

Cultural norms

Cultural norms and culture are similar concepts but they are not the same thing. Culture is a generic term given to the use of certain tools, practices and beliefs that groups use to survive and thrive in their environment (see the definitions above). **Cultural norms** are the unique set of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours specific to a particular culture. Given a specific environmental context, certain expectations of appropriate and inappropriate attitudes, beliefs and behaviours will arise. These constitute cultural norms.

All groups have culture and they are all the same in purpose but different in means. The term "culture" refers to the purpose while "cultural norm" refers to how to achieve the purpose. Different cultural groups have different cultural norms.

| Culture | Cultural norms |
|--|--|
| A response by a group of people to the challenges of environmental context for the survival of a group of people | Who decides who will marry whom? How much personal space is normal? What is more important, the needs of the individual or the group? How important is hierarchy and authority? Are there specific gender roles? What are they? Who determines them? |

▲ Table 4.1

Enculturation and cultural transmission

Cultures are dynamic in that they change over time to adjust to the changing demands of their environmental contexts, but they do remain largely stable as generations come and go. This continuity is important for the survival of cultures. Their survival relies on attitudes, behaviours and beliefs being passed from one generation to the next. This process is often referred to as **cultural transmission**.

Enculturation is the process by which individuals learn their culture. This could be via observation, formal instruction or direct personal experience. We learn a culture's rituals and traditions in order to function successfully within it.

Cultural transmission is accomplished through the process of **enculturation** and **social cognition**.

Cultural transmission is a theory of learning whereby individuals acquire a significant amount of information simply by interacting within their culture. Enculturation refers to the process of receiving this same information. In other words, cultural transmission and enculturation are two sides of the same coin.

Culture and cultural norms are in a bidirectional relationship with the individuals who make up particular cultural groups. Cultures and their norms grow out of the behaviour of individuals but individuals' behaviour is shaped by culture and norms (see "Social cognitive theory"). This should raise an important question: who decides what norms will be established and passed on?

Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) developed **gatekeeper theory**—a psychology and communication theory related to who controls access to information and ideas in a social group. Gatekeeper theory is simple but important. Gatekeepers are those people in society who decide what information is shared to groups and other individuals. Examples of gatekeepers are politicians, religious or spiritual leaders, news editors, teachers and university professors. Through a filtering process, these individuals decide what information is unwanted, controversial, corrupting or otherwise harmful to society and remove that information from circulation. The gatekeeper role normally starts in the home with parents controlling which messages their children need and which should be avoided.

An example: the culture of honour

A culture of honour exists in societies where individuals (normally men) place a high value on strength and social reputation and where any insult to someone's reputation, family or property is met with a violent response (Brown, Osterman and Barnes, 2009). Some examples of cultures of honour include the southern USA, some inner-city neighbourhoods in major US cities, and parts of the Middle East, India and Pakistan. What each of these cultures honours most varies; some value female chastity and devotion, others aggression towards outsiders or personal reputation. What they all share is a violent (or threat of a violent) response to perceived insults or challenges.

TOK

Are “alternative facts” really facts or are they lies?

Traditionally, the news media played an important role in social groups by deciding what events were important enough to be shared with their readers or viewers. Not only did the news media decide what information was important but they decided how that information should be delivered. In the past, there was an attempt to remain impartial when reporting on current events. It feels sometimes as if this attempt has been abandoned for one-sided and often heavily biased news reporting.

Recently, there has been an increase in what is called “fake news” and public figures stating what are falsifiable statements. Kellyanne Conway, a spokeswoman for President Trump, has defended untrue statements made by the Trump administration by calling them “alternative facts”.

For more information, read the following article.

