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BOOK REVIEW

Shaules, Joseph (2015). *The Intercultural Mind: Connecting Culture, Cognition, and Global Living*. Boston, MA, USA: Intercultural Press; 240 pages.

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Significant technological advances over the last 250 years continue to revolutionize how we humans perceive, understand, and interact with the world around us. Fundamentally, they have opened up fresh perspectives on how we interact with each other in both the physical and virtual worlds. Communication technologies now allow us to find, contact, and carry on meaningful discussions with people a half a world away with scant consideration of time or geography; transportation technologies bring us into first-person contact with others both in new locales and in our everyday hometowns. As never before in human history, technology is multiplying the venues and opportunities for people from different national, regional, ethnic, familial, professional, and religious cultures to meet and mingle.

Yet, many of these interactions are less than successful—and some outcomes tragically poor or even disastrous. Academics and practitioners have invested much time and activity in researching, theorizing about, and attempting to instruct individuals and organizations about the various aspects of perception, expectations, and behavioral patterns that make groups of humans, who share so many biological and behavioral similarities, distinct from each other. The challenges these professionals face include understanding (a) how one's own multiple and overlapping cultures and identities affect what one values and how one perceives, interacts, and behaves; (b) how individuals deal with missed cues and misunderstanding when interacting with someone who has dissimilar ways of perceiving, interacting, and behaving; and (c) how to bring the knowledge of both parties' realities into play simultaneously to build "bridges" and create reflective processes that can improve the interaction, enhance collaboration, and nurture relationships.

Even with the extensive research and exponentially growing literature focused on these seemingly infinite facets that may appear in intercultural interactions, a debate has been raging among theorists about how culture affects the individual on the intrapersonal level. Is culture

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“software of the mind” (Hofstede, 2001), hardwired as predispositions and learning devices into a person’s developing operating system (e.g., Keller, 2008), or a simple toolbox of cognitive perspectives that one can draw on at will in interaction (see, e.g., Friedman, 2014; Weber & Dacin, 2011)? Can or should one try to eliminate the influences of one’s native cultures when attempting to interact with someone dissimilar, or must those influences always and inevitably be in play? In other words, how much agency does the individual have over the group-level aspects of culture that become embedded in each of us both neurologically and environmentally at the moment we are born into a group or decide to become part of one?

Scores of models and theories have been proposed, explored, developed, and offered as tools by researchers in recent decades to explain the role of culture in human relations. Unfortunately, many of these models and theories are turning out to be rather simplistic or essentialist in nature, lacking the crucial sensitivity to circumstances and frames of reference. Although such approaches appear to make the complexity of human interaction—particularly between and among individuals with significantly different perspectives on how to live and behave—easier to grasp, the contexts and potentially important unique components of interaction are too easily diminished or disregarded. Many of these approaches have been highly commercialized and provide the stock-in-trade of what has become a diversity consulting and training industry. Some practitioners in this field may feel threatened by recent explorations and discoveries, particularly in the field of neuroscience, that shed light onto the deficiencies of a number of these theories and practices. The natural outgrowth of such realizations is beginning to be seen in new perspectives that suggest alternative forms of intervention.

Ongoing advances in human biological research are demonstrating how the developing brain, in fact the entire neurological system, functions in such a way as to rely on its earliest imprints of a person’s cultural norms in continuously functioning to organize and interpret incoming stimuli and reinforce these original messages (e.g., Kitayama & Park, 2010), thus influencing and, at times, directly affecting how interaction with others and the world will be carried out (Domínguez Duque, Turner, Lewis, & Egan, 2010). In the coming decades, further technological advances will continue to add significantly to how we understand the holistic nature of the human system and thus how we view the complexity at the nexus of individual agency, group-level influences, and cognitive, affective, and somatic responses. These rapidly developing areas of research confirm that an individual’s endowment and development are intimately related to and influenced by many of the cultural norms and practices of groups into which that individual was born and nurtured (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Kim & Sasaki, 2014). As a result, over time, many of the current models and theories on the role culture plays within the individual organism and on the dynamics of his or her group’s norms and behaviors surely will be eliminated or at least profoundly refined—and new theories and applications will emerge.

Amid this rethinking of generally accepted theory and practices comes *The Intercultural Mind: Connecting Culture, Cognition and Global Living*. Throughout its 240 pages, Joseph Shaules provides a very readable presentation on how what we currently label cognition and culture interact. Seamlessly, Shaules compares and intertwines recent neuroscientific research with traditional perspectives and theories. He uses first-person experience to illustrate how culture is at work within each of us at both the deep unconscious, intuitive level and the conscious, interactive level. Moreover, he shows how the development of a conscious,

reflective, and attentive mind can be the principal and universally available means for recognizing and (re)organizing what unconscious culture produces. On the basis of this process, he underscores the potential for developing better strategies for successful functioning and engagement on a day-to-day, moment-to-moment basis.

Of particular value are the insights found in chapters on “The Architecture of Bias” and “The Language–Culture Connection.” The material found in these chapters enables the reader to understand the presence of unconscious bias as a normal function of the human mind, yet one in which problematic components in everyday speech and behavior can be better managed through strategic yet simple observation of and reflection on one’s own ongoing experiences.

Shaules adopts a metaphor to connect theory with experience by directing us to pay attention to what he labels the “Oz Moment.” He draws on the widely disseminated children’s book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which was written more than a century ago and popularized in musical theater and film. It is the fantasy story of an adolescent girl who is whisked away from her familiar life and environment by a tornado and dropped into a strange land with fantastic characters, behaviors, and settings that she somehow needs to navigate in her effort to return home. Using this metaphor, Shaules highlights the feelings and confusion that one might experience when engaging in an unfamiliar environment or interaction and facing realities that one does not comprehend or perhaps will not know even how to describe. The ability to recognize such Oz moments can alert us to awaken the intercultural mind and to look for fresh perspectives in immediate events by drawing on a wider range of internal resources, thus making it possible to stake out a potentially better direction in one’s forward course.

The Intercultural Mind demonstrates how technology can advance and refine research in the human sciences and open new insights into the many perspectives on interpersonal interaction, whether within one’s familiar culture or in an environment that—or with a person who—is unfamiliar. For both the academic and the practitioner, Shaules’ book offers an integrated and well-conceived presentation on the need for contemporary researchers to consider developing technologies as partners in their exploring theoretical concepts, conducting empirical investigations, and reflectively applying their discoveries to understanding and to work with everyday concepts and practices in an increasingly globalized world. This points to greater promise for the ongoing development of insights and tools that will enable dissimilar people to better understand themselves and each other as cultural beings in their interactions. Developments in both research and applied areas can be a step forward for humanity in its challenge to create collaboration and cohabitation in a multicultural world and for us, as individuals, as we continue on our path toward becoming globally aware and interpersonally enlightened citizens.

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