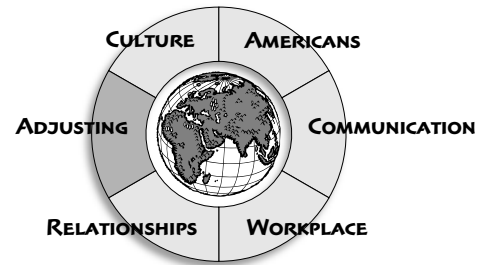


CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS



In this chapter you examine three of the most important social relationships PCVs have during their tour of duty:

- ☞ relationships with host country families;
- ☞ friendships with host country people; and
- ☞ romantic relationships with host country partners.

In a sense, your entire Peace Corps experience is nothing but a series of relationships with all manner of people in a wide variety of roles. All you have learned in this workbook about culture and cultural differences is only meaningful when applied in specific situations with specific individuals. This entire book, then, is really about how to handle relationships, both social and work related.



“Why,” he said at last, “why did you come alone?”

“I thought it was for your sake that I came alone, so obviously alone, so vulnerable that I could in myself pose no threat, change no balance. Alone, I cannot change your world, but I can be changed by it. Alone, I must listen, as well as speak. Alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal, not political. It is individual. Not We and They, but I and Thou.”

*—Ursula Le Guin
The Left Hand of Darkness*

5.1—DEAR JAN

In this letter from Jan's friend, Gavin, you find a lot of talk about friends and friendship. Mark any passages where you think Gavin has misunderstood or misinterpreted something that's happened or otherwise reached an incorrect conclusion:

Dear Jan:

1. Greetings from the East! Sorry you couldn't make it out in January, but there's still time. Shall I entice you with stories about what the sky is like out here, the colors of the sunset, the lushness of the hills? Maybe you'll feel more adventuresome later in the spring.

2. Speaking of adventures, there's certainly no shortage of them, is there? But they aren't the kind most of us expected, I think, at least not the kind I expected. I thought the hard part would be the bugs, the food, learning the language, and doing without TV. But that was easy. It's the people that are the challenge (and for whom I'm no doubt a challenge as well, as I remind myself when I'm being rational and objective, which isn't very often). I've made a couple of friends, I think, but I've got a lot to learn about friendship in this place. One of them, a guy I work with, invited me over for dinner last week, and as we were eating he asked me if I could "help" him with a problem he's having at work. I said sure and asked what it was. It turns out he wants me to lie for him about an incident that happened two weeks ago, when he said he had lost a report that in fact he just hadn't had time to write. The details don't matter, but I was shocked he would ask me this.

3. This same man can be very kind, too. I was a bit taken aback a few days ago when I happened to mention in conversation that my grandmother had recently passed away. I think he was hurt. He got a bit quiet and asked me why I hadn't told him sooner. He was very solicitous, asking if there was anything he could do. The next day he sent me a card—I guess they give these out at the church—announcing that he was having two masses said for my grandmother sometime next month.

(continued)

4. Things at work are going as well as can be expected. The hardest thing to get used to is the casual attitude some people have toward their jobs. We were really busy last week, getting ready for the visit of the Minister of the Interior, and right in the middle of this, one of our key people suddenly disappeared for four days. When I asked where she was, someone said her cousin had died. I felt sorry, of course, but the cousin lived right here in the village, and I know the funeral took place on Monday, and this woman didn't come back to work until Friday.

5. Can you keep a secret? I think I have a girlfriend. I would say I knew I had a girlfriend, but it's a little hard to tell. She accepts my invitations to the movies or the pastry shop, but she always manages to bring someone else along with her, her sister, a best friend, once even her mother! We haven't held hands yet or kissed (is this getting too graphic for you?), but she did wear a pin I gave her. I'll keep you posted. At this pace, we might start using each other's first names before I complete my service.

6. Well, I could go on and on (and usually do in my mind), but it's time for my walk through the village. I started doing it for exercise (to the other end and back here takes 45 minutes), but now I do it as much for the show this place puts on. There's always something to learn or something new happening. I've decided that either this is a very interesting village or it's a very boring village and I'm one stimulus-starved individual.

*Cheers,
Gavin*

5.2—THE CIRCLE OF RELATIONS

As you enter the world of host country social relationships, you need a good map to guide you. This exercise asks you to construct such a map or chart showing how both you and your host country friends relate to and regard other people.