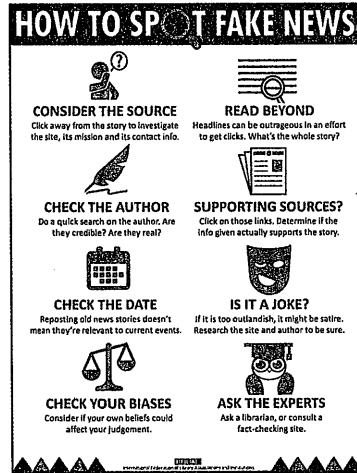


CNN “Alternative facts’: Why the Trump team is planting a flag in war on media”: <http://money.cnn.com/2017/01/22/media/alternative-facts-donald-trump/index.html>

When societies need to make decisions about important things such as climate change, going to war or national budgets they need actual facts. These facts must be “real”: they must accurately represent the world around us. What does it mean for gatekeepers and citizens if we accept the idea that there is such a thing as “alternative facts”?

To what extent has the internet and social media changed the relationship between society and gatekeepers?

To what extent do you agree with the statement: “alternative facts are not facts, they are falsehoods” (CNN, 2017)?



TOK

Natural and human sciences

“Memetics” and cultural transmission

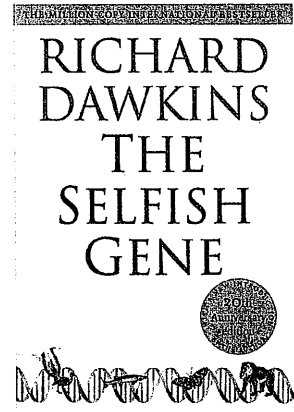
In 1976, Richard Dawkins coined the term “meme” in his book *The Selfish Gene*. A meme is a “unit of culture” (an idea, belief or behaviour). In his book, Dawkins likens the cultural transmission of ideas to the biological transmission of genes—so memetics is the cultural equivalent of genetics in biology. In Dawkins’ words, “Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation” [or learning] (Dawkins, 2006, p 192).

The interesting part about memes is that it does not matter whether the ideas or beliefs are true, a meme simply has to be beneficial to its host culture. According to Dawkins, one of the most successful memes is what he calls the

God meme or religious practices. It does not matter whether God is real or whether any single religion has monopoly on the truth because the idea of God and religion have great psychological advantages to the members of a group whether or not it is true. In this way, the God meme has survived

for millennia. Memetics is very controversial and is considered a pseudoscience by its detractors (Kantorovich, 2014).

Do you accept this analogy between genetics and memetics? What makes you say that?



In terms of origin, cultures of honour may have formed in areas without a clear authority or rule of law. In this type of environment, protecting yourself, your possessions and your family may have required an aggressive defence against insult which could have served as a test to your ability to defend yourself. Social influence to take action against insult or challenge can be as simple as verbal encouragement to respond (for example, "Are you going to let him talk to you that way?" or "Are you just going to sit there and let him insult you? Be a man!") Children who are exposed to adults responding to threats or insults with violence along with accompanying positive reinforcements become **socialized** to engage in that behaviour as well. In short, children learn these behaviours simply by being a part of the culture.

ATL skills: Thinking

Think about social science as an area of knowledge. Do you think the experimental method can be used to gain knowledge in the social sciences? Can we trust the validity and reliability of the findings? To add to your ideas, read:

"Science's reproducibility problem: 100 psych studies were tested and only half held up", an article by Jessica Firger:

<http://www.newsweek.com/reproducibility-science-psychology-studies-366744>



Research in focus: Cultural origin and transmission

Dov Cohen, at the University of Illinois, led researchers in a quasi-experimental study to test his theory that southern white males in the USA responded differently to threats and insults than northern white males. Researchers set up

three conditions to test for difference between northerners and southerners.

The US term "honor states" typically refers to the states in the southern USA.



Approximate extent of the US southern culture of honour states

Participants were male University of Michigan students who either grew up in the south or the north of the USA. In three different conditions, a **confederate** bumped into the participant and

then insulted him by calling him by a derogatory name. The northerners were relatively unaffected by the insult but southerners (comparative to northerners) were found to:

Research in focus [continued]

- think their masculine reputation was threatened
- be more upset (showing elevated levels of cortisol—a hormone associated with stress and arousal)
- be more physically primed for aggression (showing elevated levels of testosterone—a hormone associated with aggression and dominance)
- be more cognitively primed for aggression (completing artificial scenarios with more violent endings)
- be more likely to engage in aggressive and dominant behaviour.

