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Globalization, Culture, and the Non-Convergence of German and American Norms of Interaction: Revisiting the Lewin Hypothesis

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Abstract: Cultural globalization raises the question regarding the convergence of the norms governing face-to-face interaction in different cultures. As increased cross-cultural communication and mobility lowers the barriers of interaction, many argue that local cultural norms will inevitably give way to global standards, as defined by globally leading cultures such as the Americans. In this paper I take a critical look at the idea of converging cultural norms between two countries, Germany and the United States. Drawing on Simmel's theory of face-to-face interaction and Kurt Lewin's analysis of German-American differences, I find that for three key levels of interaction—self-disclosure in the stranger-to-member passage, conversation style, and the construction of friendship—characteristic German versus American norms of interaction persist with little evidence of convergence.

Keywords: Cultural Globalization, Convergence of Cultural Norms, Social Interaction, Cross-Cultural Communication, Georg Simmel, Kurt Lewin

Küreselleşme, Kültür ve Alman-Amerikan Etkileşim Normlarının Benzeşmezliği: Lewin Hipotezini Yeniden Ele Almak

Özet: Kültürel küreselleşme, farklı kültürlerde yüz yüze etkileşimleri sevk ve idare eden değer yargılarının yakınsaması sorununu gündeme getirmektedir. Artan kültürlerarası iletişim ve hareketlilik, etkileşim sınırlarını aşağı çektiğinden, pek çok araştırmacı yerel kültürel normların, yerini, Amerikalılarınki gibi küresel çapta lider kültürlerce tanımlanmış küresel standartlara bırakacağını iddia etmektedir. Bu makalede iki ülke, Almanya ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki kültürel normların yakınsadığı şeklindeki düşünceyi eleştirel bir bakışla ele alıyorum. Simmel'in yüz yüze etkileşim kuramı ve Kurt Lewin'in Alman-Amerikan farklılıkları çözümlemesine yaslanarak, etkileşimin üç temel seviyesinde –yabancıdan müntesibe geçiş esnasındaki kendini ifşada, sohbette ve dostluk inşasında– yakınsamaya işaret eden çok az veri olduğu ve etkileşim normlarındaki karakteristik Alman-Amerikan farklarının varlığını sürdürdüğü sonucuna ulaşıyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürel Küreselleşme, Kültürel Normların Benzeşmesi, Toplumsal Etkileşim, Kültürlerarası İletişim, Georg Simmel, Kurt Lewin

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Introduction

Getting acquainted, forming friendships, becoming a member of a group, conversing and resolving conflict are socio-cultural universals wherever people live in society. And yet, as anthropologists well know, every culture develops a unique solution to these universal “problems” of interaction. In some cultures the interaction among strangers or newcomers is casual and easy, in others it requires the most complex mediation by trusted third parties. In some cultures friendship is defined as intimate soulmateship for life, in others it is a limited interaction based on mutual interests.

That these differences exist and that they contribute to misunderstanding and breakdown of communication at the cross-cultural interface is part of the experience of even the most casual international traveler. What is less well understood is how these kinds of differences persist or change in the presence of increasingly global interaction among the members of the world community. Given that economic and technological changes have shortened the distance between nations and cultures psychologically and technically, given that the global exchange of literature, film, and news reporting is increasing at an ever faster rate, how robust are the differences that have long separated nations and obstructed their communication?

To pursue this question I focus on the interactional norms of two national cultures which have been linked by increasingly close ties of communication and exchange. From the days of the first waves of German immigration to the United States in the 18th and 19th century, to the Weimar Republic enthusiasm about Taylorism and Fordism, to America’s pivotal role in German economic and cultural reconstruction after the devastation and demoralization of World War II, and finally to today’s widely cast net of economic, political, cultural and educational collaborative agreements, there has been an increasingly tighter cultural give and take between Germany and the United States. These developments suggest that the cultural distance between the two countries has shrunk and continues to do so.

This is indeed what many observers are assuming—not as a hypothesis, but as confirmed truth. In fact, the expression of “Amerikanisierung” of German culture comes so easily off the lips of contemporary observers that it has become a key term of German national self-consciousness. Based on that view, the norms of behavior in the two countries, especially those of its educated elites are so similar that Germans and Americans experience little difficulties in moving to and fro. In the fields of business, economics and technology innovations seem to flow effortlessly back and forth across the Atlantic. There seem to be few countries sporting closer ties.

In this paper I take a critical look at the idea of converging cultural norms between the two countries, Germany and the United States. I argue that for three key levels of interaction—self-disclosure in the stranger-to-member passage, conversation style, and the construction of friendship—characteristic German versus American norms of interaction persist with little evidence for convergence.

