

Interview and analysis re constructing cultural perceptions essay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Intercultural Communications

Interview and Analysis: Re/Constructing Cultural Perceptions

Part A

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to an interview about your perceptions of the United States. I would like to know many things like what your impressions were before you moved here and what expectations you had formed. (Samovar, 2006, p. 219) I'm interested in understanding the events or conversations in the US that have surprised you or led to a better understand of the culture. I am also curious are you able to understand situations that may be confusing to you. I have a set of basic questions and I would like you to give detailed answers or examples when you can. In other words do not feel that you only have to exactly answer the question, I am interested in hearing about your whole communication experience.

Do you have any questions? Let us begin with the questions if that is okay with you.

Interview Questions:

- 1) How were your ideas of what to expect in the United States?
- 2) What did you notice first as a positive impression?
- 3) What did you notice first as a negative impression?
- 4) How are your children fitting into the culture?
- 5) What is the biggest problem you have communication with people in your neighborhood?
 - a) Verbal?

b) Non-verbal?

6) What is the biggest way communication in Greece differs with communicating in American English?

7) Do you find anything hard to understand?

8) Do you have any support in your community for helping understand the culture of the United States?

Part B

Interviewee: The name of my interviewee is Maria Petrakis from Greece. She is a mother of two and has immigrated to Greece with her husband and two children. She is in her thirties and has traveled to other countries in Europe and Asia but this is the first time she has been in the United States. Her husband accepted a job at a prestigious state university located in a small city. Her husband had immigrated to the US a few years after he received his PhD degree because he was offered a job in the manufacturing industry. Her husband is an engineer. All four members of the family learned English as a second language but her husband has been the only one that has had a lot of real world practice. Maria and the children have spoken English at their English classes and sometimes at home the three of them practice together. Maria did prepare the children by having them listen to animated movies in English without dubbing or subtitles.

Interview Analysis

Maria described her first positive impression of the US was how beautiful she found the street where she will be living. The roads are straight and all the yards are very big. She told me that Greece is an ancient country so most

cities have built up around the ancient market place. Also Greece is along the sea and has a lot of mountains. The streets are not straight with big intersections because there is not room to build the highways that way. The streets nearest to the coastline follow the shape of the coastline. When you get further away from the coastline the streets become straighter and more like in the US. In the mountains the highways are narrower in the US and have a lot of curves and steep parts. So for her the idea that you can travel in a car for miles and miles on a straight highway is a new way of thinking about travel.

She told me that the most shocking thing she noticed when she first arrived in the United States was the fact that American people are very big. I think she meant fat but she did not want to sound rude. This tied into her explaining the difference about food in Greece and the US. She said when she was growing up they did not have American-type hamburgers or snacks like ten different kinds of potato chips. Now she said Greece has snack foods with lots of salt and sugar like in the US. This is causing a problem with obesity in the children. But even before that there was a problem with obesity in children because grandparents always push food on their grandchildren.

When I asked why they would do that she told me, “ Grandparents remember being hungry during World War II and they want their grandchildren to have all the food they can eat so they don’t feel hungry.” Greece has experienced many wars so the history of Greece is a lot different in the US. Maria told me that she had a problem talking with Americans

about Greece because the Americans did not understand the historical context behind what she was saying. (Samovar et al., 2006, p. 216) She felt embarrassed to give people a history lesson so she had started changing the subject to children or food. The best way she said to change an uncomfortable conversation to a pleasant conversation was to start talking about the types of food in Greece. Americans seemed to enjoy talking about that a lot. Maria said she enjoyed talking about Greek food, too, and had shared many of her own recipes.

Maria told me that before move to the US all of her impressions about America came from Hollywood movies and televisions shows. She mentioned that the television show “ Desperate Housewives” is on she watched at home before she immigrated here. She knew the story was fictional but she thought the women in the show were probably a lot like real life housewives. She became worried because she is a housewife who will stay at home to raise the children. Her worries were about the cultural differences between Greek and American stay-at-home wives. Greek mothers (and fathers, too) have a tendency to put their children’s education before anything else. She was relieved to find that the same type of attention to their children’s education is also on the minds of her neighbors. Otherwise she was afraid she would not be able to find many things to talk about. Essentially she learned that both Greek and American parents have a priority to make sure their children are doing well in school and are receiving a good education. Her main worry that her children will be able to go to a good university and later find a good job is the same worry that Americans have.

Maria said she had to learn not to touch people when she was talking to them because Americans would jump back or look at her with surprise. She said in the Greek culture the personal space between two people is very small. People stand close together. They also sit closer together at concerts and other events that are outside. In Greece the idea of touching a person when you are talking to them is not given a second thought. For example, tapping on their arm to make a point happens sometimes. The biggest difference in non-verbal communication was that Greek people are very affectionate when they greet each other hello and good-bye. They usually hug and give each other one kiss on each cheek. It may be an “air kiss” but still it is considered the socially acceptable way. When this does not happen people may become upset because their feelings are hurt.

Maria also talked about how quiet Americans seem because Greeks are very emotional and dramatic no matter what they are talking about. Also Americans do not use their hands very much when they talk. This has made it difficult to understand Americans because in Greece she counted on these cultural cues to understand the context of conversations. Another thing is that Americans have a lot of nicknames for people and for things. Trying to understand what they are talking about is very difficult for Maria because she does not have the same cultural context. She does not understand if they are talking about movies or about politics or what they are talking about. Also she was distressed about the way Americans use a lot of slang which she does not understand. She said, “I am too embarrassed to keep asking questions to try to understand what they are talking about. Even

though I speak English sometimes cannot even pick out the subject they are talking about.”

The children are doing well with their grades at school. There is a problem that some parents and children do not like having foreigners at the school. Her children speak English but with a Greek accent. She expects they will be speaking English with an American accent very soon. She said the strangest thing that has happened is that they were accused of being terrorists and a stranger yelled at them they should go back to where they came from. The whole family has dark hair and their skin is not exactly white like northern Europeans. They were in a park and speaking Greek together when the incident happened. Now Maria says she has decided it is better to speak English when they are not at home. She and her husband do not want their children to forget Greek though so they will continue speaking Greek at home.

Maria said she feels very fortunate because they have a Greek Orthodox Church within driving distance so the Greek community at the church has become important to her. I asked her if they helped her understand American culture but she said they did not. The Greek Church is more about Greek culture and helping her not feel homesick. It is also the place that the children can play with Greek-American children. That is helping the transition of the children into the new community she feels.

There are important differences in how Greeks and Americans speak based on the difference in cultural orientations. Greek is a highly contextual

language based on a long history of language and non verbal cues. American English is basically low contextual except for current popular topics slang so it is very difficult for Maria to understand in the neighborhood.

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