Northerners were only half as likely as southerners to become more angry about than amused by an insult (35% versus 85%). Cohen and his team say this highlights the southern culture of honour in the insult-aggression cycle where insults diminish a man's reputation. This then results in an attempt to restore the lost reputation through aggression and violence (Cohen *et al*, 1996).

Additional research undertaken by Ryan Brown and colleagues at the University of Oklahoma

found that US states with a culture of honour had higher incidences of high school violence. Students in culture of honour states were more likely to have brought a weapon to school in the past month than students from states with no culture of honour. In addition, the researchers found that over a 20-year period culture of honour states had more than double the number of school shootings per capita than states with no culture of honour (Brown, Osterman and Barnes, 2009). In separate research it has also been shown that culture of honour states have a higher level of major depression and both male and female suicide rates (Osterman and Brown, 2011).

The research by Cohen *et al* (1996) illustrates an important issue in relation to cross-cultural research. Although not explicitly about **acculturation** (see definition below), this research raises the question: what happens when members of a culture of honour are asked to live in a culture that does not include an insult-aggression cycle? Anticipated behaviours within a culture are part of the social fabric that hold groups together. When members of a group cannot anticipate the actions of others, mistrust and apprehension can seep into relationships and seed conflict.

Acculturation is a process of psychological and cultural change as a result of contact and interaction between cultures. This can result in changes to all (or both) cultures, not only the non-dominant culture (Berry, 2005).

In the distant past, this would not have caused concern or merited discussion because diverse cultural groups did not meet or influence each other significantly. Cultural conflict is a growing concern in our world as diverse cultural groups are increasingly living side by side with potentially incompatible attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

ATL skills: Thinking

Why do you think some people are reluctant to accept immigrants or refugees from other cultures?

What challenges do you think would be faced by an incoming immigrant or refugee?

How do you think social psychologists could help to ease the challenges presented by the movement of people between cultures?

Acculturation

Why do cultures change?

Cultures are not static. They change over time, just as people change. They can change as a result of modernization, affluence, migration, education and a myriad of other reasons. Acculturation is one type of cultural change. **Acculturation** is a process of psychological and cultural change as a result of contact and interaction between cultures. This can result in change to all (or both) cultures not only the non-dominant culture (Berry, 2008). It is also important to note that change is both psychological (individual) and cultural (social); it affects individuals and society at large. Acculturation is often discussed as a process that takes place between dominant and non-dominant cultures.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that accelerating globalization is driving acculturation. The total number of international migrants (people living in a different country from the one in which they were born) reached 244 million in 2015. That represents a 40% increase from 2000 and includes 20 million refugees (United Nations, 2016). Interestingly, this *does not* mean that we are headed toward a single homogenized global culture. Contact with other cultures may be inevitable but the responses to contact range from total acceptance to total rejection.

Examples of resistance cultures that have survived and maintained their cultural identity are everywhere. First Nations (or Aboriginal) cultures in Canada, the USA, Australia and elsewhere have survived centuries of contact with other cultures. This contact was not always peaceful. Many First Nations cultures have been subjected to forced assimilation policies such as the introduction of residential schools which were designed to “kill the Indian and save the man”. At these government-run or church-run schools, First Nations children were removed from their families, punished for speaking their native languages and forced to adopt European ways of life. Despite this, and over a century of contact with more dominant cultures, many distinct and vibrant First Nations cultures exist around the world. Indeed, many of these cultures are currently experiencing a resurgence, perhaps working in the opposite direction of assimilation as more and more First Nations youths are exposed to, and proud of, their cultural past. These are

examples of cultural resistance and revitalization in the face of cultural domination.