Theory and Method

Unlike globalization theories that work predominantly at the macro-level (Ritzer 2009; John Meyer 2006), the research presented here proceeds from the assumption that people operate in local life-worlds that are richly contextualized by the particularisms of history and tradition, as well as ethnicity, religion, and affective ties, which have historically shown to be surprisingly resistant to the imperatives of globalization. Tocqueville famously declared culture or “mores” (his term for “culture”) the “only tough and durable power in a nation” (Tocqueville 1968, p. 247). This is in contrast to Marx and Engels (1983, p. 225) who saw the particularisms of history and culture “daily vanishing”, or contemporary macro-theorists who perceive a “wholesale globalization of human identities and perceptions” (John Meyer, 2012, p xi) and a decreasing “dependence on local realities” (p xiv). I have elsewhere (Meyer 2003) spelled out why I believe that Tocqueville’s account of the interplay of culture and institutions continues to be compelling even today. A contemporary theorist in the Tocquevillian vein would be Hans-Georg Gadamer who expressed a “deep skepticism” about the “fantastic overestimation of reason by comparison to the affections that motivate the human mind” (1998, p. 570). To this Gadamer added, “[w]hat can be submitted to reflection is always limited in comparison to what is determined by previous formative influences” (1998, p. 574).

This is an exploratory study with two objectives:

--conceptually, I want to foreground the *micro-world* of face-to-face interactions as the elementary arena of the life-world. For globalization to affect the kind of global cultural convergence many macro-theorists propose, it would have to thoroughly penetrate to the level of those micro interactions.
--to offer *hypotheses* that can be used to test the degree to which the micro-arenas of two cultures—in this case the German and the American—do indeed converge or not.

The approach I take is informed by the micro-sociology of Georg Simmel (Simmel 19//). A contemporary and colleague of Max Weber, Simmel has been recognized as a key source of theorizing the micro-level of social interaction. According to Lewis Coser, Simmel viewed “society [as] a web of patterned interactions.” The task of sociology was studying the “forms of these interactions as they occur and reoccur in diverse historical periods and cultural settings” (Coser 1977, p. 178)

In this paper I begin by recounting Simmel’s analysis of some universal features of face-to-face interaction in interpersonal relations. The second step of my analysis consists in recalling the work Kurt Lewin did in the 1930s on the German—American cultural interface. Lewin was a student in Berlin when Simmel taught there. While it is not clear if Lewin was a formal student of Simmel, his analysis is steeped in the kind of micro-sociological understanding that Simmel championed. In step three I utilize the fortuitous coincidence of Lewin’s work of more than 70 years ago, to explore contemporary research as to its consistency with Lewin’s analysis. I draw *inter alia* on examples from the business sector as the most international of social domains, assuming that persisting differences in this always most openly international sector would lend stronger support to the thesis of non-convergence. I close by articulating additional testable hypotheses for further research.

Simmel’s Theory of Face-to-Face Interaction

Simmel is the originator of a type of sociology in which the individual actor and the choices he faces in a given social environment are at the origin of the forms of social organization. This focus on individuals interacting with other individuals makes Simmel’s work especially well-suited for cross-cultural analysis. This becomes especially clear in Simmel’s study of the role of social distance in interpersonal relations and the negotiation of openness (accessibility) and closeness (distance / discretion).

In social interaction individuals operate under a simultaneous imperative of social openness and closeness. To make interaction with others possible, actors must make parts of their self accessible to them. To maintain their individual identity he or she must, at the same time, retain a core part of the self inaccessible to all but the most trusted intimates. The result is an “ideal sphere” surrounding each person, which, when violated, must lead to personal “trespassing”:

Although differing in size in various directions and differing according to the person with whom one entertains relations, this sphere cannot be penetrated, unless the personality value of the individual is thereby destro-

yed. A sphere of this sort is placed around man by his honor. Language poignantly designates an insult to one's honor as 'coming too close' ['zu Nahe treten']; the radius of this sphere marks, as it were, the distance whose trespassing by another person insults one's honor. (Simmel, 1950, p. 321)

In conversation a person must likewise straddle the delicate balance between truthfulness and the cultivation of social ties:

In purely sociable conversation, the topic is merely the indispensable medium through which the lively exchange of speech itself unfolds its attraction... As soon as the discussion ... makes the ascertainment of a truth its purpose..., it ceases to be sociable and thus becomes untrue to its own nature--as much as if it degenerated into a serious quarrel... (p. 52).

