

Intercultural Sensitivity in the Integrating Suburb  
of Westville, Durban, South Africa

Noel B. Peters and Kevin Pertchick  
California School of Professional Psychology- Fresno, USA

Keyan Tomaselli and Ruth Tomaselli  
University of Natal - Durban, South Africa

Abstract

To investigate intercultural sensitivity, the Davis Russell-Peters Intercultural Sensitivity Instrument (1994) was administered to 203 participants situated within residences in the formerly white suburb of Westville, Durban, South Africa. The subjective experience of the participants was evaluated by comparing demographic variables with a suggested continuum of six stages between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. Respondents appeared to traverse the polarities related to their perceptions of reality and its subjective meaning. The preference for ethnocentric attitudes appeared to be a construct employed as a result of categorization and separation caused by former restrictive legislation of Apartheid, and strong cultural and religious anchors. It appears that groups gravitate towards their own cultural group because of the security it offers in times of political unrest and fear. Also, groups appeared to maintain healthy self-concepts and a preference for ethnorelativism, creating a world that values difference and is open to integration with the larger society.

The pioneering studies of ethnocultural populations in the United States conducted by cross-cultural psychologists during the 1980's revealed that the nature of people's life orientation has traditional and contemporary facets. The traditional attitudes relate to family, religion, and marriage. The contemporary relate to education, achievement, and success. Studies of acculturation and adaptation to the host setting revealed a clearly selective approach to the emulation of aspects of the dominant culture (Berry, 1989). Ethnocultural populations adapt to many forms of behavioral expression in Western host societies, but some forms of expression, such as the ritualization of Hindu marriages, are considered integral parts of cultural identity, and these are rigidly maintained. Values that ethnocultural groups are willing to compromise include, an expressed need for self-development, admiration for the Western-based value "opportunity for all," and a clear movement towards speaking English. Values that are viewed as unalterable include loyalty to family, respect for elders, cooperation, doing one's duty, and maintaining appropriate forms of etiquette in social interactions.

During the 1980's, cross-cultural theorists Triandis (1993) and Berry (1987; 1989) formulated a theoretical context which gives perspective to the above named findings. Triandis (1993) identifies an individualist versus collectivist basis to all world societies. In general, nonwestern societies tend toward collectivist cultural values with emphasis on family, community, interrelationships, and authority. Groups are the basic units of social perception. By contrast, Western societies, in general, focus on the individual as the basic unit of social perception with independence, personal development, and autonomy as the favored normative goals (Triandis,

1993). For fifty years, South Africans have lived with institutionalized Apartheid in the form of residential zoning, separate education, social interaction and occupation, and have lived with a legislative lifestyle that differed from their original collectivist value structure of their inherited culture. This often resulted in alienation from the major South African culture and ethnocentrism towards their own group (Peters, 1991).

Studies of acculturation attitudes in plural societies are widely known. According to Berry's (1989) conceptual framework, all acculturating people are confronted with the issues of cultural maintenance of their own in-group and the changes arising from interethnic contact. The ideological demands of Apartheid have created a strong in-group emotional bonding within South African ethnic groups, which is rooted in the maintenance of cultural identity and cultural heritage. Previously interethnic group contact in private life was discouraged in South Africa. Because separation was institutionalized, little documentation exists on how people realistically view intergroup contact. As interaction slowly takes place, it would be informative to ask people whether they do indeed value such relationships. There is some implicit indication of the value placed in Western-European languages and lifestyles. Today, South African ethnic groups tend to speak English and several aspects of their lifestyle are essentially Western-European.

