions on the roles and social norms we expect from people.

For example, you might form an impression of a city bus driver based on how you would anticipate a person in that role to behave, considering individual personality characteristics only after you have formed this initial impression.

**Physical cues** can also play an important role. If you see a woman dressed in a professional-looking suit, you might immediately assume that she works in a formal setting, perhaps at a law firm or bank. The salience of the information we perceive is also important. Generally, we tend to focus on the most obvious points rather than noting background information.

The more novel or obvious a factor is, the more likely we are to focus on it. If you see a woman dressed in a tailored suit with her hair styled in a bright pink mohawk, you are likely to pay more attention to her unusual hairstyle than her sensible business attire.

# How We Form Impressions

## Social Categorization

One of the mental shortcuts we use in-person perception is social categorization. In this process, we mentally categorize people into different groups based on common characteristics. Sometimes this process occurs consciously, but for the most part, social categorizations happen automatically and unconsciously. Some of the most common social categories are age, gender, occupation, and race.

As with many mental shortcuts, social categorization has both positive and negative aspects.<sup>4</sup> Social categorization allows you to make rapid judgments. Realistically, you simply do not have time to get to know every person you come into contact with. Using social categorization allows you to make decisions and establish expectations of how people will behave quickly, allowing you to focus on other things.

Problems with this technique include the fact that it can lead to errors, as well as to stereotyping or even prejudice.

Imagine that you are getting on a bus. There are only two seats available. One is next to a petite, elderly woman; the other is next to a burly, grim-faced man. Based on your immediate impression, you sit next to the elderly woman, who unfortunately turns out to be quite skilled at picking pockets.

Because of social categorization, you immediately judged the woman as harmless and the man as threatening, leading to the loss of your wallet. While social categorization can be useful at times, it can also lead to these kinds of misjudgments.

Can you think of a time in your life where this has happened?



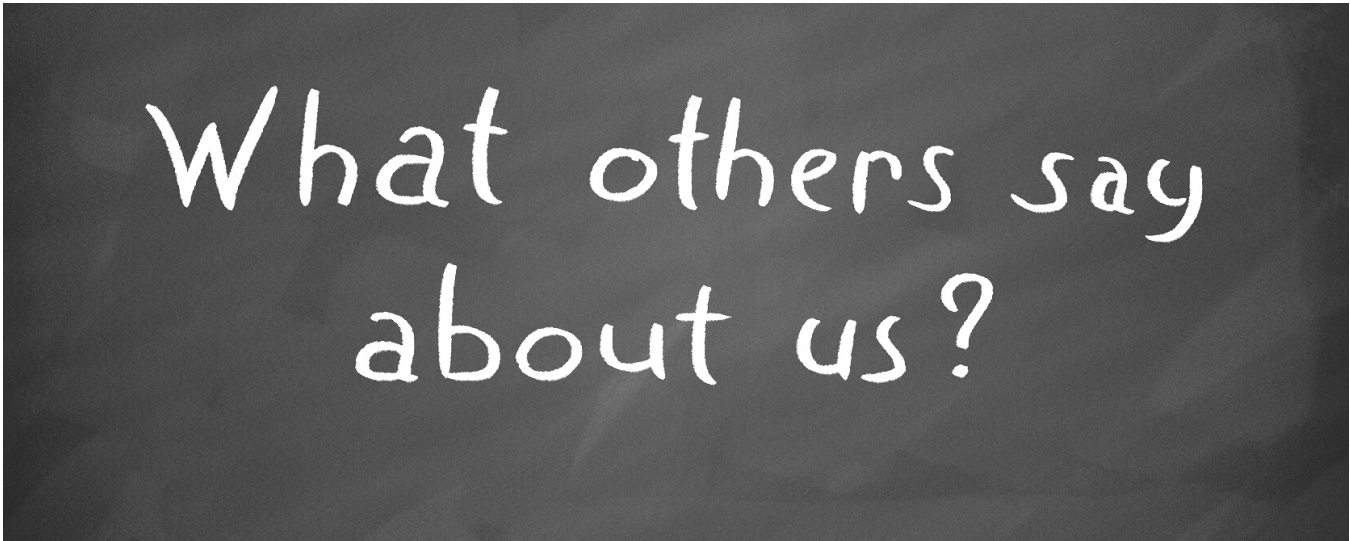
# How We Form Impressions

## Implicit Personality Theory

An implicit personality theory is a collection of beliefs and assumptions that we have about how certain traits are linked to other characteristics and behaviors. Once we know something about a cardinal trait, we assume that the person also exhibits other traits that are commonly linked to that key characteristic.