The conflict between sincerity and social bonding also plays a role in the modern form of friendship where Simmel stipulates a shift from a friendship of complete intimacy to a more differentiated and partial form:

To the extent that the ideal of friendship was received from antiquity and (peculiarly enough) was developed in a romantic spirit, it aims at an absolute psychological intimacy... Yet such complete intimacy becomes probably more and more difficult as differentiation among men increases. Modern man, possibly, has too much to hide to sustain a friendship in the ancient sense. [...] It would seem that, for all these reasons, the modern way of feeling tends more heavily toward differentiated friendships, which cover only one side of the personality, without playing into other aspects of it (pp. 325-6).

This does not mean, however, that discretion in the interaction among people becomes obsolete. It is in the context of discussing friendship that Simmel develops the concept of "central" and "peripheral" zones of a person's personality:

But the relation which is thus restricted and surrounded by discretions, may yet stem from the center of the total personality. It may yet be reached by the sap of the ultimate roots of the personality, even though it feeds only part of the person's periphery. In its idea, it involves the same affective depth and the same readiness for sacrifice, which less differentiated epochs and persons connect only with a common total sphere of life, for which reservations and discretions constitute no problem. (326)

Simmel ostensibly meant his sociology to be a description of the universal properties of social interaction. The only source of variability he sees is social change along the tradition--modernity axis. It fell to Kurt Lewin's work to show that an interactionist perspective as developed by Simmel holds great potential for cross-cultural analysis.

Kurt Lewin's Assessment of German--American Cultural Differences

Born in 1890, Lewin grew up in the intellectual climate of the turn of the century Germany. He was a student at Berlin University at a time when the towering figures of the social sciences were innovators such as Weber, Sombart and Simmel. When Lewin submitted his doctoral dissertation at Berlin University in 1914 the latter author had been teaching in Berlin for almost 30 years. Lewin's approach to social psychology seems especially akin to Simmel's micro-sociology.

Kurt Lewin left Hitler-Germany in 1933 along with many other members of the German Jewish community. He found exile and a new home in the United States. Continuing his social-psychological research, he quickly began to systematize his observations on relevant differences in Germany and the United States as related to parenting, private/public space, and what he will describe as the regions of personhood in each society. One result was a paper on "Some Social-Psychological Differences between the United States and Germany," first published in 1936. In this paper Lewin approaches the problem of intercultural comparison by contrasting a number of well-defined social situations in the two countries and comparing the behavior of the respective protagonists. Thus he observes that American children in kindergarten or grammar school show less servility vis-a-vis adults than in Germany. American adults, on their part, approach children slowly and friendly, using a soft voice, where their German counterparts typically approach them with sudden movements and in a loud voice. Parents of the U.S. middle class, to which he confines his observations, thank their children for behaving properly and use suggestions rather than orders. They make it a point to give reasons for requesting something from a child. Summarizing across these observations, Lewin finds that what we would call an individual's physical and social mobility, what Lewin calls the "space of free movement" (Lewin, 1948, p. 5) which is greater in the US than in Germany (Lewin, 1948 p. 5-9).

Lewin uses his empirical observations of German--American social-psychological differences to develop a social distance model designed to map some of the underlying differences between the two cultures. In this model he distinguishes between "peripheral" and "central" regions of a person (figure 1). "The more central regions are defined as the more intimate, personal regions" (Lewin, 1948 p. 20). An operational measure of distance might be: "The person A is asked whether he would share certain situations (like travelling in the same car, playing games together, dancing together, marrying) with a certain person B. The differences in social distance can be defined as different degrees of intimacy of the situation which the person is willing to share with the other" (Ibid.).

Based on this conceptual distinction between central and peripheral or private and public personal zones, Lewin submits his major proposition concerning German--American social-psychological differences, "more regions of the persons are considered of public interest in the United States than in Germany" (Lewin, 1948 p. 23), using the following graphical representation for illustration:

