

# BPS-SPS conference 2014

## Making sense of acculturation: Self-reports and personal experience of international students

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# Overview

- interdisciplinary symposium:  
combining subject perspectives &  
methods in immigration research
- positioning my contribution
  - social psychology: person in society
  - phenomenology: making sense



# Acculturation psychology

individual  
adaptation



socio-cultural  
adaptation

host society  
expectations



- **culture** frame: maintaining heritage culture or adopting new culture
- **contact** frame: seeking contact within or between groups
- **identification** frame: identifying with one or several cultures

# Acculturation psychology



**John W. Berry:**

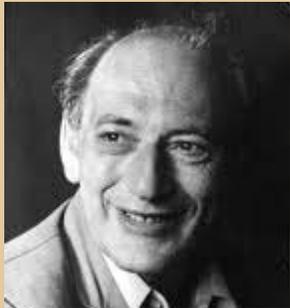
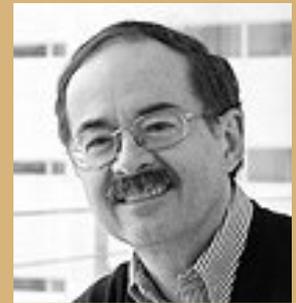
desire for culture  
maintenance & contact

integration, assimilation,  
separation or marginalisation

**Richard Bourhis:**

maintaining & adopting culture

interactive acculturation  
model: consensual,  
problematic, conflictual fit



**Henri Tajfel:**

social identity & sense of belonging

categorisation, identification, action

**Valery Chirkov:**

Critical psychology of  
acculturation

beyond measurement,  
classification & prediction



"Understanding [...] requires talking to people, taking their perspectives, analysing their stories, and discovering the meaning of their actions [...] if researchers are looking for a context-bounded understanding of particular events and actions, they have to analyse social, cultural, and historical contexts, take people's perspectives, and through the reconstruction of their experiences understand these people and their behaviours." (Chirkov, 2009, p. 97)

# Phenomenology

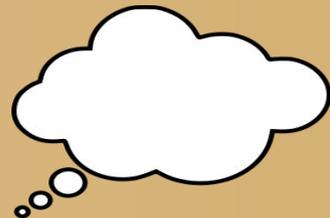
- Jonathan Smith: **interpretative phenomenological analysis**

- double hermeneutic: interviewer/analyst makes sense of the participant making sense of lived experience
- bridging the gap between case studies & quantification
- open-ended in-depth interviews, identification of themes