See video

Watch this related TED Talk on pop culture in the Arab world:

https://www.ted.com/talks/shereen_el_feki_pop_culture_in_the_arab_world



Acculturation studies

Studies into acculturation are most interested in how cultures change as a result of migration and the resulting contact with other cultures. As a result of globalization, closing yourself off from contact with members outside your cultural group is no longer a viable option. It has become more important to study the strategies of dealing with acculturation rather than the willingness (or not) to accept change within your culture. In short, the world has become far too interrelated for cultural isolation. **Berry (2008)** argues that individuals can adopt four strategies for cultural change.

Assimilation: when individuals are open to change and are unconcerned about any loss of their original culture. In this strategy, individuals openly seek interaction with cultures other than their own and are willing to adjust their behaviour, attitudes and beliefs.

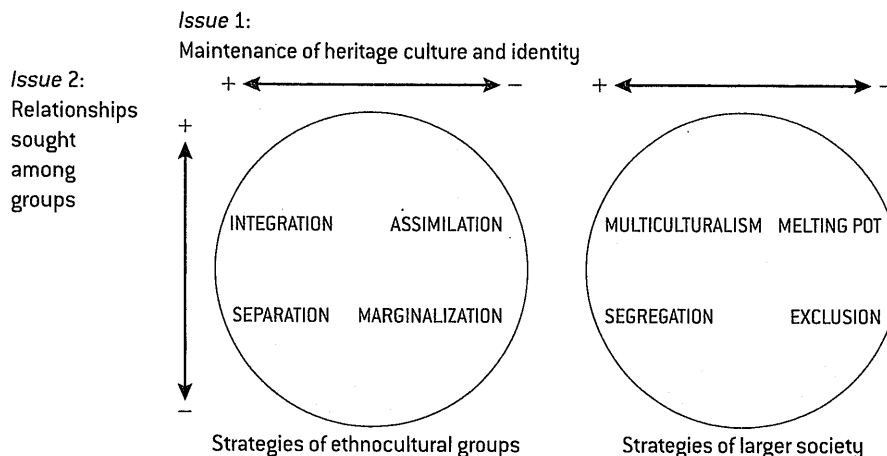
Integration: when individuals want to hold onto traditional values and beliefs but at the same time desire daily interactions with other cultures. This option can only be pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and accommodating toward cultural change.

Separation: when individuals value their original culture and are averse to losing touch with the values and traditions of their past. These individuals actively seek to avoid contact with other cultures.

Marginalization: when individuals have little interest in maintaining their original culture but at the same time little interest in opening relations with other cultures.

The preferred strategy depends upon whether or not you are a member of the dominant or minority culture and what the cultural values are among both cultures. For example, assimilation is often sought by dominant groups reluctant to change and will result in a “melting pot” (for example, the US attitude towards immigration); when separation is forced, it is called segregation (for example, apartheid

South Africa). Multiculturalism is the result of an openness on the part of all cultures widely accepting of diversity (for example, the official immigration policy in Canada). Marginalization is the result of individual decisions to remain isolated and of social policies that limit or at least discourage cultural contributions from minority groups. Figure 4.13 illustrates Berry’s (2008) research.



▲ Figure 4.13 Values of intercultural studies in ethnocultural groups and in the larger society

Source: Berry (2008)

How are acculturation studies designed?

Acculturation is a process that happens over time at both a group cultural level and at an individual level. It is therefore important that longitudinal studies take place that look at change over time. In addition, studies should look at changes in both (or all) cultures, not just the non-dominant one. Studies should also look at changes in individual psychology as well as changes in greater society (culture). Research often employs questionnaires and surveys so findings are often reliant on self-reported data. Finally, as with any psychological research, attaining results from multiple samples in multiple societies is very important. Findings from only one or two cultures is insufficient in explaining acculturation and its impact on identities, attitudes and beliefs.

ATL skills: Thinking and research

Do you think the findings of acculturation studies are valid, considering they are the product of self-assessment? What makes you say that?

What changes would you propose to the research methodology of acculturation studies to make them less reliant on self-reporting?

How does acculturation impact behaviour?