What is a cardinal trait? Cardinal traits are those that dominate an individual's personality to the point that the individual becomes known for them. For example, The young Narcissus of Greek mythology was so enamored with his own reflection that his name became the root of the term narcissism or excessive self-obsession.

For example, if you observe that a new student is very happy, you might immediately assume that they are also friendly, kind, and generous. As with social categorization, implicit personality theories help people make judgments quickly, but they can also contribute to stereotyping and errors.



What others say  
about us?

# Activity: Don't Misunderstand Me!

**Directions:** Take a few moments to reflect on a few misunderstandings that have already occurred, or could occur. What do you know to be true about yourself or the situation?

1. One misunderstanding a professor might have about me is . . .

2. But in reality, the truth about me is . . .

1. One misunderstanding another student might have about me is . . .

2. But in reality, the truth about me is . . .

1. One misunderstanding my family might have about me is . . .

2. But in reality, the truth about me is . . .

# Tips for Being a Better Ally

## 1. Be empathetic

It's easy to mistake empathy with sympathy. You might have an LGBT friend who, on top of worrying about adjusting to a new culture, is worried about their safety if they come out to their host family. Or, they could be a person of color who deals with cultural, religious, linguistic barriers, and negative stereotypes depending on where they're from or where they're going. These combined factors can be weakening. You can't solve racism, sexism, classism, or homophobia.

What you can do is listen. Being an active listener and being okay with not being able to solve these problems is the key to empathy.

[Check out Brené Brown's explanation of Empathy vs. Sympathy.](#)

In Brené Brown's video, she explains that it's okay not to have all the answers. It's okay to say "I don't know what that's like, but I'm here if you need me." Check out the video and it will probably be one of your favorite animal-in-a-cave videos. You'll also think twice about starting off a sentence with "At least." - **Charleen Johnson Stoevers** (@GoAbroad Contributor)

## 2. Check-in

Few things are as comforting as having friends reach out for the sake of reaching out.

After my assaults and after the Orlando shooting in June, I was very public on Facebook and on my blog about how these events affected me. Not once was I angry that someone reached out to me. I felt more saddened that people felt as if they couldn't or shouldn't reach out to me because they wouldn't know what to say.

After the Orlando shooting, I was in shock. As a queer woman of color, I felt as if I could have been targeted myself. I never would have thought that a horrific (but not the worst) mass shooting could happen in a "safe" space for queer people. I took two mental health days to see a therapist and to be around friends I cared about, and once I returned to social media and opened my inbox, one of my friends told me: "I stand with you. I'm proud of you. You are brave. You are loved."

I had one coworker text me out of the blue and tell me that she didn't have anything particular to say, but she wanted me to know that she was there for me in case I needed someone to listen. It made me feel loved. I thanked her for reaching out, even though we didn't end up talking. - **Charleen Johnson Stoevers** (@GoAbroad Contributor)



### **3. Use "I" Statements**

Using I statements instead of accusatory statements can make a world of a difference when you're addressing issues or asking something of someone, especially if they have a mental illness or dealing with discrimination abroad.

Read this statement: "You always take forever to get online to skype." What's wrong with this? First, when using words like "always" or "never," you're making a sweeping generalization. Maybe your friend just has incredibly slow internet. Maybe they feel like they have to be emotionally grounded before talking to you first so that you don't worry about them.

Instead, say things like "I will wait for you to come home so that we can chat," or "I feel ignored when you take longer than planned to get online. I'd like to know what we can do about it." This takes more of the pressure off of your friend and sounds so much more constructive.

### **4. Have an open, conversation about what they're going through (if they are open to it)**

Most people are aware of their limits, but travel can push those limits further. Therefore, even if you have already talked with your friend about how you can support them, initiating this conversation again with regard to travel can provide them an extreme amount of relief. If it's difficult for you to initiate conversations, just think of how hard it might be for someone who is struggling abroad to do so.

Say something like "I'm happy we could spend time together. I notice you seem a bit tired right now. I'd like to know if you need a break. I don't need you to explain anything if you don't want to, though." Some people need to set more limits than others.