- application to migrant acculturation experiences

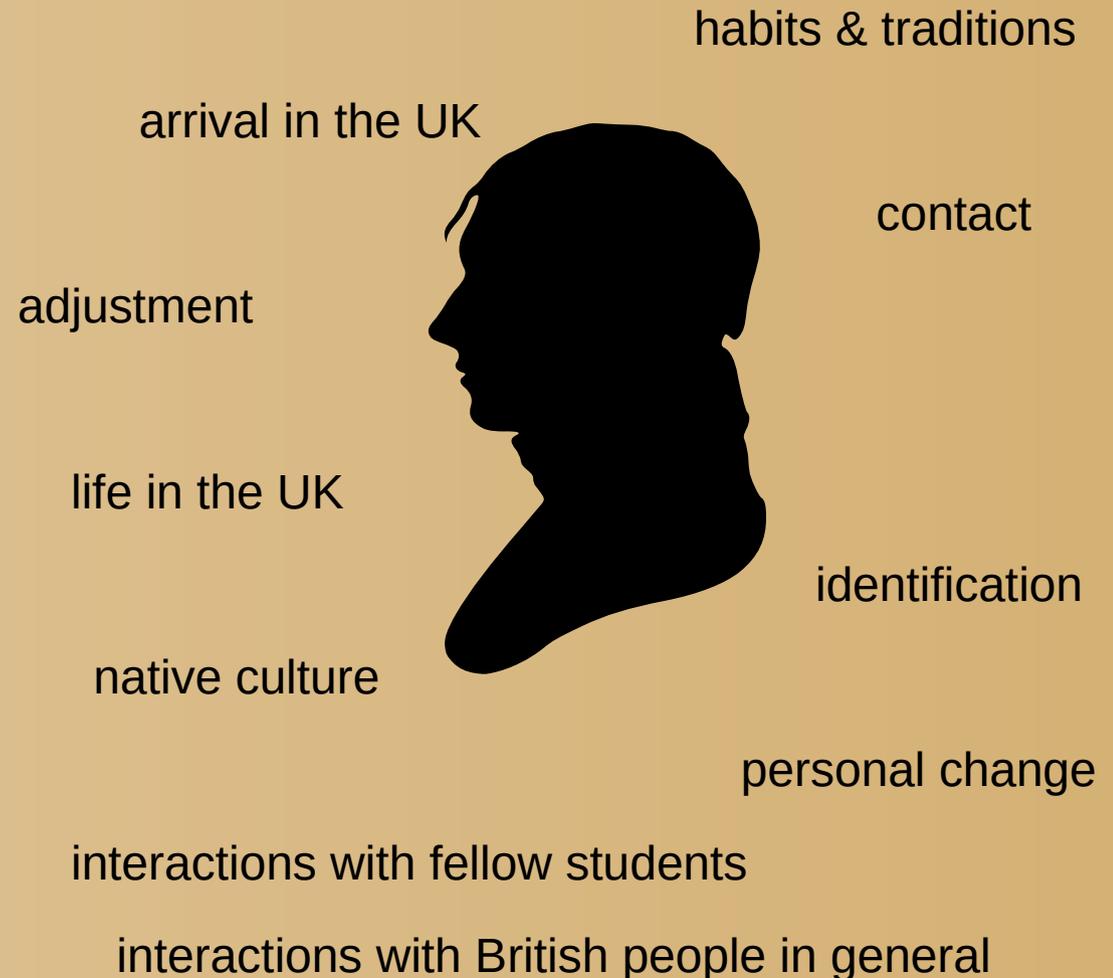
- How do migrants experience, and make sense of, the transitions involved in migration?
- How do migrants understand and negotiate the interplay of culture, intergroup contact, and identification?
- How do these experiences relate to the topics involved in quantitative measurement scales of acculturation?



# Method

- 4 interviews

- Sachit, Nepali postgraduate, 32
- Xenophon, Greek undergraduate, 37
- Karl, South African undergraduate, 20
- Valentin, Slovak undergraduate, 20



# Method

- questionnaire

## Making sense of acculturation: Questionnaire

(Based on van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011)

I am a male / female (*please delete as appropriate*) student at Canterbury Christ Church University. I am \_\_\_\_ years old (*please insert*) and have arrived in the United Kingdom from \_\_\_\_\_ (*please insert*) during the past four years.

I identify with British culture.

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
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I consider myself to be a part of British culture.

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
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I identify with \_\_\_\_\_ (*please insert*) culture.

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
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I consider myself to be a part of \_\_\_\_\_ (*please insert*) culture.

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
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I consider it important to honour British traditions.

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
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I consider it important to adopt at least parts of British customs and culture.

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
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I consider it important to honour \_\_\_\_\_ (*please insert*) traditions.

strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
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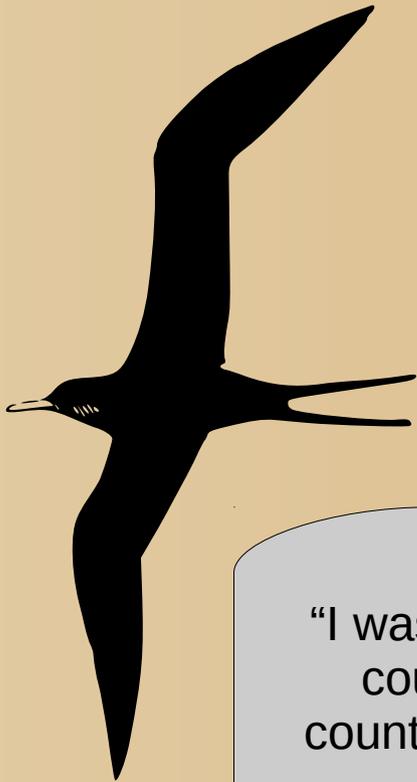
identification (native & British)  
culture (native & British)  
contact (native & British)



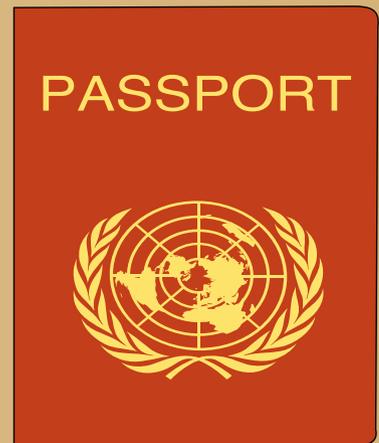
reflection on questionnaire & interview

# Sachit's perspective

- doctoral student of health studies
- extensive multicultural experience from research & personal life
- double migrant



“I was already a migrant for 6 years in a different country. And then I just moved from another country **to** another country, a third country. So for me it was, like, all well settled ...”