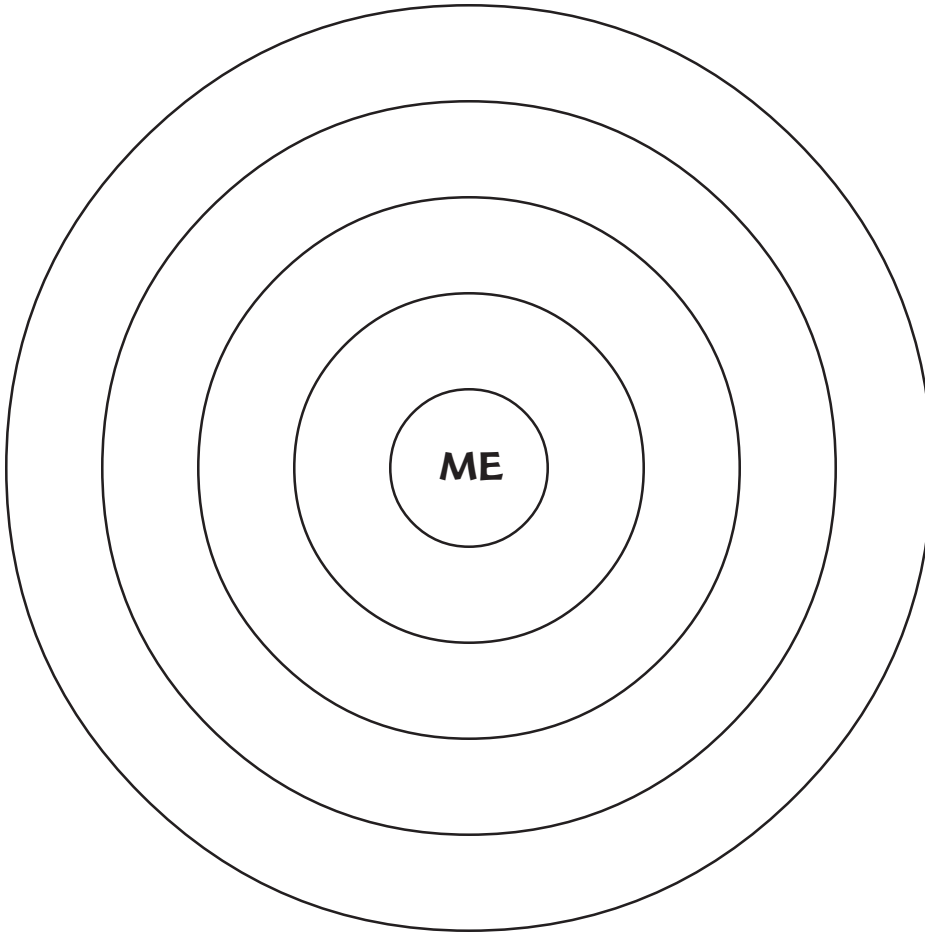
PART ONE

At right is a series of rings or concentric circles with you in the center. Look at the list of types of people which appears below and then place each type in one of the rings, nearer to or further from the center depending on any or all of the following criteria:

- ☞ how closely you are involved in that person's life and vice versa;
- ☞ how responsible you feel for the happiness and well-being of that person and vice versa;
- ☞ how much of your inner life, your most private thoughts and feelings, you share with that person and vice versa;
- ☞ how much that person "means" to you.

You may add other types of people and leave off any on the list that don't apply to you. Feel free to add to the rings if necessary or to draw your own chart if the placement of the rings doesn't suit you. Don't worry about being too precise; the idea is to get a *general* sense of the personal and emotional closeness you feel toward these people.

Your parents	Your grandparents
Complete strangers	Your first cousins
People you've met once or twice	Your closest friends
Your brother(s)	Your aunts and uncles
Acquaintances	Your second cousins
Good friends	Your children
Your spouse	Your in-laws
Your sister(s)	Your boss