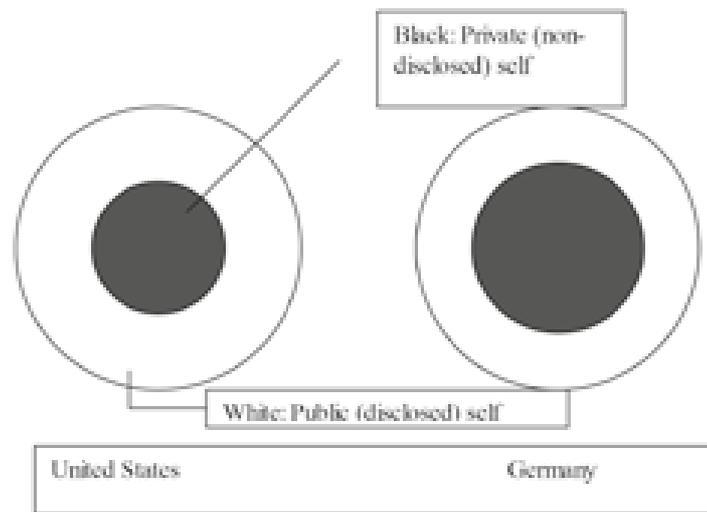


Figure 1:
Self-Disclosure in Interaction: Germans and Americans.
Americans present a greater zone of self-disclosure in stranger-to-stranger
interaction. (Author, 2014)

That a person's zone of public accessibility is larger in the U.S. than in Germany does not mean that the private self on the part of the American is necessarily less developed than in Germany. However the private self in the American simply infringes less on their public behavior (see graph, page 22).

From this basic proposition Lewin deduces a number of *hypotheses*:

Friendship: Given the greater zone of the public self, Americans should be capable of having many "relatively close relations ... without a deep personal friendship" (Lewin, 1948, p. 25).

Interpersonal Conflict: Americans do not become emotionally engaged as quickly as Germans. Thus "these persons should be less in danger of personal friction" (Lewin, 1948, p. 25).

Group homogeneity: Within group distances in the US are smaller than in Germany. Because of their greater accessibility individual members form more homogeneous groups than in Germany.

Group distance: Between group distances are smaller in the US than in Germany. Social distances between groups do not crystallize to “class” distinctions as they do in Germany.

Group size: Because individual differences are de-emphasized rather than pronounced, the American type of organization of the self tolerates greater group size. “Practically only two large political parties exist in the United States, whereas the political life in Germany has shown more than a dozen political parties” (Lewin, 1948, p. 29).

Adaptability to change: Having a greater part of his self publically accessible, the American is more adaptive to change than the German who tends to “carry more of his specific individual characteristics to every situation” (Lewin, 1948, p. 31).

Lewin’s characterization remains interesting to the contemporary reader for two reasons. On the one hand his discussion pioneers a number of theoretical concepts that have become useful to describe cross-cultural differences. Among them are the concepts of social distance, public and private self, adaptability to change or, in more recent terminology, tolerance of uncertainty, group dynamics, and friendship. Secondly, his substantive characterizations of cross-cultural differences provide an interesting historic benchmark to evaluate how much may have changed in the 70 years since Lewin’s assessment.

Lewin’s Hypothesis—How Has it Held Up?

To explore the continued validity of Lewin’s analysis I explore recent research on aspects of the German--American cross-cultural difference that allows us to move beyond mere impressions to assess the continuing validity of Lewin’s general characterization. Ironically, despite Lewin’s stature as a social scientist, none of the studies I am going to review cite Lewin as a source. While this does not bode well of the social sciences’ capacity for cumulative research, it strengthens the validity of the comparison undertaken here as we are comparing the results of more or less independent witnesses on the problem in question.

Public and Private Self in German and American Interaction

Forming social relationships often takes place between people who have not met before. This necessitates a mechanism by which such social bonds can evolve in order to transition strangers into colleagues or friends, a mechanism

that is necessary across all cultures, though it often manifests differently. In particular the cues and clues used in this transition, as well as its tempo and speed, differ markedly in different cultures. The German conventions as compared with their American counterparts offer us one such specific example of differing details in the mechanism of creating social bonds. The German process of relationship-building is slow, drawn-out and interspersed with frequent "tests" of the actual level of trust achieved. The German expects to build trust only gradually and to the extent that it is warranted by action, not words. As a social relation between them begins to develop, Germans remain at "arm's length" for a considerable period. "A less formal way of behavior would be considered presumptuous of a degree of mutual familiarity and trust that the parties have not yet granted each other" (Meyer, 1993 p. 98).

In his study Kalberg (1987) found four pivotal behavioral patterns to distinguish German from American interaction forms. The first one among these was that German forms of interaction produce more severe separations of "insiders" from "outsiders," with the transitional passage from one status to the other taking longer and being of less predictable outcome than in the US. According to his interviews with Germans and Americans who had lived and worked in the other country for five years or longer, Germans expect a certain reserve of the newcomer and prefer to observe his or her behavior in a larger group without entering into immediate face-to-face contact with the novice (Kalberg, 1987 p. 607). The novice who enters a group is observed passively and almost reluctantly. By contrast, American insiders feel obliged to aid the outsider's status transition by actively involving him/her in the group's transactions.