Acculturation happens through contact and exchange between cultures. Communication is a very important determinant of acculturation. Strong communication and involvement on the part of immigrants with their original culture can help the acculturation process in the beginning (social support from the original culture before it is available from the new culture may be important here). Over the long term though, strong communication and involvement with original cultural groups may retard acculturation as this prevents effective communication and involvement with the new, adopted culture (Lahey, 2003).

When examining the impact of acculturation on behaviour, a significant limitation appears. First, most migration occurs from poorer, less-developed countries to richer, more-developed countries. As a result, research is biased toward a study of acculturation in one direction. There is very little opportunity to study the effects of acculturation in the other direction; that is, from rich countries to poorer ones. Acculturation studies look mostly at the movement of peoples from more traditionalist, poorer cultures to more liberal and richer cultures. This makes generalization problematic.

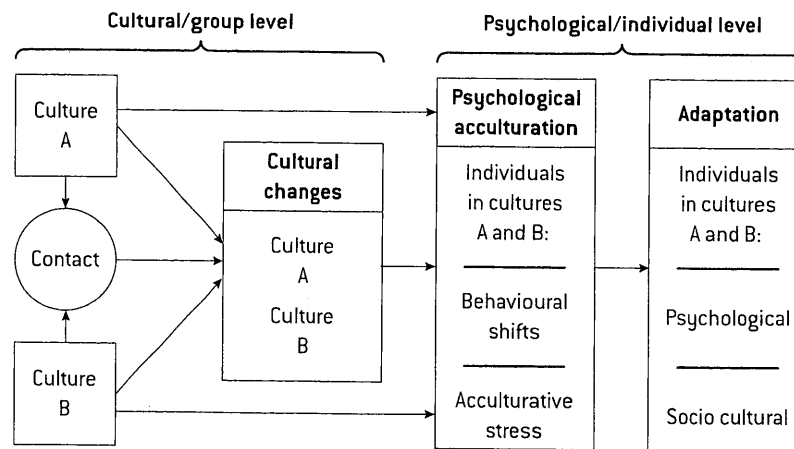


Figure 4.14 A general framework for understanding acculturation

Source: Berry (2005)

The health behaviour of migrants has been extensively studied. Two main effects have been noticed. The **healthy migrant effect** refers to the concept that recent migrants tend to be healthier than their native born counterparts. The second effect, **the negative acculturation effect**, refers to the apparent diminishing difference between migrants and their native born counterparts over time. That is, the healthy migrant effect diminishes with great acculturation into unhealthy host country habits. The healthy migrant effect has not been theoretically founded and seems to run counter to the well-established connection between low socio-economic status and poor health. It has been largely explained by the fact that most host countries select for healthy migrants and that the food environments of migrant origin cultures are often healthier than those of first-world receiving cultures. (see "Clinical bias in diagnosis and the role of culture in treatment" in Unit 5 on abnormal psychology)

ATL skills: Thinking and research

A lot of research in psychology is accused of being W-E-I-R-D (Western, Educated, from Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic countries). As a result, much psychological research is done in a very particular context that may bias findings. Acculturation studies are no exception.

Do you think the healthy immigrant effect and the negative acculturation effect may be two examples of this type of bias? What makes you say that?

Shah et al (2015) found a positive association between obesity and acculturation among 1,375

mainly South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) male migrant workers in the UAE.

Participants completed a health and lifestyle questionnaire between January and June 2012. Over half of those surveyed had lived in the UAE for more than six years and the most common occupations were drivers (23%), labourers and agricultural workers (17% each) and construction workers (12.5%). Findings showed that these migrant workers in the UAE had significantly higher body mass index (BMI) than men of the same age in their cultures of origin. The longer the migrants stay in the UAE, the greater the difference between their BMI and that of men in their culture of origin. The mean BMI among participants was higher than for working men aged 20–59 years in India (31.5 kg/m² versus 23.1 kg/m²) and Bangladesh (26.2 kg/m² versus 19.7 kg/m²). Prevalence of being overweight and of obesity in male Pakistani migrants was more than double than for Pakistani men in their origin culture. In addition, the prevalence of obesity and being overweight in the study sample (63.4%) was also higher than in Emirati men (58.6%). These findings seem to show that acculturation may contribute to obesity and being overweight.