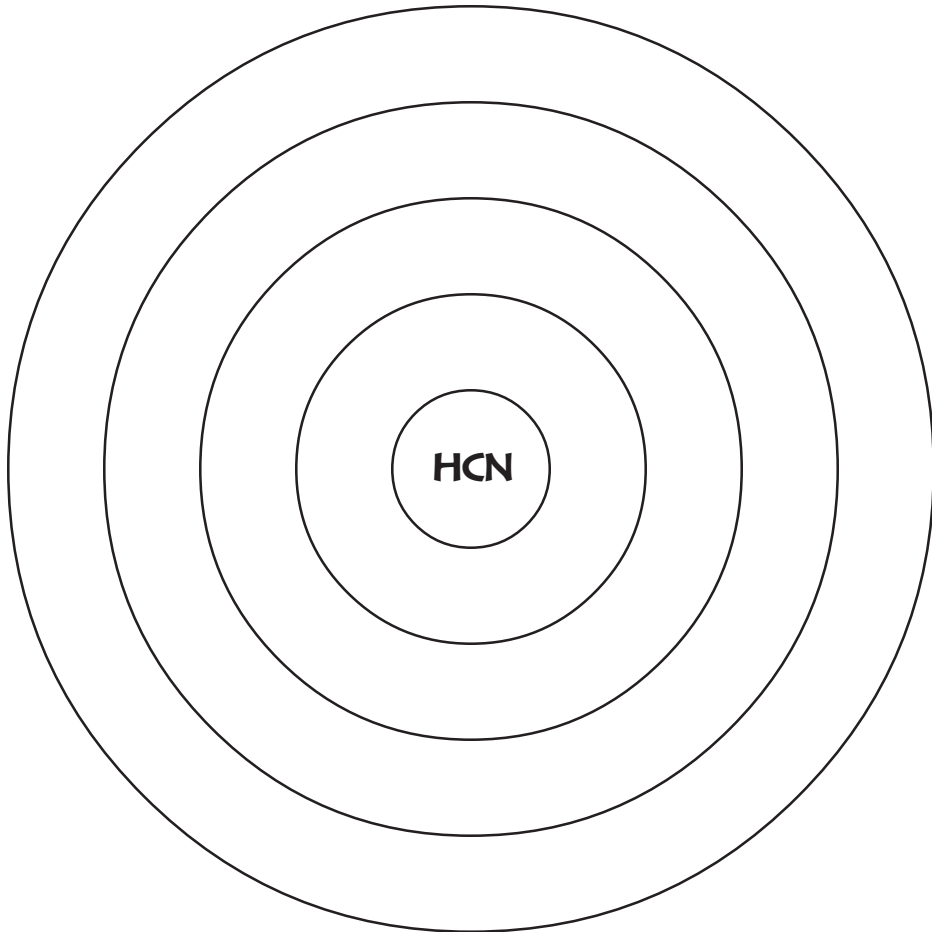
Informant Activity

PART TWO

You will now repeat this exercise from the perspective of a host country person. To do so you will need to find an informant, someone who knows the host culture well. Explain the activity and then ask that person to locate the various types of people on the chart reproduced below. When you have finished, compare your chart with that person's and then answer the questions on the next page.

—INSIGHT—

Emotional and social distance from other people is greatly affected by culture.



1. What are the most striking differences you notice between the two drawings?
2. What do you think accounts for these differences? (Discuss with informant if possible.)
3. Do you see any implications for your relationships with host country people?

The African family is large. Cousins and second cousins all fall under the heading of brother or sister, and uncles and aunts function as parents. If I were a student and wanted to study in Dakar, the assumption would be that I could live in the city with my extended family.

—PCV Senegal

5.3—RULES OF THE HOUSE—INTERACTING WITH A HOST COUNTRY FAMILY

Almost all PCVs form a close relationship with at least one host country family during their service. In this exercise, you consider some of the basics of living or being a guest in the host family's home. You have all been guests in people's homes before, but when you cross cultures, the rules may be different.

Below is a checklist of rules, divided into categories. However you can do so, find out about all the items listed below. Because some rules are gender and age based, try to talk to someone of your own sex and age and observe this person's behavior.

BATHROOM* ETIQUETTE

- ___ How much time is it appropriate to spend in the bathroom in the morning when everyone is getting ready for the day?
- ___ Are you supposed to lock the door when you're in the bathroom?
- ___ How often is it appropriate to bathe?
- ___ Which bathroom items are considered personal and which can be used by anyone?
- ___ How clean are you supposed to leave the bathroom after bathing?
- ___ What do you do with a dirty towel?
- ___ Should you never do some things in the bathroom but in some other place that has a sink or running water?
- ___ In the morning, do certain people always use the bathroom before others?

Think of any other rules of the bathroom you would tell a person from another country who was going to be a guest in your house back home. Do you need to find out about any of these rules here?

**Refers to a general area. This may also be a pit latrine.*

EATING ETIQUETTE

- ___ Is anything expected of you in getting the meal on the table?
- ___ Where do you sit? Do you choose a place or wait to be told?
- ___ Does a serving order exist?
- ___ How much food should you take or accept when you're being served?
- ___ When is it okay to start eating?
- ___ What is the etiquette for getting a second helping?
- ___ Do you have to eat everything on your plate?
- ___ What is the etiquette for refusing more food?
- ___ Should you talk during the meal?
- ___ What topics should you talk about? What should not be talked about?
- ___ Is it appropriate to praise the food?
- ___ Is it appropriate to belch at the table?
- ___ If you're not going to be home for a meal, do you have to let people know? How long in advance?
- ___ What are the rules for inviting someone to a meal?
- ___ When can you leave the table?
- ___ Is it okay to take food or drink to your room?
- ___ Is it okay to take food or drink to other rooms in the house?
- ___ Can you help yourself to food from the refrigerator whenever you want to do so?



Think of any other rules of eating you would tell a person from another country who was going to be a guest in your house back home. Do you need to find out about any of these rules here?

HELPING OUT

- ___ What household duties is a guest expected to help with?
- ___ Is it appropriate to help with house cleaning?
- ___ Are you expected to clean your own room?
- ___ Are you expected to wash your own clothes?
- ___ Are you expected to iron your clothes?
- ___ Are you expected to take out the garbage?
- ___ Are you expected to do food shopping?
- ___ Are you expected to clean up after a meal?
- ___ Are you expected to help prepare for a meal, e.g. set the table, put food on the table?
- ___ Are you expected to help out with younger children?



Think of any other rules of helping out that you would tell a person from another country who was going to be a guest in your house back home. Do you need to find out about any of these rules here?

DRESS ETIQUETTE

- ___ What dress is appropriate in the morning before you are ready to dress for the day?
- ___ How should you be dressed when you are staying in the house and not going outside?
- ___ What is appropriate dress for going to take a bath?
- ___ How should you be dressed when you are in your room and the door is closed?

