

Intercultural contact essay

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Intercultural Contact Essay Introduction I have chosen the movie “ Crash” seen in class as the subject of my intercultural contact essay (Haggis, 2004). Following a brief summary of movie, I will discuss the terms learned from intercultural communication course at George Mason University and apply them to various scenes in the movie, highlighting the cultural insensitivity characters portray towards members within their ethnic community and those who come from a different ethnic background.

Brief Summary of the Text The film “ Crash” is focused on the racial and social tensions that exist among people from different ethnicities. Set in Los Angeles, California, the film depicts constant metaphoric and physical clashes among members of the black, white, Hispanic, Persian and Asian Community. The film interweaves stories of its main characters among each other, which includes a police detective, his ill mother with a drug problem, two thieves, a district attorney and his wife, a locksmith and his family, two cops and their supervisor, a Hollywood director and his wife, and an immigrant shopkeeper, his wife and his daughter. In the clashes of ideas and values that take place among these characters, the audiences see the racial stereotypes and prejudice in play that people of various ethnicities express for other members, who may or may not share a similar ethnic bond or cultural values. Actors and actresses are seen generalizing their opinions, often coming to wrong conclusions about others based on looks and clothing. Unable to communicate and afraid of their own fears, people begin to blame others for their hardships and things that are wrong in the society. False accusations and misleading truths exacerbate the gap that already exists among these people of various ethnicities, leading to heightened tensions

and more cultural clashes. Hatred, anger, guilt, compassion, kindness, and a multitude of other emotions are seen throughout the movie. Application of Theories and Terms Though I have previously seen the movie “ Crash” I did not previously realize that it was highlighting the intercultural conflict and tensions that is experienced by living in an ethnically and culturally diverse community (Haggis, 2004). Throughout the movie, several theories and terms from intercultural communication can be applied to various scenes. First, the concept of Ingroup-Outgroup is prevalent in the movie. To briefly define these terms, “ Ingroups are groups with whom we feel emotionally close” while “ Outgroups are groups with whom we feel no emotional ties” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). The two thieves considered everyone, including members of the black community, as part of outgroup. One of the thief would always condone his other thief friend for liking hockey, considered to be a white man’s sport. He would also rebel from travelling in the bus, claiming that the big windows on the bus are meant to degrade the black community. His initial perception of everyone as part of the outgroup lead him have a very negative outlook on life. Generalizations were made about people, leading to false accusations. For example, when a Persian-immigrant was discussing with his daughter about the type of gun he wants to buy at the gun store, the gun seller became annoyed from the internal conversation and called him “ Osama, ” labeling him as a member of a terrorist organization based on his language. Later in the movie, when the Persian-immigrant’s shop is ransacked, his wife is seen erasing graffiti which labeled them as Arabs. Additionally, when one of the thieves discovers a few Cambodian slaves locked inside a van, a comment is passed about these

slaves as being a “ different kind of Chinamen. ” Associating everyone who is from the East and may have similar physical features to those of native Chinese under the umbrella of Chinese origin is also an example of generalization. “ Prejudice is an individual’s feeling and predispositions toward outgroup members in a pejorative or negative direction. In the intercultural context, prejudice is the sense of agnostic hostility towards the group as a whole or towards an individual because he or she is a member of the group” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). When a white police officer had an argument with a black HMO Manager, he became prejudice against the members of the black community for not receiving an approval to take his father outside of the current doctor’s network for medical care. He is later seen to release his frustration and abuse his power by pulling over a Hollywood director and his wife who has had couple of drinks. He is seen to be sexually abusing the director’s wife in the name of pat down and security measures, humiliating the women and her husband in public. As another example, after the Persian-immigrant’s shop is ransacked, he develops hostility against the locksmith who had earlier warned about changing the door. His prejudice leads him to drive upto the locksmith’s house and pull the trigger of the gun he had previously bought. I also saw a transition of one of the thief characters from ethnocentric states to ethnorelative states. Initially in the state of denial, he would defend his perception of the world as being the only real and good one. He would also minimize the cultural differences, claiming how all the people are same when it comes to their perception of looking down on the people from the black community. A good example of this denial, defense, and minimization is seen in the scene when both thieves

walk out of a restaurant and discuss the reasons as to why the black waitress did not offer any coffee to them. Following the incident when the two thieves try to steal the Hollywood director's car and one of the thieves ends up hiding in the same car following a police chase, he begins to accept the cultural differences and adapt his perception to the new frame of reference developed from his new experience. His acceptance, adaptation, and integration with the existing society is seen through his decision to travel in the bus, which he had earlier refused. He also is shown to free all the human slaves locked in the van he had earlier stolen. These states of ethnorelativism show the new intercultural sensitivity the character develops for other people who were from a different ethnicity or cultural background. References to stereotypes were also made evident during the movie. "A stereotype is an overgeneralization towards a group of people without any attempt to perceive individual variations" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). A scene which represents a great example of the use of stereotypes in the movie "Crash" is the debate between the police detective and another member from the DA's office on the investigation of the gun shots made by a white undercover cop, which resulted in the death of a black undercover cop. In this debate, the member from DA's office passes remarks about the black community and how the lack of opportunity and good educational institutions is why prisons have more black people than any other ethnic group. He continues to generalize about several other factors that deeply affect some people from the black community living in poor and less developed areas. An example of racism can also be seen in the movie. During a conversation between a white cop who wants to switch to another

cop partner and his supervisor, existence of racism is evident and seen yet all the officers and their supervisors are bound by a structure in which they have to function knowing this harsh reality. The cop's supervisor states how a complaint on another cop for acts of racism will backfire, resulting in the loss of jobs for both. Concluding the conversation with a suggestion, the supervisor offers the white cop to request for a change of assignment based on personal made-up reasons rather than the actual problems in the LAPD.

Conclusion Watching the film is in class and following it with a discussion did become a great intercultural experience. The film highlights a very significant aspect of human life, the ability to communication or lack thereof among an intercultural society. People form wrong preconceptions of other people based on how they look or dress, many times out of which it is reinforced by a single bad, personal experience. Lack of intercultural understanding leads to wrong generalization of people. Furthermore, our social and personal identities influence our everyday behaviors in a particular manner regardless of the whether we are conscious of it or not. This film also highlights how people can show acts of compassion despite their prejudices against certain members of society and behave on a more humanitarian level. We often label a person as good or bad depending on their behavior. However, rather than condoning the person itself, it is far more important to realize that a person is capable of good and bad behavior, which is elicited by the situation or circumstances people are put in their day to day life. To reduce the racial bias and prejudice against people who are categorized as outgroups, an effort must be made at a conscious level to educate ourselves and others about their culture, their customs, traditions,

and ways of verbal and nonverbal expression. Learning to overcome our own fears will be necessary to overcome these intercultural barriers as more often than anything, it is our perception that holds us back. Being considerate of other people, even when some people may seem to be ignorant and lack intercultural sensitivity can also help reduce the intercultural tensions that exist among people living in a diverse community.

References Ting-Toomey, S, & Chung, L. C. (2011). Understanding intercultural communication. USA: Oxford University Press. Haggis, P. (Director) (2004). Crash [Theater].