

## **In the Mind of the Beholder**

We all believe that we observe reality, things as they are, but what actually happens is that the mind interprets what the eyes see and gives it meaning; it is only at this point, when meaning is assigned, that we can truly say we have seen something. In other words, what we see is as much in the mind as it is in reality. If you consider that the mind of a person from one culture is going to be different in many ways from the mind of a person from another culture, then you have the explanation for that most fundamental of all cross-cultural problems: the fact that two people look upon the same reality, the same example of behavior, and see two entirely different things. Any behavior observed across the cultural divide, therefore, has to be interpreted in two ways: 1) the meaning given to it by the person who does the action, and 2) the meaning given to it by the person who observes the action. Only when these two meanings are the same do we have successful communication, successful in the sense that the meaning that was intended by the doer is the one that was understood by the observer.

### **Understanding Culture Part One**

In the first part of this exercise, read the description of the eight instances of behavior given below and write down your immediate response to or interpretation of that behavior in terms of your own cultural values, beliefs, or perception. The first one has been done for you.

1. A person comes to a meeting half an hour after the stated starting time. Your interpretation: *This person is late and should at least apologize or give an explanation.*

2. Someone kicks a dog. Your interpretation: The person is mean to animals or either the person was protecting themselves from a dog attack.

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3. At the end of a meal, people belch audibly. Your interpretation: \_\_It means a person is full and released themselves, but they should be courteous towards other people in the process.

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4. Someone makes the OK gesture at you. Your interpretation: This means the person is ok with whatever is said or about to be done.

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5. A woman carries a heavy pile of wood on her back while her husband walks in front of her carrying nothing. Your interpretation: I believe the rolls should have been reverse. The gentlemanly thing to do was for the man to carry the heavy pile of wood.

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6. A male guest helps a hostess carry dirty dishes into the kitchen. Your interpretation: I believe the man is being helpful.

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7. A young man and a young woman are kissing each other while seated on a park bench. Your interpretation: I believe the two of them may be in a relationship and possibly be in love with one another, and they don't care who sees them. \_\_\_\_\_

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8. While taking an exam, a student copies from the paper of another student. Your interpretation: I believe this is called cheating. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Understanding Culture Part Two

In the second part of this activity, you are asked to imagine how these same eight behaviors would be perceived or interpreted by someone from a culture different than your own. The particular cultural difference is described in each case. Read each behavior and the description of the culture, and then write in the space provided how you think a person from such a culture would interpret that behavior.

1. A person comes to a meeting half an hour after the stated starting time. How would this act be interpreted?

A) by someone from a culture where people always arrive half an hour after the stated starting time Interpretation it is normal for this culture \_\_\_\_\_

B) by someone from a culture where meetings never start until at least an hour after the stated time Interpretation; This is something they are used to.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Someone kicks a dog. How would this act be interpreted: A) by someone from a country where dogs always carry disease : Interpretation: They believe the dog could endanger their health. \_\_\_\_\_

B) by someone from a country where most dogs are wild and vicious Interpretation: This is an act of protection. \_\_\_\_\_

3. At the end of a meal, people belch audibly. How would this be interpreted: A) by someone from a culture where belching is the normal way to compliment the food: Interpretation: Belching is a compliment to the cook or host. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Someone makes the OK gesture at you. How would this be interpreted: A) by someone in whose culture this gesture is obscene Interpretation: It could cause a problem because of the misunderstanding of the gesture \_\_\_\_\_

B) by someone in whose culture this gesture has romantic connotations Interpretation: It could allow someone to know that they are interested in someone romantically. \_\_\_\_\_

5. A woman carries a heavy pile of wood on her back while her husband walks in front of her carrying nothing. How would this be interpreted: A) by someone from a culture where women are proud of their strength and ability to work hard

Interpretation: This is a chance for a man to show off how proud he is of his wife. \_\_\_\_\_

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6. A male guest helps a hostess carry dirty dishes into the kitchen. How would this act be interpreted: A) by men from a culture where men never clean up after a meal

Interpretation: He could be considered a weak man \_\_\_\_\_

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B) by the hostess from that same culture Interpretation: She could be confused on why the man is helping her if that is not the usual custom. \_\_\_\_\_

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7. A young man and a young woman are kissing each other while seated on a park bench. How would this act be interpreted: A) by someone from a culture where men and women never touch in public Interpretation This could be offensive in the culture \_\_\_\_\_ they \_\_\_\_\_ are from. \_\_\_\_\_

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8. While taking an exam, a student copies from the paper of another student. How would this act be interpreted: A. by someone from a culture where exams are not fair and are designed to eliminate students at various stages of the education system Interpretation: This means they believe you can help one another with exams to succeed in a system that wants you to fail. \_\_\_\_\_

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B) by someone from a culture where it is shameful not to help your friend if you are able to Interpretation: It is normal to help out friends. \_\_\_\_\_

Vernon Merrick-Field assignment #4

**After answering all of the above questions, reflect on what you learned from doing this assignment and then write at least one paragraph on what you learned from doing this assignment. Attach to the drop box for FIELD ASSIGNMENT due.**

**After doing this assignment, I can see how some gestures and acts can be done the same way but viewed differently in different cultures. As we already learned earlier, the way people are raised through family, education, and religion play a major part of our culture. If we are raised with different viewpoints with similar gestures and acts it could be pretty disorienting when you deal with a culture different from the one you are use to. That is why it is important to learn and get as much information as you can about culture different from yours if you plan on visiting or being a part of another culture for any length of time.**