- ___ Are there rules about how you should dress for lunch and dinner?
- ___ How do you dress when guests are coming?
- ___ Can you wear shoes in the house?
- ___ For what occasions do you have to dress more formally?
- ___ In general, what parts of the body must always be covered, regardless of circumstances?
- ___ Is it okay to borrow clothes from family members?
- ___ Are you expected to lend your clothes to family members?
- ___ Is lending clothing to someone the same as giving it to them to keep?

*I awoke to the faint sounds of
small hands clapping three
times, as custom requires upon
entering a home.*

—PCV Paraguay

Think of any other rules of dress that you would tell a person from another country who was going to be a guest in your house back home. Do you need to find out about any of these rules here?

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

- ___ What rooms are considered public and which are private?
- ___ What is the etiquette for entering a private room?
- ___ What is the meaning of a closed door?
- ___ Is it okay to spend time by yourself in your room?
- ___ Are you not allowed in some areas of the house?
- ___ Are you expected to share personal possessions (tape player, books, cassettes, CDs, your laptop) with other members of the family?

—INSIGHT—

We all obey numerous rules for interacting with people at close quarters, most of which we aren't aware of. The rules of your host culture may be different from what you're used to.

- ___ What are the rules for bringing other people into the house?
- ___ In what instances can you be in your room with another person with the door closed?
- ___ When you leave the house, do you have to say where you're going and when you'll be back?
- ___ What responsibilities do you have when other guests come to visit?
- ___ Do you need permission to use such items around the house as the TV, radio, sewing machine, and other appliances?

Think of any other public/private rules you would tell a person from another country who was going to be a guest in your house back home. Do you need to find out about any of these rules here?

5.4—THE LIMITS OF FRIENDSHIP— WHAT DO FRIENDS ASK FRIENDS TO DO?

This exercise focuses on one key aspect of friendship: the responsibilities or obligations it incurs. If the requests below were put to you by a close friend back home, what would your answer be? If “yes,” put a “Y” in the underlined space preceding the question; if “no,” put an “N.”

1. Would you lend this person a substantial amount of money?
2. Would you lie for this person in a situation where he/she was in trouble?
3. Would you use your position or influence to help this person gain a special advantage over other people in getting a job in your organization?
4. Would you serve as a go-between for this person in a difficult work situation?
5. Would you let this person copy from your paper on an exam?.
6. Would you intervene in a family or marital dispute if this person asked you to?
7. Would you agree to take care of this friend’s child for an extended period during a family/personal emergency?
8. Would you look after this friend’s house while he/she was away?
9. Would you give a positive recommendation for this person if you did not think he/she would be good in a particular job?
10. Would you help this person do something illegal if he/she asked you to?



*Each night I sit with these four
old men and learn their
language. We go over simple
phrases like, "How is the body?
The body is well. I tell God
thank you." But it is this small
effort which brings us together.*

—PCV *Sierra Leone*

—INSIGHT—

What friends expect of
friends may be
different in your host
culture from what you
are used to.

Informant Activity



Ask a host country person, or someone who knows the local culture well, how he/she would answer these questions, and record the answers in the same way using Y or N.

1. ____ Would you lend this person a substantial amount of money?
2. ____ Would you lie for this person in a situation where he/she was in trouble?
3. ____ Would you use your position or influence to help this person gain a special advantage over other people in getting a job in your organization?
4. ____ Would you serve as a go-between for this person in a difficult work situation?
5. ____ Would you let this person copy from your paper on an exam?.
6. ____ Would you intervene in a family or marital dispute if this person asked you to?
7. ____ Would you agree to take care of this friend's child for an extended period during a family/personal emergency?
8. ____ Would you look after this friend's house while he/she was away?
9. ____ Would you give a positive recommendation for this person if you did not think he/she would be good in a particular job?
10. ____ Would you help this person do something illegal if he/she asked you to?

If you answered "no" to any of the questions to which the host country respondent answered "yes," how would you handle these situations if they actually were to occur?

5.5—WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

In this exercise, you apply what you've learned about friendship in the previous activities to several specific situations. In the space below each of these incidents, note how you would handle them.

VISA PROBLEMS

You have become a close personal friend of one of the other teachers at your school. You have met her family and eaten at her house many times, and you have invited them to yours. You have also gone on numerous outings together. Today, as you sip morning coffee at your regular cafe, she asks you to help her get a visa to the United States. (She plans to go there, find work, and then bring her family over.) You reply that you know nothing about that and suggest she contact the American Embassy for information. "They are quite strict," she answers. "If you don't know an American who can help you, you don't have a chance." She asks you again if you would help. How do you respond?

GOING AWAY

You are very friendly with your next door neighbors, where you eat your meals on a regular basis. Today they inform you that the mother of the wife in the family has become gravely ill, and everyone is going to her town for what will probably be an extended stay— everyone, that is, but the youngest boy, 12 years old, whom the family does not want to take out of school. Instead, they would like him to stay with you and have you look after him until they return. You explain that you work all day and don't get home until the late afternoon, but they say that this schedule corresponds with his school schedule and wouldn't be a problem. From your knowledge of the culture, you know this is not an

unusual request for close friends to make of each other, but you can't imagine looking after a 12-year-old boy for the next month. What can you say or do?

