

Deep Culture Podcast – Transcript

The Deep Culture Podcast explores the psychological impact of intercultural experiences, informed by the sciences of brain, culture and mind. Join hosts **Joseph Shaules** and **Ishita Ray** as we look at the personal growth that can come from travel, living and working abroad, learning a foreign language, growing up in a multicultural context—and the challenges of bridging different cultural worlds.

Episode 57 – Personality and Culture – Deep Connections

Are you a different person when speaking another language? Does being bicultural mean you have two personalities? In this episode, Joseph Shaules and Torhild Liane Skårnes Harr explore the challenges of being true to yourself and adjusting to different cultural worlds. Emre Seven, Sanne Bosma and Ishita Ray share stories about adjustment stresses and uncommon connections.

Time	Speaker	
00:00:00	Emre	<p>I remember driving to a Turkish restaurant miles away, just to get her some baklava she loved so much.</p> <p>I used to find strawberry pie ready when I came from work. There would be a note with a P.S., which said: “Just a tiny slice is enough for me.”</p>
00:00:29	Joseph	Hello, this is Joseph Shaules, and welcome to the Deep Culture podcast, where we explore culture and the science of mind. And I am here today with Lia. Good afternoon from Tokyo, Lia.
00:00:40	Lia	Good morning from Norway. Joseph, the title of this episode is Personality and Culture - Deep Connections.
00:00:48	Joseph	And we wanted to explore a question that confronts people who live between cultural how can you be yourself when you are changing to adapt to different cultural worlds?
00:01:01	Lia	<p>You can't just be yourself in a foreign country. You have to adapt, change how you communicate. My husband, for example, he grew up in Peru and then moved to Norway. I remember meeting his friends and it was like I didn't recognize him.</p> <p>In Norway, he was this quiet, serious person. Then in Peru, suddenly the life of the party.</p>

00:01:23	Joseph	<p>Wow, like you're meeting him all over again.</p> <p>So, we will dig into the psychology of moving between different cultural worlds. Are we a different person? Does our personality change?</p> <p>And how can we form deep connections and be true to ourselves?</p>
00:01:41	Lia	<p>We look at research into personality and culture. Like, does being bicultural mean you have two personalities?</p> <p>And do people from around the world all recognize the same personality types?</p>
00:01:53	Joseph	<p>And we'll hear stories from the podcast team about how they have navigated these changes and how they've created deep connections.</p>
00:02:02	Lia	<p>And that brings us to part one - Same or Different.</p>
Part One – Same or Different		
00:02:13	Joseph	<p>So, Lea, let's talk about a feeling we're both familiar with.</p> <p>Changing the way you communicate or how you act when you're in a foreign environment or a foreign country. When you're speaking a different language.</p>
00:02:27	Lia	<p>You can call this cultural adaptation or cultural adjustment. And sometimes people talk about cultural frame shifting, and it means having different modes to function in different environments.</p>
00:02:37	Joseph	<p>It's something you need to be good at if you're working in an international environment. As we hear from podcast team member Sanne Bosma.</p>
00:02:50	Sanne	<p>I definitely change depending on the environment and people I interact with.</p>

		<p>At the International Business School, for example, we use English. I find that when interacting with an international audience, I am more reserved, more indirect.</p> <p>But when I speak English with a more expressive person, for example, one of my Spanish colleagues, I tend to become more expressive, less personal space, more touching.</p> <p>In Dutch, with Dutch colleagues, I am more direct. I use more dark humour. Occasionally I have used dark humour in English, but this sometimes shocks people, so I've learned to avoid it.</p> <p>And then again, I adapt when I am in an Armenian cultural environment, it is more expressive. Personal space is smaller. Laughter is louder. Hands and arms are used much more. I am also aware of gender expectations. I may sit differently or behave differently with men. I am more modest and far less engaging.</p> <p>Over time, these differences have become habits. So, yes, my personality might change, but am I a different person? I don't think so.</p>
00:04:14	Joseph	This is really interesting. Sanne says that her personality changes. These are different habits she has, but she's not a different person.
00:04:23	Lia	I can totally relate to this. You change a lot and still feel like the same person, but also feel really different. It's an odd feeling.
00:04:32	Joseph	<p>Well, let's dig into this a bit more deeply. And I'm happy that I can ask you about this, because you have really adapted deeply in all of the years that you lived in the Philippines. So, let's start with a very basic question.</p> <p>Why do people change themselves in a foreign environment?</p>
00:04:50	Lia	Well, first of all, it helps you get things done. But it's also about building relationships. If I'm in the Philippines, then it's harder to connect if I'm being a typical Norwegian.
00:05:00	Joseph	But then does that mean that you have two personalities?