This contrast in the status of insider and outsider correlates with different conceptions of the private and public sphere. Kalberg reports that Germans share their personal affection and compassion with fewer others and typically do not include even longtime workplace associates into the circle of their informal, personal relations. In contrast to this, Americans often seek to bridge the status of insider/outsider with new members by fostering an informal setting. This often includes informality in one's behavior and showing personal comfort and ease in the presence of the other. The commonly accepted practice of speaking in such settings to colleagues on a first name basis or the ritual of ice breaking conversation around polite or humorous talk on non-committal topics are examples of this American attitude.

Germans take the medieval caveat emptor 'buyer beware' in regards to relationship building as well. For it is not with words that one builds trust, as the "seller" or in this case, the person seeking to create a relationship, is going to present themselves in the best light with the way they speak. Thus it is the

accumulated data drawn from experiencing their behavior that earns trust. Simplified, one might say that Americans operate by a “extend good-will unless you have reason to distrust” rule, while Germans operate by the opposite caveat emptor rule: “distrust until you have reason to trust”.

Kalberg’s account of the steep distinction between private and public zones in German society evokes Dahrendorf’s earlier description to the same effect. In his study of society and democracy in Germany Dahrendorf (1969) argued that the “Privatgütern” [private virtues] tend to orient the German away from the public virtues of citizenship and participation, toward an apolitical sphere of family and friendship, ‘private’ regions are unfilled spaces that imply a degree of resistance to anything public. Thus private values provide the individual with standards for his own perfection, which is conceived as being “devoid of society” (Dahrendorf p. 286). The different conceptions of private and public are reflected in different interpretations of loneliness. Dahrendorf cites research by Hofstätter (1957) that shows that Americans associate with loneliness a state of being “unloved, unsuccessful, unmanly” (Hofstätter, 1957 p. 289) whereas the lonely German experiences himself as “tragic” (Ibid). Americans interviewed by Hofstätter associated with loneliness “small, weak, sick, cowardly, empty, sad, shallow, obscure, bad, ugly” (Ibid.) while German associations included “big, strong, healthy, courageous, deep” (Ibid.). According to Dahrendorf loneliness is experienced as failure in a country where public virtues prevail. In Germany, by contrast, it tends to be experienced as heroic.

The finding that the boundary between the public and the private is less easily penetrated for Germans than Americans and the transition from exclusion to inclusion takes longer and is more cumbersome, attests to the continued relevance of the equality of conditions that Tocqueville found to be the most important innovation characterizing American social culture. In his analysis of the effects of the equality of conditions on social manners and mores Tocqueville was particularly impressed with the feelings of reciprocal obligation pervading the social relations among people unseparated by rank or status. With the eye of an ethnographer he recorded differences which, to this day, can be taken as characterizations of interaction norms in societies with and without a history of social hierarchy and status. His description of the pattern of interaction among strangers is an example. Tocqueville asserts that under conditions of equality forms of social interaction become “natural, frank, and open” (Tocqueville, 2000 p. 567) because there is no longer unspoken warfare about the status hierarchy when two strangers meet. This is still the case in Europe where, after the demise of aristocracy, rank is no longer immediately visible even though it remains important. This is why a long and cumbersome ritual is needed to determine status when two strangers meet.

Tocqueville speculates that interaction patterns in America have become “natural, frank, and open” (Tocqueville, 2000 p. 567) because the demise of hierarchical relations makes people, in fact, more similar to one another. “When ranks are almost equal among a people, as all men think and feel in nearly the same manner, each instantaneously can judge the feelings of all the others; he just casts a rapid glance at himself, and that is enough” (Tocqueville, 2000 p. 564). By contrast, “feudal institutions made people very sensitive to the sufferings of certain men, but not at all to the miseries of the human race” (Tocqueville, 2000 p. 561).

Tocqueville’s account of American versus European social manners suggests that the equality of conditions is an important factor in the emergence of the lower insider/outsider and private/public boundaries because in the US social conditions being more alike, people share experiences and to communicate with each other more easily. On the other hand, given that equality brings with it the development of similar sensitivities and more gentle mores in general, there are fewer occasions to feel bothered by others and less need to keep potential intruders at bay.

To summarize: The codes which facilitate the passage from novice to member in interaction groups differ in different cultures. In German-German encounters the outsider-to-insider passage occurs slowly and gradually as a result of the accumulation of interpersonal trust, with the “burden of proof” largely on the novice. In American-American encounters, by contrast, passage is a more instantaneous, credential-based process actively facilitated by group members.