A PARENTAL VISIT

Your parents have just finished a whirlwind trip to your country, which did not give them time to visit the out-of-the-way and hard-to-get-to part of the country you live in. Accordingly, you met them in the capital and accompanied them on a two-day swing through the tourist hot spots. You have returned to your site after seeing your parents off and have recounted the story of their trip to your best friend, a colleague from work. When you finish, she's wearing a rather long face, and you ask her what's the matter. She says she would have very much enjoyed meeting your parents and feels hurt that you didn't think she was a good enough friend to introduce them to her. After all, she has taken you to her parents' house in the capital several times. How do you respond?

LOAN STAR

Two friends of yours in your village recently opened up a small grocery store. Things went well initially, but then their business dropped off. At this point, they asked you for a loan to help them get through the next two months. It wasn't much money, so you were able and happy to help out. Now they have come to ask you for more money, with the idea that their problem is their location. They have found a new place they

could move to, but the owner of this new space wants a three-month advance on the rent, and your friends don't have it. You are beginning to suspect that your friends just aren't good businessmen and won't do any better at the new location than they did at the previous one. For this reason, and also because the sum they have asked for is quite substantial (though not beyond your means), you have turned them down. They are quite upset. "I thought we were friends," they say. "We would do this for you without a moment's hesitation. That's how friends treat friends in this country." Now what do you do? In retrospect, could you have done anything to avoid this situation?

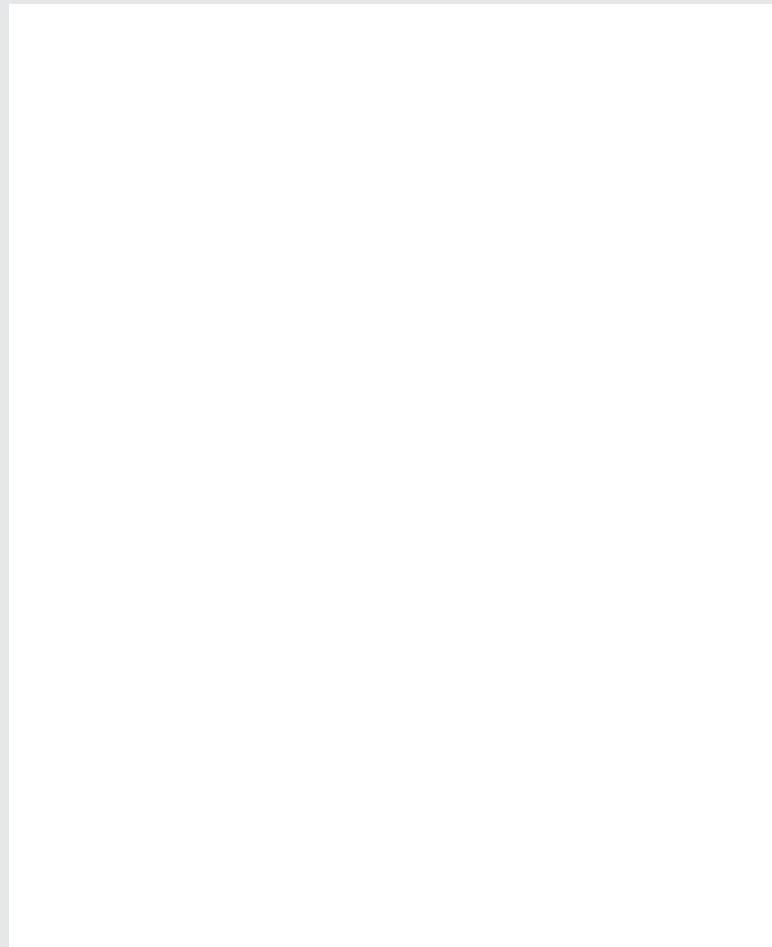
MISSING FUNDS

You are very friendly with your neighbors, of which the father in the family happens to be a colleague of yours at work. They regularly invite you to meals, and you spend a lot of time at their house. Now, a most delicate problem has arisen at work. You have discovered, in your position as an accountant, that the father from next door has stolen money from the organization. You confronted him with your evidence, and he broke down and wept. He said he needed the money for an operation his youngest daughter just underwent and that he planned to put it all back over the next few months. He begs you to give him a chance and not tell anyone what you have discovered. He reminds you of all he and his family have done for you and asks for your trust. "Friends have to help each other in situations like this," he says. For your part, you know that if an audit is ever done of the organization's books, the missing funds will be discovered, and your own competence and credibility may be questioned. How do you feel about being asked to do this favor? What is your response?

[For brief notes on these incidents, see page 252.]