Delavario et al (2013) found that there was a relationship between acculturation and obesity among Hispanic migrants in the USA. A literature review of nine studies conducted on migrants to the USA from eight different cultures of origin have found mixed results between men and women. Six studies found a positive association between higher acculturation and BMI, while three

found that higher acculturation was associated with lower BMI mainly among women. The increase in BMI among men may be because migrants are moving into a culture that promotes unhealthy weight gain more than their culture of origin. Contrary findings for women have been explained by the western ideal of a slim female body and a resultant higher emphasis placed on physical activity and fitness, which would counter the positive association between acculturation and obesity.

Another study, also undertaken in the USA, supports the relationship between acculturation and obesity. This research looked at what researchers call unhealthy assimilation among Asian migrants. Unhealthy assimilation refers to convergence of the health of migrants to a less healthy new-culture standard. Ishizawa and Jones (2016) did find that second- and third-generation migrants had a higher likelihood of obesity than first-generation migrants or individuals from their origin culture, but the researchers did identify moderating factors. They found that neighbourhoods with a high migrant density and those households that retained their original language acted as buffers against obesity (**Ishizawa and Jones, 2016**).

Length of stay has been found to be a contributing factor to obesity in a study of migrants in Portugal conducted by **Da Costa, Dias and Martins (2017)**. A study of over 31,000 people (of whom 4.6% were migrants) was conducted between 2007 and 2008. Findings showed that the prevalence of overweight was higher for native Portuguese than new migrants but that length of residence of migrants (more than 15 years) was positively associated with prevalence of overweight (Da Costa, Dias and Martins, 2017). In this case, it seems that the acculturative process included a change in diet or lifestyle that caused the migrants to mirror the obesity and overweight prevalence rates of native Portuguese.

There are other researchers who challenge the assumption that acculturation and obesity are necessarily correlated. These researchers imply that it is not the acculturative process itself that results in obesity but the culture to which one is acculturating that matters. A study of over 3,100 Spanish adolescents conducted by **Esteban-Gonzalo et al (2015)** found no significant difference in overweight risk between Spanish and

immigrant adolescents. Findings did show that short-term immigrants (with less than six years' residence) had a higher overweight risk than longer-term immigrants and native Spanish people, but that the difference disappeared within six years.

Acculturative stress

Acculturation can be stressful. Obesity, substance abuse and cardiovascular disease are correlated with heightened levels of chronic stress (see Unit 6 on health psychology). Acculturative stress can be defined as biopsychosocial difficulties when adapting to a new cultural context. The term has been used as a synonym for culture shock and psychic shock. Another way to think of it is as the stress experienced by people who are coping with conflicting cultural norms (Sullivan, 2009).

Many people experience acculturation without the associated stress. Protective factors and determinants of acculturative stress include (but are not limited to) affluence, social support and the degree of similarity or difference in cultural contexts. These mirror the protective factors and risk factors of stress discussed in Unit 6 on health psychology.

Acculturative stress can arise when there is conflict between the various acculturation strategies and it can be a difficult challenge to individuals interacting with multiple cultures. This issue can become very problematic when members of the same non-dominant group have conflicting opinions on acculturative strategies. An example of this can be found with the Shafia so called "honour killings" in Canada outlined in "Psychology in real life" below.

According to Berry (2005), integration strategies result in the lowest levels of stress. This may be because individuals are not required to give up social identification with their original culture when they adopt and adapt some identification with their new culture. Assimilation and separation result in intermediate levels of stress while marginalization results in the highest levels of acculturative stress. If we examine these results using social identity theory, it seems that the more connected an individual feels to a group (whether that is the new culture, the old one or both), the less stress is experienced. This may be due to the protective factor of social support—those with connections to both cultures will have access to more social support than others.