Research by Bennett (1989) provided the theoretical framework for this investigation. The continuum is divided into six stages of development. The six stages are Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration, and comprise a continuum between the polar opposites of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. Each stage represents a way of experiencing difference between cultures. A Denial of difference may occur when physical or social isolation precludes any contact with significantly different cultures. This position represents the most ethnocentric stance, where one's own viewpoint is unchallenged and central to all reality. The Defense against difference attempts to counter perceived threat to the centrality of one's view. This stage recognizes significant differences between cultures although it perceives them as a threat. Minimization engages in "burying" the differences between cultures under the weight of cultural similarities; thus, differences are trivialized. Acceptance indicates that cultural difference is both acknowledged and respected. Difference is perceived as fundamental, necessary and preferable in human affairs, but it is not evaluated at this stage. Adaptation includes altering one's own behavior and cognition to cultural difference. This is a temporary alteration of cognitive processes, and it is this ability to change the processing of reality that constitutes an increase in intercultural sensitivity. Integration makes an application of ethnorelativism to one's own identity. Adler (1977) stated that an individual who is able to experience integration is "Not simply the person who is sensitive to many different cultures, rather he/she is a person who is always in the process of becoming a *part of and apart from* a given cultural context."

It is assumed in the model that intercultural sensitivity increases with movement to the right towards a more "relative" treatment of difference. The midpoints of the continuum represents a division between "ethnocentrism" as that term is generally understood and "ethnorelativism," a term coined as an appropriate antonym of ethnocentrism (Porter & Samovar, 1983). The later stages of ethnocentrism include concepts such as Adler's (1977) "multicultural man," Bochner's (1979) "mediating person," Heath's (1977) "maturity," and "intercultural competence" (Dinges, 1983; Brislin et al., 1983).

The objective of the current study was to investigate the level of intercultural sensitivity

among various ethnic groups now living in the formerly "white" suburb of Westville. The experience of difference is measured along a continuum spanning six levels between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. The stages are consecutive and consist of Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. Demographics recorded were the participants' age, gender, ethnicity, education, number of years at current residence, and religion. It is hypothesized that the white residents will exhibit more ethnocentric responses than the Asians, blacks, and coloreds. The Asians, blacks, and coloreds have more to gain from the abolition of Apartheid than the whites; thus, they will be more open to ethnorelativistic responses than the white subjects. Also, it is believed that the Asians will show the strongest ethnic identity while the whites who are thought to be less aware of their ethnic identity will show the weakest response to their own ethnicity.

## Method

### *Participants*

Two hundred and three South African individuals participated in this study. The mean age of the respondents was 42 years ( $SD = 18.6$ ). One hundred and three of the respondents were male and 100 were female. There were 85 Asian, 10 black, 10 Colored, and 98 whites who completed the questionnaire. Their occupations were primarily at the managerial and professional level. One hundred and forty-one of the respondents had a minimum of a technical college degree. Of the 200 individuals that answered the residency questionnaire, 40 had been in residence five or fewer years, and 160 had been in residence over five years. The demographic questionnaire revealed that there were 134 Christian, 20 Islamic, and 41 Hindu individuals, with eight participants choosing the "Other" category of religious preference.

### *Materials*

The Davis Russell-Peters Intercultural Sensitivity Instrument, South African Version (ISI) was used. It is a 69 question self-report questionnaire based on a four-point likert scale for each item. A brief demographic survey designed specifically for this population was included at the beginning of the ISI. The demographics recorded included age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, level of education, number of years at current residence, and religion.

### *Procedure*

The ISI, South Africa Version, was administered to 203 families in the racially integrated suburb of Westville, Durban, South Africa. Research assistants administered the instrument on a door to door basis within the neighborhood. In some instances the ISI was completed in the presence of the administrator, and other times it was collected at a later time.

## Results

The ISI, South African Version was found to be valid by two independent doctoral level clinicians with expertise and extensive training in multicultural sensitivity. Each item was

judged to be valid for each scale, and all items are included under only one of the six scales. An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the six scales of the ISI. The results showed that the six scales formed two factors, which supported the theoretical basis of the two factors ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. Integration, Adaptation, Acceptance, and Minimization loaded under Factor 1 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Factor Analysis of the ISI Scales

ISI Factors	Factor Loading for Factor 1	Factor Loading for Factor 2
<b>Ethnocentrism</b>		
Denial	----	0.87
Defense	----	0.90
Minimization	0.65	0.50
<b>Ethnorelativism</b>		
Acceptance	0.91	----
Adaptation	0.86	----
Integration	0.87	----

\*only factor loadings above equal to or greater than 0.5 were reported  
-- no factor reported

Factor 1 accounted for 46% of the variance that is attributable to the ISI. Denial, Defense, and Minimization comprised the second factor that accounted for 31% of the variance attributable to the ISI. Thus, the six factors of the ISI follow the proposed continuum between the two factors of ethnocentrism, and ethnorelativism.