5.6—FAMILY LIFE

Think for a moment about how various members of your host family interact with each other: husband and wife; parents and children; children and children; brothers and sisters; grandparents, etc. Do you see any differences in these interactions than that of the norm in the United States? Note what these are in the space below:



5.7—ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The dynamics of romantic relationships are often puzzling enough in one’s own culture, but even more complicated in an intercultural context. Even if you don’t contemplate a cross-cultural romantic relationship during your Peace Corps tour, you may be the object of someone else’s interest or you may unintentionally communicate interest in another person, who then responds. It is important, then, for you to be aware of any differences between the norms governing male/female (or same-sex) romantic relationships in American culture and those in your host country. To complete the first part of this activity (the “Me” side of the box), answer the questions below from the perspective of American culture. Feel free to add any other questions of your own.

PART ONE—AMERICAN PROFILE

1. How does a man show he is interested in a woman? (or another man?)

<i>ME</i>	<i>HCN</i>

2. How does a woman show she is interested in a man? (or another woman?)

<i>ME</i>	<i>HCN</i>

3. How does a man show he is not interested in a woman who *is* interested in him? (or in a man who is interested in him?)

<i>ME</i>	<i>HCN</i>

4. How does a woman show she is not interested in a man who *is* interested in her? (or a woman who is interested in her?)

<i>ME</i>	<i>HCN</i>

5. How do you know when the relationship is becoming something more than just friendship? What are signs that the other person is taking this relationship much more seriously?

<i>ME</i>	<i>HCN</i>

6. What do men/women do to show they want to pull back on or cool down the relationship?

<i>ME</i>	<i>HCN</i>

—INSIGHT—
 Norms for romantic relationships are influenced by culture.

7. How much touching, embracing, and kissing is appropriate for a couple in public?

<i>ME</i>	<i>HCN</i>



Informant Activity



PART TWO—HOST COUNTRY PROFILE

Now ask someone who knows the host country culture well these same questions. Record the answers in the “HCN” side of the box next to those you have already written for yourself, and afterwards compare the answers. What are the most striking differences? What are the implications of these differences for having a romantic relationship in your host country?



5.8—MEN AND WOMEN— WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Below are a number of male/female critical incidents. In the space that follows each description, write what you would do, based on what you know about romantic relationships in your host country. After you finish, you may want to discuss these incidents with a host country informant.

AFTER DARK

You enjoy your conversations with one of the other teachers at school and have gone together to a local cafe several times after class. Today you stayed longer than usual at the cafe and by the time you leave, it is after dark and your friend says he will walk you home. When you get to your house, you invite him inside to have something to drink. You get into another conversation, during which he moves closer to you and finally tries to put his arms around you and kiss you. You are very upset and start shouting at him. He is equally upset and says everyone knows what it means to invite a man into your house when you are alone, and you should stop trying to act so innocent. In retrospect, can you see how this misunderstanding could have occurred? Now what do you do?

WEDDING BELLS

You are an outgoing, vivacious, and warm person with a ready smile. You introduce yourself to people at social events and make them feel at ease. Last week, a shy, middle-aged widower at work asked you out to dinner, and you accepted and had a pleasant evening. He asked you again this week, and while you were somewhat hesitant, you accepted again. Now, today, he has sent you a beautiful card—containing a

marriage proposal. You, by the way, are 24 and not interested in marriage. Now what? In retrospect, can you see how this misunderstanding could have occurred?

JUST THE TWO OF US

You teach at an all girls high school in a large town on the coast. For the last several months, you have been dating a man you met at a school fundraiser. While you entered this relationship primarily because you were attracted to this man and enjoyed his company, you also thought it would be a way to enter more fully into the life of the local culture. But in this regard, the relationship has been a disappointment. He has not introduced you to his family or other relations nor to very many of his friends, except for a few male friends you have met on occasion. For the most part, you do things alone, just the two of you, and do not go to many public places, except for restaurants. Last night, you asked him again if you could meet his family, and he took your breath away with his response: “In our culture, men don’t introduce their mistresses to their family. My wife would not be amused.”

You are stunned; you had no idea this man was married and would never have gotten involved with him. You are very concerned that if word gets out about you, it could hurt your reputation at the school and even hurt the school’s reputation. What now? In retrospect, did you have any indications that the relationship was not in fact what you thought it was? In future relationships, what would you say or do differently?

A TURNING POINT

You have been dating a host country woman for a few months, and recently she took you home to meet her family. After this family visit, the two of you slept together for the first time. Today when you meet, she starts talking about marriage and asks you what your plans are in this regard. When you reply that it's a bit premature to be even thinking, much less talking, along those lines, she becomes very upset. "You met my family and they approved of you," she says. "And we slept together. I thought you knew what that meant. We can't stop this now. Our family would be ruined." What can you say or do? Can you see what might have led to this misunderstanding?

PRESSURE

You have been dating a host country national for several weeks. You enjoy his company and you both like to do the same things. Through knowing him, his family, and his friends, you have gained a much deeper insight into the local culture. Recently, he has been pressuring you to have a sexual relationship with him, but for you, this represents a deeper commitment than you are comfortable making at this point. He says that in his culture, sleeping with somebody is not taken quite so seriously and asks you if you have something against him personally. You have assured him you do not. Now he has begun to accuse you of being a racist, saying that the reason you won't sleep with him is that he's an HCN. He has even told people at the place you both work that you are a racist (without giving any details), and you are starting to get concerned. What should you say or do? How could you have handled this situation differently?