“It was very normal.”

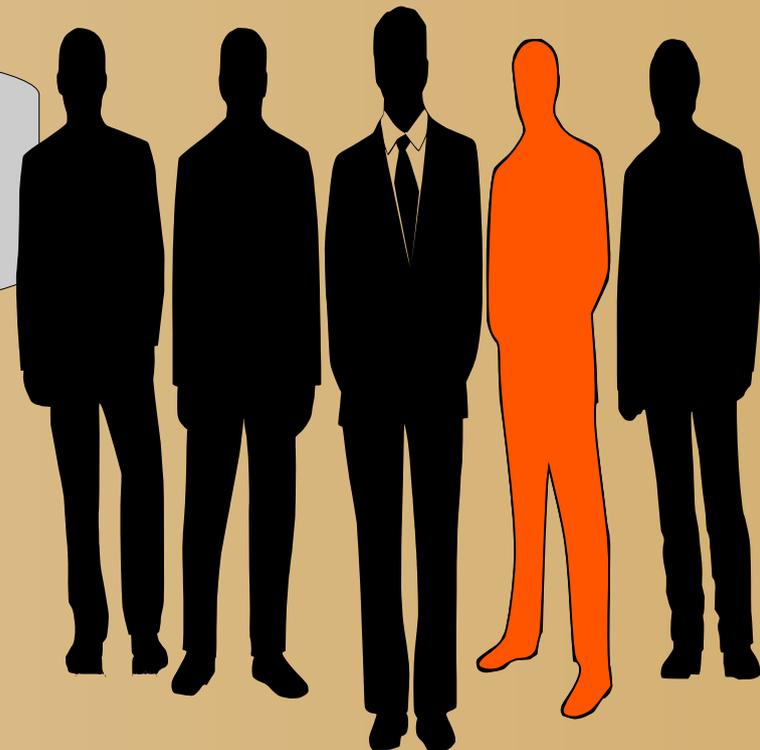
# Sachit's perspective

"I have my own tradition, I have my own culture, I have my own religion. And on top of everything, I'm individual. And it depends on me what I want to do."

- individual character & responsibility

"I haven't felt anything. I mean, as an individual, I've been there and I see someone else there and we interact as a human being and that's it."

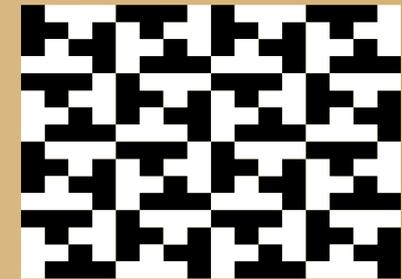
"What is good for me, and what is bad for me, I have to decide it as an individual."



# Sachit's perspective

- individuals pragmatically adapt to respond to the demands of intercultural settings

“WHERE. You. Are. And how you are going to adapt yourself in that environment”



“It doesn't matter, I mean, even if you have migrated somewhere else and then you are coming to a new country, whenever you are coming to a new country or a new place, I would say, it's not only about a country, if you are coming to a new place, it always takes time to ... settle. I mean, If I go from here to Nepal, even in Nepal, although I belong to Nepal, it's still ... it'll take some time for me to settle down there. Because everything will be new.”

# Sachit's perspective

- individuals pragmatically adapt to respond to the demands of intercultural settings

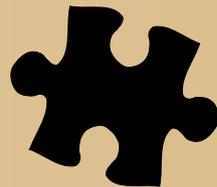
"I go to Nepalese party and Nepalese, um, cultural events, and Nepalese barbecue and Nepalese social things - because of my research, I have to go there actually - so when I'm there, I'm very much like Nepalese, so I speak in Nepalese language, I joke in Nepalese language and ... do all sorts of [things] of what is like quite famous in Nepal. So I do like that. When I'm in a club with a British friend or with, like, multicultural friend ... then of course the sense of humour is completely different there. And then I enjoy that side as well. So **there** I adapt to **that** situation, that space, that particular context. In Nepalese environments I adapt to that particular context. Because if I go to the Nepalese party and if I'll not behave like them then they'll think me as, like, "oh, who is this guy and where he has come from".