A reliability analysis performed with all 69 items of the ISI showed that the instrument is internally consistent, alpha = 0.87 (see Table 2). A reliability analysis was

Table 2: Reliability Analysis Using Cronbach's Alpha to Establish Internal Consistency

ISI Factors	Alpha Level
<b>***Ethnocentrism</b>	
Denial	0.74
Defense	0.77
Minimization	0.73
<b>***Ethnorelativism</b>	
Acceptance	0.72
Adaptation	0.71
Integration	0.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.87</b>

performed on each of the six scales. The scale of Denial contained 14 items, Defense contained 17 items, Minimization contained 11 items, Acceptance was composed of ten items, Adaptation contained seven items, and the scale Integration was composed of nine items. All scales were found to show high internal consistency, and a Cronbach's Alpha revealed that all scales were reliable over the  $\alpha = 0.70$  level.

The overall pattern of results was obtained by comparing the means of the six scales with separate six demographic variables. The demographic variables were age, gender, number of years in residence, religion, ethnicity, and level of education. The variable age was correlated with each of the six scales of the ISI. No significant correlations were found. Each of the five remaining demographic variables used one-way ANOVAs to compare the means between the demographic and the scales variables. A Tukey's-HSD test was used as a post-hoc analysis to specify the significant relationships within the ANOVAs. There was no significant difference between the gender of the participants and how they responded on the ISI.

The demographic variable ethnicity revealed that black South Africans scored significantly higher on Integration than Asian South Africans,  $F(3, 201) = 3.13, p < .05$  (see Table 3).

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Ethnicity.

ISI SCALE	Asian	Black	Colored	White
Denial	mean =30.2 SD=8.9	mean =29.9 SD=5.1	mean =30.2 SD=7.9	mean =31.9 SD=5.6
Defense	mean =34.1 SD=9.1	mean =36.8 SD=7.9	mean =33.8 SD=6.0	mean =35.1 SD=10.5
Minimization	mean =28.4 SD=6.0	mean =33.9 SD=6.0	mean =30.3 SD=9.7	mean =30.1 SD=7.3
Acceptance**	mean =30.2** SD=6.0	mean =35.7** SD=8.7	mean =32.5 SD=5.7	mean =32.6** SD=4.5
Adaptation*	mean =21.1* SD=4.0	mean =25.4* SD=10.2	mean =22.0 SD=4.0	mean =22.3 SD=3.7
Integration*	mean =31.0* SD=6.8	mean =37.4* SD=8.5	mean =32.0 SD =6.6	mean =32.6 SD=6.0

\*significant at the  $p < .05$  level

\*\*significant at the  $p < .01$  level

Blacks also scored higher than Asians on Adaptation,  $F(3, 201) = 3.47, p < .05$ , and black South

Africans scored higher than Asians on Acceptance,  $F(3, 201) = 4.83, p < .01$ . It was also found that white South Africans scored higher than Asian South Africans on the Acceptance scale of the ISI,  $F(3, 201) = 4.83, p < .01$ .

The subjects' religious affiliation was compared to each of the six scales of the ISI and it revealed that Christians scored significantly higher than Islamic individuals on the measure of Adaptation,  $F(3, 201) = 6.01, p < .01$  and on the measure of Acceptance,  $F(3, 201) = 8.94, p < .01$  (see Table 4).

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Religion.