UNREQUITED FEELINGS

One of the secretaries at work has had an obvious crush on you ever since you arrived at your post. While you are always friendly towards her, you do not have any romantic feelings for this person. Recently, she has accelerated her campaign and invited you to a couple of parties. You declined, knowing full well that she's interested in more than just a casual relationship. Your refusal has not gone over well, and she has retaliated for your rejection by spreading the rumor that you are sleeping with one of your 15-year-old students. What should you do? Could you have done something earlier to have prevented this situation from evolving to this point?

[For brief notes on these incidents, see page 252.]

DEAR JAN—AN ANALYSIS

Reread the letter to Jan at the beginning of this chapter and note any passages you now find suspect; then read the analysis below:

Paragraph 2—Gavin sees friendship largely through American eyes, which is only natural. Take his response to the friend who asked Gavin to lie for him: while such behavior is probably not something many Americans (certainly not Gavin) would consider asking of a friend, it may be well within the bounds of friendship in some cultures.

Paragraph 3—Gavin also interprets the next incident, concerning his grandmother, through American eyes. It does not appear that Gavin's grandmother has loomed large in his life. Like many American families, the grandparents may have lived some distance away and not been actively involved in Gavin's everyday life. Hence, his grandmother's passing away does not have so strong an impact on him. In the case of Gavin's friend, however, it is possible that several generations of the family inhabit the same household, or live close by, and the bonds between grandson and grandparent are as close as those between mother and son. The death of one's grandmother would be a major event—and one that Gavin should have mentioned immediately to someone he considered his friend.

Paragraph 4—This same cultural difference is at work in paragraph four. To Gavin, the death of a cousin, whom one might see once or twice a year at the holidays, hardly justifies four days off from work. But once again, the closely knit family structure in many cultures means that cousins might be as close to each other as brothers and sisters. Moreover, some cultures may expect more response at the time of a death than merely attending the funeral or sending a sympathy card.

Paragraph 5—Finally, regarding his girlfriend, Gavin doesn't make any mistakes here, as such, except to interpret all of her behaviors from his American point of view. It's true that in the United States, bringing your sister along on a date is unusual and might make one think this was something less than a date, but in Gavin's host country, for all he knows, it may be the norm. Accepting the invitation to go out may be a powerful message in that culture, more powerful than he realizes, and the significance Gavin assigns to holding hands and kissing may or may not be the same in the local culture.

People who go into the Peace Corps come back with some imagination. They aren't frightened when a Black runs for sheriff or something; they've seen Blacks run whole societies. They've seen Polynesians do just about as well in medicine as we do. People who have had this experience are set free by it.

—James Michener



MY MOTHER WANTS TO SEE YOU

One evening, very late, there was a knock at my door. It was rapid and continuous.

I yelled, “Shkoon?” (Who is it?)

“Besma,” came the reply. “Fisa, fisa.” (Hurry up.) I opened the door. “You must come over to my house right now, please.”

“What’s wrong?”

“My mother wants to see you, and dinner is waiting.” Although it was very late, I was accustomed to these impromptu invitations to meals at the Tounsi household. We walked hurriedly through the narrow streets, in and out of the complicated labyrinth of the *medina* to her neighborhood.

I was flooded with kisses by Besma’s mother, Laila. She seemed especially excited to see me. She held my hand and escorted me through the courtyard into the family living area. The roomful of waiting people stood up to welcome me. I recognized almost everyone in the room as family and cousins. The only person not to greet me was an older gentleman who did not move from his seat but fixed his stare on me from the moment I came in the room. He seemed amused. Besma’s mother once again grabbed my hand and led me to the couch. I was seated facing the stranger, and the room became very quiet.

Then the stranger started to speak. In perfect English, with a strong Arabic accent, he introduced himself as Uncle Mohammed. He gave me an abbreviated life story. He told me he was educated and that he took a degree in dentistry. He was financially secure and could promise me frequent vacations in Europe and a yearly trip to America to see my family. He explained that he had seen a picture of me, one that I had given to Besma. He knew the moment he saw it that I should be his wife. Did I accept?

Dumbfounded beyond words, I looked around the room. Everyone was perched on the edge of their chairs. I shot Besma a what-have-you-done-to-me look. When I turned to Laila, she was frantically nodding yes, yes, yes! I looked back at Mohammed, who was awaiting my favorable reply.

“How old are you?” I asked.

“Forty-six,” he replied.

“Wow,” was all I could say.

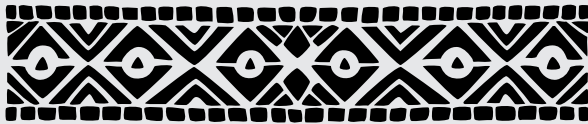
“It’s a wonderful opportunity for you,” he said, “really the chance of a lifetime.” Then Laila chimed in. “You will be in our family. I am so happy.” She was already congratulating me.

“Besma, can I speak with you a moment?” I asked. [The PCV speaks in private with Besma and then returns to the living room, all eyes upon her.]