### **5. Offer to seek help or participate in resource-gathering on your friend's behalf**

You might have a better internet connection than they do to look up where to find a medicine, or they might not be as tech-savvy as you are to find some answers. Maybe you know someone who can better support your friend than you're able to with immediate resources. Be upfront about the availability of your resources and your willingness to do research. If your friend isn't able to google something or get advice, you'll help them.

# Safety While Abroad

While participating in a global program can be an amazing and sometimes life-changing experience, just like life at home, you may encounter discrimination on your travels, or find yourself in an unsafe situation. People might judge you based on your ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. For some students when they study abroad it will be the first time they are in the position of being a minority. If you are a minority in your host country, you may receive additional attention depending on your background and ethnicity, which may or may not be discrimination.

Remember, there is nowhere in the world 100% free of ignorant people. Whatever happens, don't let the possibility of discrimination prevent you from experiencing the life-changing benefits of living abroad. However, it is also important to keep yourself safe. Here are a few tips:

## Educate Yourself

- Educate yourself on the cultural, historical, and political environments of the countries you plan to visit. Be aware of cultural norms that might be different from those in the U.S. However, do not feel that you need to allow for unsafe or uncomfortable invasions of your personal boundaries for the sake of cultural sensitivity.
- Educate yourself about sexual harassment, violence, and gender dynamics abroad in order to make safe choices. You cannot trust everyone you meet while abroad, no matter how kind or helpful they seem to be.
- Identify ways to blend in with the local culture to avoid being targeted as a tourist.

## Asking For Help

- Learn how to ask for help in the local language.
- Be sure you know local emergency #s, and how to reach your on-site program coordinator.
- When traveling, always let your on-site program coordinator where you are going and when you expect to return.

# Safety While Abroad

## Travel Documents & Items of Importance

- Carry your emergency card/health insurance information and your ID, and at all times. Make copies of these documents.
- Leave your physical passport in a safe place, and carry a copy instead.
- Always keep important items locked up, close to you, or on your person at all times.

## Getting Around While Abroad

- Don't hitchhike!!
- When traveling or visiting your study abroad location, always share your whereabouts with someone else you know on the program. Let them know where you are going, and what day/time you'll be back.
- **Be cautious** when driving or riding in a car and understand potential dangerous situations that occur when you are near or in moving bodies of water. Traffic accidents and drowning are the **leading causes of death for students abroad**.
- **Be alert** in crowded places like train/bus stations and popular tourist destinations.
- **Be aware** of your surroundings.
- Listen to your instincts and **learn to trust them**.

## Protecting Your Living Space / Electronics

- Many thefts abroad occur from having new friends, whether strangers or other students visiting or staying the night in your space. Consider hanging out in public spaces instead.

## Alcohol & Drugs Abroad

Risks of Alcohol & Drug Use Unique to Study Abroad:

- A drop in your GPA
- Disrupted travel plans
- Trouble with international authorities
- Offending host families and locals
- Sexual risks such as rape or sexual assault
- Dismissal from your program



# On-Campus Resources

## Explore Global Programs, Contacts & Support

[www.scu.edu/globalengagement/global-opportunities/](http://www.scu.edu/globalengagement/global-opportunities/)



## Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Phone: (408) 554-4501

Email (general): [cowellcenter@scu.edu](mailto:cowellcenter@scu.edu)

Location: Cowell Center, Bldg. 701

Website: [www.scu.edu/cowell/counseling-and-psychology](http://www.scu.edu/cowell/counseling-and-psychology)



## Campus Ministry

Phone: 408-554-4372

Email: [campusministry@scu.edu](mailto:campusministry@scu.edu)

Location: Benson Center, Room 105

Website: [www.scu.edu/cm](http://www.scu.edu/cm)



## Student Life

Phone: (408) 554-4583

Email: [osl@scu.edu](mailto:osl@scu.edu)

Location: Benson Memorial Center, 205

Website: [www.scu.edu/osl](http://www.scu.edu/osl)



## OML

Office of Multicultural Learning

Phone: (408) 551-7152

Email (general): [oml@scu.edu](mailto:oml@scu.edu)

Location: 832 Market Street

Website: [www.scu.edu/oml](http://www.scu.edu/oml)



## RRC

Rainbow Resource Center

Phone: 408-551-3397

Email (general): [rrc@scu.edu](mailto:rrc@scu.edu)

Location: Benson 11

Website: [www.scu.edu/oml/rrc](http://www.scu.edu/oml/rrc)