Migration and acculturation have also been found to have an impact on mental health in children and adolescents. Batista-Pinto Wiese (2010) argues that migration and acculturative stress can have severe implications for young children and adolescents because migration can be understood

as a life trauma. She points out that younger children can develop insecure, ambivalent or disorganized attachment while adolescents may show increased aggressive behaviour along with anxiety and depressive behaviour related to acculturation.

Discussion

Read “Psychology in real life” below, then answer these questions.

- Do you think acculturative stress played a role in the deaths of the Shafia girls?
- Why do you think it was difficult for these girls’ parents to adapt to the cultural norms of life in Canada?
- To what extent should cultures be accepting and understanding of the norms and values of immigrants?
- Do you believe that immigrants and refugees should assimilate to the culture of their new homes?

Psychology in real life

Globalization has resulted in the mixing of cultures around the world. These cultures often hold conflicting values and in some cases these conflicts can have serious consequences. Take, for instance, the example of honour killing. Honour killing is not condoned by any major religion nor any nation state but some subcultures of conservative, traditional people believe honour killing is an acceptable, often necessary social practice.

An honour (or shame) killing is the murder of a family member due to the perpetrators’ belief that the victim brought shame on the family or community and that the only way to erase the shame is to kill the victim. Honour killing is different from other forms of domestic violence for three reasons: honour killings are planned in advance, they can include multiple family members planning and committing the murder, and perpetrators often do not face negative stigma in their families or communities [Government of Canada, 2016].

In January 2012, three daughters and a first wife of Mohammed Shafia were found dead at the bottom of a canal in Kingston, Canada. In the coming months, it became clear that the Shafia family had killed the three girls, and the woman the girls knew as their aunt, for shaming the family. It would seem that the Shafia daughters’ desired acculturative strategy was at odds with their parents’ strategy.

The girls were caught between a conservative, traditional culture and a liberal, modern one. Their punishment for choosing the latter was death.

Ontario Superior Court Justice Robert Maranger presided over this case, which shocked the nation. Four family members were dead with three family members guilty of their murder. Michael Friscolanti tells the whole story of what happened.

“The evidence, utterly heartbreaking, left no real doubt about the truth. Before they died, the Shafia sisters were caught in the ultimate culture clash, living in Canada but not allowed to be Canadian. They were expected to behave like good Muslim daughters, to wear the hijab and marry a fellow Afghan. And when they rebelled against their father’s “traditions” and “customs”—covertly at first, then for all the community to see—the shame became too much to bear. Only a mass execution [staged to look like a foolish wrong turn] could wash away the stain of their secret boyfriends and revealing clothes.”

[Friscolanti, 2017]: <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/inside-the-shafia-killings-that-shocked-a-nation/>

If you are studying the HL extension, “The influence of globalization on individual behaviour”, see “How globalization influences individual behaviour” for more information. You may wish to review the section “Origins of violence” in Unit 6 on human relationships if you are studying that option.

Exercise

Take the perspective of one of the murdered Shafia girls before this tragedy. Write a letter to your parents explaining how you feel about being split between two cultures. What are your motivations for acting the way you do?

Now take the perspective of one of the Shafia parents or the brother. Write a letter to one of your daughters (or sisters) explaining why you feel the way you do about how the person is acting. What reasons might your daughter (or sister) give for her emotions?

Studies into the psychological effects of acculturation are themselves culturally dependent. It is not necessarily the process of acculturation itself that is the cause of certain behaviour but the interplay of the cultures in contact that determine behaviour. In this sense, obesity may not be a result of acculturation. Instead it may be the result of the acculturation of non-western and western, industrialized cultures. The latter are often

characterized by poor food environments with cheap foods weak in nutrients and high in added sugars and fats, along with sedentary lifestyles (as described in Unit 6 on health psychology). In order to understand acculturation, you must first understand the nature of the cultures in play. Only then will you be able to understand how the elements of those cultures have intermingled in their own unique acculturative process.