ISI SCALE	Christian	Islamic	Hindu	Other
Denial	mean =30.2 SD=8.9	mean =29.9 SD=5.1	mean =30.2 SD=7.9	mean =31.9 SD=5.6
Defense	mean =31.4 SD=7.3	mean =30.9 SD=10.1	mean =29.1 SD=5.8	mean =33.3 SD=4.4
Minimization	mean =30.0 SD=7.2	mean =26.3 SD=6.8	mean =29.6 SD=5.9	mean =31.1 SD=5.2
Acceptance**	mean =32.7** SD=5.5	mean =26.1** SD=5.4	mean =31.9** SD=5.1	mean =30.8 SD=2.1
Adaptation**	mean =22.8** SD=4.7	mean =18.9** SD=3.4	mean =20.9 SD=3.4	mean =21.5 SD=2.2
Integration	mean =32.7 SD=6.8	mean =28.5 SD=5.7	mean =32.0 SD =6.2	mean =32.5 SD=5.6

\*\*significant at the  $p < .001$  level

Also on the Acceptance scale, Hindus scored significantly higher than Islamic individuals,  $F(3, 201) = 8.94, p < .01$ .

The length of residence in Westville found that those who lived in the area five or fewer years scored significantly different from those who lived there over five years. Those who lived in Westville five or fewer years scored significantly higher on Acceptance,  $F(1, 201) = 11.11, p < .001$ ; Adaptation,  $F(1, 201) = 7.04, p < .01$ , and Integration,  $F(1, 201) = 14.72, p < .001$  (see Table 5).

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of the Length of Residency

ISI SCALE	< 5years	> 5years
Denial	mean =30.5	mean =31.2
	SD=8.6	SD=6.4
Defense*	mean =31.7	mean =36.4
	SD= 7.6	SD=10.4
Minimization	mean =30.0	mean =29.3
	SD=5.0	SD=7.9
Acceptance*	mean =33.4	mean =30.8
	SD=4.8	SD=5.9
Adaptation*	mean =23.0	mean =21.3
	SD=4.8	SD=4.1
Integration*	mean =34.3	mean =30.8
	SD=5.8	SD=6.8

\*significant difference at the  $p < .01$  level

Also, those who lived in Westville over five years scored significantly higher on the Defense scale,  $F(1, 201) = 11.99, p < .001$  than individuals living in Westville five or less years.

Level of education was another demographic variable that was able to distinguish between residents of Westville. It was found that those with only a high school education scored significantly higher on measures of Denial,  $F(2, 198) = 6.70, p < .01$ ; Defense,  $F(2, 198) = 9.61, p < .001$ , and Minimization,  $F(2, 198) = 5.12, p < .01$  than respondents with an university level education (see Table 6).

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Level of Education.

ISI SCALE	High School	Professional College	University Degree
Denial*	mean =33.5* SD=9.6	mean =31.4 SD=6.4	mean =29.2* SD=5.5
Defense*	mean =38.3* SD=10.0	mean =35.7 SD=10.7	mean =31.8* SD=8.1
Minimization*	mean =31.4* SD=7.2	mean =30.7 SD=8.6	mean =28.1* SD=5.5
Acceptance	mean =31.1 SD=5.3	mean =32.4 SD=6.5	mean =32.0 SD=5.5
Adaptation	mean =21.4 SD=3.6	mean =21.4 SD=4.5	mean =22.6 SD=4.8
Integration	mean =31.5 SD=5.3	mean =31.1 SD=7.8	mean =33.2 SD=6.7

\*significant at  $p < .01$  level

### Discussion

The Davis Russell-Peters Intercultural Sensitivity Instrument, South African Version (ISI) was found to have good content validity and be a reliable measure of intercultural sensitivity. The test was found to be consistent with itself and each of the six scales was found to show high internal consistency. The ISI was based on the theory that the concepts of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism are polar opposites. Ethnocentrism is thought to be the concept where an individual bases their interactions with people of other cultures on an egocentric viewpoint. Ethnorelativism is when an individual is able to share a viewpoint with individuals of another culture and possibly integrate characteristics of other cultures into their own world view. Bennett's (1989) division of the ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism divides the continuum into six factors. The six scales of the ISI follow Bennett's division of the continuum. It was found that the six scales formed two factors. The first factor was composed of Integration, Adaptation, and Acceptance, with Minimization showing moderate inclusion with this group. This first factor is supported by the ethnorelativism end of the continuum. The second factor thought to be ethnocentrism was comprised of Denial, and Defense, with a moderate inclusion of Minimization. Thus, the six scales of the ISI are supported theoretically by Bennett's (1989) six factor theory and statistically by the current research.