Stranger-to-Member Passage	Germany	US
domain of self-disclosure	Small	Large
group admission criteria	Trust	achievement/credential
insiders’ role	Passive	Active
Tempo	Gradual	Instantaneous

Figure 2: Constituting an Interaction System: Stranger to Member Passage

Conversation Styles

Conversations take place in a social space in which the speaker’s truthful and sincere conveyance of information conflicts with the acknowledgement and granting of the listener’s face. As Simmel argues convincingly, any conversation is a delicate balancing act between sincerity and politeness. Expressing a view on a host’s cooking ability, a colleague’s writing, or a wife’s taste in wardrobe often requires that the speaker negotiate his way between the conflicting imperatives of sincerity and face. Adhering to either extreme prohibits

the emergence of a stable conversational situation. Abandoning sincerity for the sake of face turns conversation into an exercise of hypocrisy. Being brutally honest in everything one says will leave one without an audience in a short time.

One of the few comparisons of German and American conversation styles is Byrnes' (1986) study of "interactional style in German and American conversation". According to Byrnes, the American conversation style is

"...marked by turn taking with relatively little overlap, a pronounced willingness to cede the floor should such overlap occur, lowered pitch and less fluctuating into national contours. Hence it tends to give the general impression of less commitment to the topic at hand, but more commitment to creating an air of civility and graciousness toward the other. A topic is more a vehicle for personal bonding than an issue whose truth is to be ascertained" (Byrnes, 1986 p. 199-200).

The German conversation style, by contrast, is "concerned more with facts and truth-values, and in their service seeks, or at least should not shy away from, overt disagreement and confrontation. In fact, disagreement and confrontation are valued, and have become ritualized, in that they are deemed to further the process of establishing truth" (Byrnes, 1986 p. 201).

As a result of these different conceptions of the conversation process one finds Americans often quite comfortable to end a conversation with the substantive issue(s) unresolved. Germans, on the other hand, normally desire a higher degree of thematic closure, expecting that participants will defend their particular point of view to the best of their ability. Where Americans are likely to take offense when someone is found to press his or her point too strongly, Germans are more apt to lose respect for a conversationalist who does not join the battle for truth in full armor.

These differences between German and American norms of conversation seem also echoed in the differences between the "teutonic" and the "Anglo-Saxon" intellectual style identified by Galtung (1983), the former inclining to erect huge superstructures of deductive thought, while the latter tends to stay close to what is empirically demonstrable.

The different conversation styles of Germans and Americans seem to have their origin even long before the writings of Lewin and Simmel. In her classical description of the German national character Madame de Stael (1814/1985) dedicates a chapter to the "spirit of conversation". After pointing out that conversation is more than the exchange of information, it is also "an instrument to play with, which refreshes the vital spirits, like music with some peoples and strong spirits with others," (DeStael, 2013 p. 74) she indicates that the art of conversation is not developed among the Germans "for they hear not

a word without deducing something from it; much less do they understand how one can treat conversation as an art, which has no other purpose but the pleasure which can be found in it” (DeStael, 2013 p. 76, my translation). Apart from this aptitude towards logical deductions, conversation is impeded also by the German zeal to differentiate ranks and titles. “The old forms of address which are still in use almost all over Germany, conflict with the ease and familiarity of conversation. The most meager title...is indicated and repeated twenty times during the same meal...” (DeStael, 2013 p. 75). In effect, Germans incline to a “serious exchange of thought, which is more a useful occupation than a pleasant art” (DeStael, 2013 p. 74).

By contrast, Benjamin Franklin counsels in his widely read Autobiography: “And as the chief ends of conversation are to inform, or to be informed, to please or to persuade, I wish well-meaning and sensible men would not lessen their power of doing good by a positive, assuming manner that seldom fails to disgust, tends to create opposition, and to defeat every one of those purposes for which speech was given to us. In fact, if you wish to instruct others, a positive, dogmatical manner in advancing your sentiments may provoke contradiction and prevent a candid attention” (Franklin, 1958, p. 15).

To sum up: American conversational patterns are characterized by a deferential and reciprocal style of granting face which is reflected in a strong convention of turn taking with little overlap; German patterns are, by contrast, characterized by a strategy in which participants expect that all conversationalists will assert their views in the context of truth-seeking. The resulting structure exhibits less symmetrical turn taking and more tolerance for overlap.