# Sachit's perspective

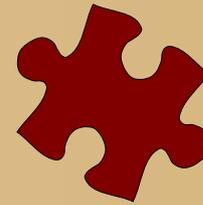
- focus on problem-solving, decision-making, life management, including visa considerations, resources, etc.
- very practical stance
- universal realities of a globalised and multicultural world

"It was a new place, where ... of course the language was not the problem, but still it was a new place where I had to find a place to live, a place where I can work, a place where I can study what I'm going to do in the future. So it **is** difficult to, to decide about, like, what you are going to do"

"We are all mixing."



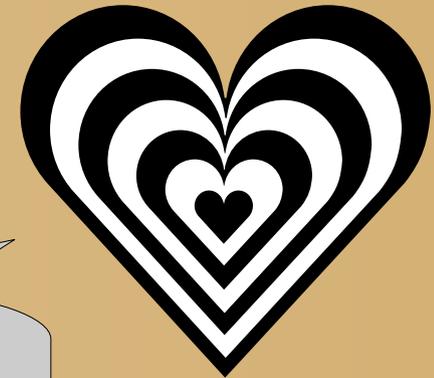
"We know about everything."



"What is British culture?"

# Sachit's perspective

- But culture maintenance, contact, identification **are** important.
  - regular family contact & advice
  - observation of traditions, sometimes after reminders
  - communication within & between groups is crucial



“You get adapted to the new space but it's always there in you.”

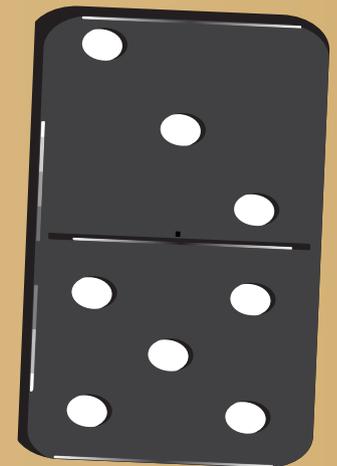
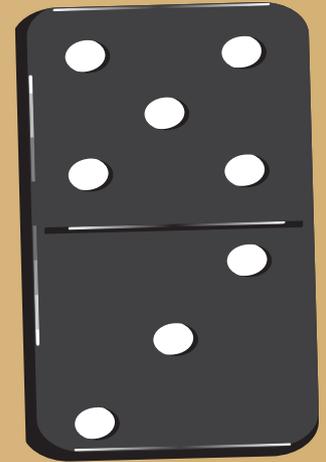
“It will always remain in me because I was born and brought up there. So I can't lose that.”

“So ... that, that culture or socio-cultural things, whatever I have experienced there, that is **always** there. [...] That always impacts when I make some decision. Like, let's see, if I'm making some decision even **now** ... then the first thing I will think about is, like, my family. Because that's where, that's the culture I've been, like, grown up”

“It doesn't matter how long I'll live here, still I think I'll be very much rooted in my own culture.”

# Impressions from others

- Sachit's perspective was probably the **most** pragmatic and individualistic one – or he was just the most open and eloquent about it.
- But (not surprisingly for international students) migration was **generally** understood as a **personal** choice, a good thing for the individual, and something that the migrant can make work.
- **Social support** – both from friends and family abroad and from friends, colleagues and fellow students in the UK – is important.
- The **multicultural** (not just bicultural) context into which respondents migrated was appreciated.
- You are the same person in both cultural contexts, but do – and, sometimes, feel – different things. (to be continued)



# Next steps

- in-depth & cross-case analysis
- improving acculturation research
  - going interdisciplinary & multi-methodological (again! ... see Berry, 2009; Chirkov, 2009)
  - taking into account individual perspectives, particular acculturative settings & general processes
- political & practical applications
  - privileged position of educational migrants may favour individualistic acculturation strategies – how about others?
  - tools to explore the match between individual migration experiences & state policy?

“Ethnography is all about culture, so if you are studying culture you can’t study culture without ethnography!”

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