People are both individually different and developmentally different in the ways they encode and experience their environments. Experiences the person constructs from exposures to various



environments are uniquely correlated to that person's perceptions, cognition, emotions, and more enduring characteristics of intelligence, interests, and personality. In addition, each person at each developmental stage evokes from others responses that reinforce positively or negatively that person's behaviors (Scarr, 1992).

In general, the residents of Westville appeared to be more alike than different in their preferences for the six scales on the Ethnocentrism-Ethnorelativism continuum. They share living in an upper-class neighborhood with occupations that are generally managerial or professional. Even by world standards, this is an exceptionally highly educated group of individuals. There were no major differences in attitudes that occurred with regard to age or gender.

Ethnicity revealed a difference between Asians and blacks. Black South Africans scored significantly higher on Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration than Asian South Africans. It was also found that white South Africans scored higher than Asian South Africans on the Acceptance scale of the ISI. A study by Peters (1997) reveals that Asians have a greater preference for collectivism than individualism. When applying this distinction to the Asian population it would appear that they would be higher on the Ethnocentric polarity of the continuum for cultural, religious, and identity reasons than other groups. However, they are adept at integrating with the larger society as it pertains to the sociocultural, sociopolitical, and economic domains. Although all the groups subscribe to the Integration scale, blacks had higher mean scores than all the other groups. This indicates that they share the common attitudes of the other groups, but more so. Blacks appear to be more open to integration than all of the other groups. This could be in part due to the fact that the other ethnic groups had much more to lose in terms of privileges than the blacks. All groups in this neighborhood indicate a willingness to be sensitive to the many different cultures in their midst. This underscores the evolutionary process of becoming *a part of* and *apart from* their given cultural context.

Christians scored significantly higher than Islamic individuals on the measures of Adaptation and Acceptance. Christianity appears to be more accepting and adaptive than other religious groups; thus, they are more ethnorelativistic than Islamic individuals. It would appear that Islam is characterized by greater denominationalism, which promotes a religio-centric stance. Islamic residents subscribe not only to their religious values with fervor, but also to their cultural ties. The results illustrate a greater tendency of Islamic residents towards ethnocentrism from a religious standpoint. This does not indicate that Islamic participants are separated from the community. In fact they integrate with the community at large when it is purposeful and practical. Because Hindus registered significantly higher than Islamic individuals on the Acceptance scale, it not only indicates that Hindus are more open to other faiths, but that Islamic individuals are less open to other faiths.

The length of residence in Westville indicated that those who have lived there five or fewer years scored significantly higher on Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration, while those who lived there over five years scored significantly higher on the Defense scale. The majority of residents who had lived in Westville for over five years were whites. Historically, whites had lived in privileged enclaves, bolstered by the Group Areas Act and were unwilling to accept other ethnic groups into their neighborhood. Other ethnic groups moving in were prepared to adapt for the sake of upward mobility and seeking a better life. With the dismantling of Apartheid, whites who are unable to accept integration have the option of remaining in these neighborhoods, moving to another less integrated neighborhood, or emigrating. Since the demise of Apartheid, large numbers of

whites have emigrated to foreign countries.

This highly educated sample indicated a preparedness for integration that is above the level of those less educated. Those with only a high school education scored higher on Denial, Defense, and Minimization than respondents with a university degree, and this is indicative of a strong sense of ethnocentrism. The more educated respondents have apparently had more opportunities to relate to other groups through educational experiences and their education may help them to make more choices that are independent of the political climate than the less educated participants; therefore, the more educated participants have the propensity for a greater openness to the acceptance of difference. Also, high school students who are younger than those at the university level have been politicized more rapidly than older subjects. The years leading up to the new political dispensation have polarized groups for the purpose of counteracting perceived threat to their in-group. Young people in high school have been subjected to a series of political demonstrations that have interrupted their education, and those intent on continuing their education have gravitated towards their own in-group for survival; thus, indicating a greater direction towards ethnocentrism.