American	German
turn-taking with little overlap	turn-taking with overlap
contributions are negotiable, inconclusive	contributions are assertive, conclusive
low ego involvement	high ego involvement
low tolerance for silence/pauses	high tolerance for silence/pauses

Figure 3: Characteristics of German and American Conversational Styles (Byrnes, 1986)

Conflict Management

In social interaction conflicts often arise both over “air-time,” that is who may speak how much, as well as with more substantive content driven issues. Under those conditions interaction systems tend to assume the form of “negotiated orders” (Strauss, 1978) in which participants make up for the absence of tried and tested routines by assuming a disposition where everything but the most fundamental objectives is negotiable. Apart from norms

that regulate the flow of conversation, norms governing interpersonal conflict thus become an important variable in the stability of an interaction system. In this regard Lewin hypothesized that personal friction would be more prevalent among Germans than among Americans. What do more recent studies indicate on this point?

In a study of “discussion behavior of German and American managers” (Friday, 1989) noted that “the American character with its need to remain impersonal and to be liked avoids argumentum ad hominem. Any attack on the person will indicate disrespect and promote a feeling of dislike for the other... In contrast, the German manager, with his personal investment in his position and a need to be credible to maintain his or her position, may strike with vigor and enthusiasm at the other’s error” (p. 435).

These observations are supported by evidence from laboratory negotiations involving, among others, German and American business managers (Campbell, Graham, Jolibert, & Meissner, 1988). In their simulation of a buyer--seller negotiation Campbell et.al. found that a problem-solving style of negotiation was used only by the American negotiators, while Germans relied more on distributive tactics to conduct a marketing transaction. Consistent with that finding, the authors also found that buyer-seller satisfaction among the German business managers was inversely related, while the American participants tended to be evenly satisfied with the deals they had struck.

These data suggest less friction and a higher incidence of mutually satisfying outcomes in American negotiations and interpersonal conflict. They also suggest that Americans tend to be better at “separating the people from the problem” and of focusing on “interests rather than positions,” two maxims of effective negotiation stressed in contemporary advice on negotiation and conflict resolution (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011; Pruitt, 1981).

	German	American
<i>Conflict Attribution</i>	Person	Problem
<i>Form of Complaint</i>	Direct	Indirect
<i>Face Orientation</i>	Threat	Saving

Figure 4: Response to the Experience of Conflict: Conflict Style of German and American Disputants (Author, 2014)

Friendship

Last but not least observers of the American-German culture contrast have often commented on a romantic streak as a uniquely German cultural trait for which the American culture shows no equivalent. Thus Gordon (1982), an astute observer of German history and culture, describes a romantic rejection of modernity as one of the most uniquely German cultural traits, referring to

its historical roots in the 18th century Sturm und Drang, as well as later incarnations, from the turn of the century Wandervogel, to the recent ecological movement led by the Greens.

An important sociological application of that romanticism can be found in the German notion of friendship. German *Freundschaft*, as Kalberg (1987) has observed, has a moral as well as behavioral connotation that is lacking in the American notion of friendship. "Understanding and sharing in a spiritual and emotional relation" (Tenbruck, 1964 p. 440).

On the behavioral level *Freundschaft* appears to include a smaller and more durable circle of close intimates than friendship. Also, the give and take of mutual support and help seem to flow more unconditionally and independent of utilitarian considerations than in American friendship. In his early study of the sociology of friendship, Tenbruck has provided a clue as to the origins of this difference. According to him friendship relations in Germany assumed importance as a response to the dissolution of pre-modern status differentiation in the century between 1750 and 1850. During that period people found themselves forced as well as enabled to seek their identity outside of the socially defined roles of formal rank and status. *Freundschaft* became both a resort against the anomie and unpredictable claims of modernism as well as a liberation from the tutelage of social forms that had become meaningless (for a discussion of this simultaneity of voluntary choice and protection see also (Silver, 1990). According to Tenbruck, this development led to an expansion of the domain of shared personal experience. True friendship, then, was that in which the participants would provide each other with unconditional support against the vagaries of the emergent modern society. With the backdrop of an eroding system of feudal inequality missing, the anti-modern, romantic element is essentially absent in the American notion of friendship. Friendship results from sympathy or shared preferences and issues in shared activities. A degree of utilitarian calculation is rarely absent from the American usage of friendship. As changing circumstances stipulate changing preferences, friendship ties are allowed to fade into the background with no harsh feelings on the part of the participants.

Additional Hypotheses

The above exploration of Lewin's hypothesis with more than half a century of hindsight has, by and large, confirmed the thrust of Lewin's work. Furthermore, we can add several additional hypotheses:

H 1: In German/American cross-cultural encounters, Germans will find themselves subjected to unexpected trust and openness. Americans will

find themselves subjected to unexpected distance and distrust.