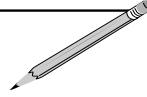
“I’m sorry I cannot accept your gracious offer,” I said. “My family wants me to marry a man from my hometown, someone I have known since my childhood.” It was a blatant lie. “He is waiting for my return. I am here because I have so much yet to learn. I want to be ready for marriage, and right now I am not. I am too young. But when I am ready, it will have to be he who I marry.”

“I understand,” he replied. “Thank you.”

—PCV Tunisia



JOURNAL ENTRY 5



What differences have you noticed in the friendships you have made with host country people and in those with fellow Americans? What has been the nicest part of living with a host family? The most difficult part?

FUNDAMENTALS OF CULTURE

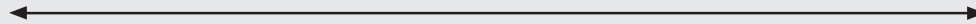
COMPARING AMERICAN AND HOST COUNTRY VIEWS

In this activity, you are asked to identify the American cultural position on each of the four fundamentals (divided into eight topics) and then compare it to the host country position and to your own personal view. The mechanism here is the continuum on which you put a mark to identify the American (U.S.), host country (H.C.), and your own personal position (I) on this topic.

FUNDAMENTALS OF CULTURE—CONTINUUM

Self Identification

Group Identification



Primary identification is with one's self. The self is the smallest unit of survival. Self-reliance, personal freedom, emotional distance from others are important. Protecting one's self guarantees well-being of others. Identity is a function of one's own achievements.

Identity is the function of group membership. The smallest unit of survival is the primary group. Interdependence, looking after the group insures well-being of the individual. People need close affiliation with others. Too much freedom is scary.

Egalitarian Mentality

Ingroup Mentality



Egalitarian mentality is the norm. Group membership is casual & voluntary. No strong sense of in/outgroup exists. Most people are treated the same. People are informal with friends and strangers alike. It's easy to change groups and make friends.

An ingroup mentality prevails. People are close, intimate with their ingroup & compete with their outgroup. They're formal with all but their ingroup. People have little trust of their outgroup. Groups hardly change. It's harder to make friends.

Autonomous

Collective

Autonomous organizations prevail. Workers are more independent. Individuals receive recognition & decision making is by majority rule. Loyalty from/to the organization is less; results are key & people are rewarded according to their contribution to the organization.

Collective organizations prevail. Teamwork, cooperation, group recognition & loyalty to/from the organization are the norm. Decision making is by consensus. Harmony is key. Rewards are distributed equally.

Universalism

Particularism

Universalism is the rule. Personal & societal obligations are of equal importance and should be balanced. Rules should be applied equally to the ingroup & society in general. What is right is always right, regardless of circumstances. Objectivity is valued & expected.

Particularism prevails. It's necessary to distinguish between ingroup and societal obligations; the former are important, the latter less so. Being fair is to treat the ingroup well & let others fend for themselves. What is right depends on the situation. Context is crucial. Subjectivity is valued & expected.

Monochronic

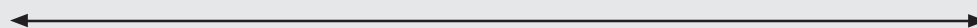
Polychronic

People's attitude towards time is monochronic. People must adjust to the demands of time; time is limited. Sometimes people are too busy to see you. People live by the external clock.

A polychronic attitude towards time is the norm. Time is bent to meet the needs of people. They're never too busy; there's always more time. People live by an internal clock.

One Thing at a Time

Many Things at Once



People do things one at a time. They stand in line; they expect undivided attention. Interruptions are bad; schedules, deadlines are important. Late is bad; adherence to schedule is the goal. Plans are not easily changed.

People do many things at one time. People stand in line less. Divided attention is okay. Interruptions are life. Schedules & deadlines are considered a loose guide. Late is late. Completing the transaction is the goal. Plans can be easily changed.

Life is What I Do

Life is What Happens to Me

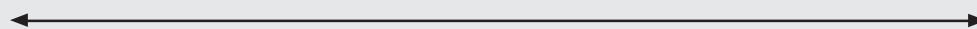


There are few givens in life, few things I can't change and must accept. I can be/do whatever I want, if I make the effort. My happiness is up to me. Unhappiness is not normal. Human beings are the locus of control.

There are some things I have to live with; there may be limits to what I can do/be; happiness & unhappiness are normal parts of life. Human beings are only sometimes the locus of control.

Progress is Inevitable

Progress is Not Automatic



Change is usually for the better. Tradition is not always right. Optimism is best. Technology is often the answer. Every problem has a solution. New is usually better.

Change can be for the worse. Realism is best. Tradition is a good guide. Some problems can't be solved. Technology does not have all the answers. New is new, not necessarily better.

CONTINUUM NOTES

If the two cultures are at opposite ends on any two or three continuums, then in the space provided, be specific in describing how you think host country nationals would perceive you when they hold opposite views on this fundamental dimension of human behavior.

—INSIGHT—

American and host country views on some fundamental questions are quite different, meaning, of course, that their behaviors will sometimes be different too.

Continuum: _____

How HCNs perceive Americans:

Continuum: _____

How HCNs perceive Americans:

Continuum: _____

How HCNs perceive Americans:

[See page 253 for possible perceptions.]