### Conclusion

Westville residents appear to share many common characteristics despite the fact that Apartheid kept them apart for decades. The demographics indicate that they share many characteristics in common, and while they differ on select variables, their preference is in the direction of the ethnorelativism polarity. Because of the legacy of categorization by the former Apartheid laws and of cultural preference, the groups value their own cultural identities, while making honest attempts at integrating with the larger society. They apparently retain and value what is good within their own cultural construct and absorb what is considered useful from the larger context. The respondents in the sample can be compared to Mahler's (1975) ideology concerning the development of the infant as it separates from its mother and achieves its own individuality. During this early phase of life, the infant moves away from its mother and explores its new freedom at some physical distance from its mother. But during this entire period, the mother continues to be needed as a stable point, a "home base," to fulfill the need for refueling through physical contact. The subjects in this study use their culture of origin in a similar manner a child uses its mother as "home base" in order for them to explore their new found freedoms with other cultural groups in the larger society.

Future studies of this group will most probably reveal a greater propensity towards ethnorelativism and cultural harmony. Since, this is an evolutionary process, it must be understood that this community has made some significant developments from the era of total separation. The measured amount of differences in ISI scale means based on demographics suggests a weak predictive validity when using demographics as the only independent variables. It would be advisable for future ISI researchers to use additional quantitative and qualitative measures to estimate cultural harmony. Further standardized instruments need to be developed to explicitly measure these cultural phenomenon and to create strong convergent validity to test the constructs of cultural attitudes. For the ISI, re-wording test items, and altering or removing some of the items to make the internal consistency of the test stronger, is needed. Also, increased use of the test with split-half reliability runs is needed to improve the reliability of the

instrument. It is also necessary that the ISI be used on larger groups and different populations and ethnicities in order to form standardization samples and to create an understanding of the validity of an individual's score.

### References

- Adler, P. (1977). Beyond cultural identity: Reflections upon cultural and multicultural man. In R. W. Brislin (Ed.) *Culture learning concepts, application, and research*. (pp.24-41). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 10, 179-196.
- Berry, J., Kim, U., Minde, T., and Mok, D. (1987). Comparative studies of acculturative stress. *International Migration Review*. 21, 491-511.
- Berry, J., Kim, U., Power, S., Bujaki, M. (1989). Acculturation attitudes in plural societies. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*. 38, 185-206.
- Bouchner, S. (1979). The mediating man and cultural diversity. In R. Brislin (Ed.) *Culture learning: Concepts, application, and research*. (pp.3-17). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Brislin, R., Landis, D., Brandt, M. (1983). Conceptualizations of intercultural behavior and training. In D. Landis & R. Brislin (Eds.). *Handbook of intercultural training, volume 1: Issues in theory and design*. (pp.1-34). New York: Pergamon.
- Dinges, N. (1983). Intercultural competence. In D. Landis & R. Brislin (Eds.) *Handbook of intercultural training, volume 1: Issues in theory and design*. (pp.176-202). New York: Pergamon.
- Davis-Russell, E. D., (1990). *Intercultural Sensitivity Instrument*. CA: California School of Professional Psychology-Fresno.
- Davis Russell, E. D., & Peters, N. B. (1994). *Davis Russell-Peters Intercultural Sensitivity Instrument*. CA: California School of Professional Psychology-Fresno.
- Heath, D. H. (1977). *Maturity and competence: A transcultural view*. New York: Gardner Press.
- Peters, N. B. (1991). *South Africa: A Catholic Perspective*. Fresno: Pioneer Publications.
- Peters, N. B. (1997). Patterns of acculturative stress and acculturation attitudes among South African Indians. *Online Journal of Psychology*,
- Porter, R. E., & Samovar, L. A. (1983). Approaching intercultural communication. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.). *Intercultural communication: A reader 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. (pp.26-42). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Triandis, H. C. (1993). *Culture and social behavior*. New York, McGraw-Hill.