H2: In a German--American conversation

- Germans are likely to interrupt more often than Americans;
- Germans are likely to occupy a greater share of the available speaking time;
- Germans are likely to experience American conversationalists as non-committal and evasive;
- Americans are likely to experience German conversationalist as rude and opinionated.

H3: Regarding friendship

- Germans will have significantly fewer friends than Americans;
- Americans will find German friendship expectations invasive.

H4: In a conflict between Germans and Americans

- Americans are likely to use fewer face threatening statements than Germans;
- Americans are likely to make more problem attributions ("we have a problem") than people attributions ("your demands are unfair");

H5: In a German--American negotiation

- Americans are likely to exhibit a more flexible and informal style than their German counterparts.

H6: In German--American team encounters Germans are likely to

- exhibit a more unequal distribution of within-group verbal contributions;
- exhibit a stronger correlation of formal rank and verbal contributions.

On the Persistence of Cultural Difference

The results of the review of studies on the German—American cultural contrasts presented above can be summarized in two points:

- a) In his microsociology Simmel has detailed universal problems of social interaction (distance, conversation, conflict, friendship) which can be thought of as continua on which the German and American culture represent distinct types.
- b) Lewin's more than 70 year old diagnosis of the relative location of the German and American cultural type on these continua remains essentially valid. The review above has produced evidence to suggest that we are dealing with social patterns of long duration whose reality can be tested by hypotheses like the ones listed above.

Whence the robustness and resilience of national cultural patterns, even in the face of a rapidly increasing rate of intercultural communication and exc-

change? Perhaps one source of our widespread overconfidence concerning the convergence and, implicitly, the malleability of cultures can be found in what may be called the fallacy of “individualist adaptation”. The current situation of increasing globalization offers daily examples that individuals who move to a different country and enter a different culture are capable of adapting to their new cultural environment with impressive speed. But, as Lewin has pointed out in essays dedicated to the problem of the cultural reconstruction of Germany after the war, changing the culture of an individual or even of small groups is not the same as changing the culture of an entire nation (Lewin, 1948, p. 34-55). The main reason for this difference lies in the fact that cultures are delicate equilibria of social interaction in which each norm, custom, or habit is enforced by and embedded in a large set of other norms such that a change in one element cannot be accommodated without many other changes. As Lewin pointed out, there are certain “dynamic relations between the various aspects of the culture of a nation--such as its education, mores, political behavior, religious outlook--which interact in a way that tends to bend any deviation from the established culture back to the same old stream” (1948, p. 45).

So, while it is undeniably true that global influences are increasingly reaching into the lives of local communities, it is also true that the equilibrium of norms in which people conduct face-to-face encounters is shielded from the unmediated influence of these forces. For one thing, by the time children are affected by international education reforms with international reach, their language, habitus, and affective sensibilities have already been formed in the context of deeply embedded local communities.

Thus, as I have documented elsewhere, it is certainly true that the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment increasingly influences the policy of national governments (see H.-D. Meyer and Benavot, 2013). Here we have a case of a global organization influencing local governments. But to conclude that local cultural norms are giving way to global ones and that world culture is increasingly trumping local norms and beliefs is to commit the Marquis de Condorcet’s rationalist fallacy. The Marquis, a fierce proponent of the French revolution, believed in the inevitable triumph of a rational world culture:

Once individuals have been brought into closer proximity by their interdependent needs; ...once they have made it a political principle to treat ignorance and misery with humanity” [...] we need no longer “fear that there are areas on our planet that are inaccessible to enlightenment. ...The time will therefore arrive when the sun will shine only on free

individuals, people who will accept no other authority above them than reason itself.

In line with Condorcet, Marx and Engels predicted half a century later “that the globalizing force of capitalism would dissolve the power of ethnicity and tradition, people remain as dependent as ever on particularist attachments to group, family, ethnicity, kin, clan, nationality, and religion” (Meyer, 2013). More than two centuries after the Marquis’ prophecies we find particularist attachments of religion, ethnicity, tradition, and tribe be as strong a force as ever. Tocqueville’s idea that “mores are the only tough and durable power in a nation” (1968, p. 247) appears more realistic, after all, than Marx/Engels’ prediction that local morals and customs would be increasingly obsolete, “survivals of the past”, or “differences that are daily vanishing” (Marx and Engels, 1983, p. 225).

If the staying power of the cultural particulars in the way people interact in face-to-face settings such as family, local community, and education is as large as the above explorations suggest, we have reason to tread carefully as we interpret the impact of the undeniable globalization processes at the macro-level. It may well be possible that these processes drive the social and educational policies of nations towards converge, while at the same time, being limited and constrained by the persistence of local norms.

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