00:05:05	Lia	Well, for me, that question is too simple. It's too binary. We need to think about what we mean by personality.
00:05:12	Joseph	Well, I think a lot of people would say that our personality or our character is something inside us, like an essence that makes you who you are and that it's the same no matter where you are, what you do. There are a lot of different personality tests that are supposed to show you what your type is.
00:05:30	Lia	I've done those myself. The results that I got didn't match what people tell me. Like, that I thrive in a predictable environment. That is not true. It gives you a way to talk about collaboration, like at work. But in terms of actually identifying some deeper qualities in you, I have my doubts. It's very essentialistic, very individualistic.
00:05:54	Joseph	Let's get back to what we said about whether personality is like some essence. So, if you're a reserved person in Norway, then you should also be one in the Philippines.
00:06:06	Lia	And I don't think it works that way. I can't believe you're the same person when you're speaking French and Japanese.
00:06:13	Joseph	No, that's true. I do adjust a lot. Years ago I had a Japanese girlfriend and we always spoke Japanese together. We hadn't been going out for very long, and one day I answered the phone and started speaking French and she gave me this look. Then when I hung up, she said in Japanese: "When you speak French, it looks like you're showing off.
00:06:34	Lia	Because of how you were talking?
00:06:37	Joseph	I guess. I mean, French is pretty expressive. <i>«Ecoute, il faut s'exprimer! Il faut avoir du sentiment. On est des êtres humains, quand même. »</i>
00:06:45	Lia	Which means?

00:06:47	Joseph	"Hey, you've got to express yourself to be alive. You know, we are human beings, after all."
00:06:51	Lia	And you don't communicate like that in Japanese?
00:06:59	Joseph	<i>"Sō desu ne, amari kanjō-teki ni naru kotowanai desu ne". . .</i> Which is: "Well, I, yeah, I really don't get that emotional in Japanese."
00:07:04	Lia	Well, I adjust a lot, too. Interacting in Tagalog is very different than in a Norwegian. In the Philippines, people are very sensitive to each other's feelings. Like, if you've been quiet, people will notice, maybe ask you, what's wrong. In Norway, if something is wrong, you have to say it. It changes how you relate to people. Let's say I am invited to go to a party, but I don't want to go alone. So I ask a friend to join me. If I ask an Norwegian friend and she says that she doesn't want to go, I'm like, okay. I look for another solution. With a Filipino friend, I could kind of insist saying something like, <i>"Samahan mo na nga ako"</i> or <i>"Come with me, please!"</i> . It sort of signals that I don't feel like going alone, that I somehow need her to be there.
00:07:54	Joseph	And so in that case, would she go with you?
00:07:57	Lia	Most likely she would. It's a very relational culture. It's normal to depend on your friends like that. In Norway, if I insist like that, it would seem needy or maybe pushy.
00:08:09	Joseph	So these are some pretty deep changes. You're not just using a different language. You really have to adjust your relationships with people.
00:08:27	Lia	No matter how you think about personality, these changes are deep. It's like I was saying about my husband, Mahel, when he moved to Norway from Peru, he had to learn a whole new way of living. There is enormous pressure on someone who grows up in a different cultural environment. You almost have no choice but to switch back and forth.

00:08:46	Joseph	So, does that mean that growing up with two cultures means you have two personalities?
00:08:52	Lia	Here's how I see it. There isn't some unchanging personality within you. That's an illusion. Who you are comes out in how you navigate the different situations in life.
00:09:03	Joseph	<p>And that means to be yourself in different cultural worlds, you have to know how to play different cultural games.</p> <p>And this goes back to the idea that you often hear that culture is like water to a fish. But that means that we can't really be ourselves until we've learned how to navigate in a new pond and our personality is like our own personal way of swimming.</p>
00:09:25	Lia	And the idea that personality depends on the situation is really common in the world. As Ishita Ray explains.
00:09:36	Ishita	<p>The idea that you have a single true self and one true personality feels individualistic to me.</p> <p>In India, no one is surprised if the outgoing, talkative cousin is also a tender, loving father and the calm, rational employee at work. It is normal to be a different person with different people in different situations.</p> <p>And that is absolutely the case with me. I grew up in an environment where I had to speak different languages to be myself. I joked with my brother at the dinner table in Bengali. I played cricket in the schoolyard in English. And with my best friends in school, I spoke Hindi. These are all me. And is my personality the same in these different situations and relationships and languages? It simply cannot be.</p> <p>The gap between these different selves can be quite extreme. My father was shocked to see me aggressively negotiate auto rickshaw fares in Hindi when he visited me in Delhi. But in Delhi you have to be a bit of a badass just to get things done.</p>

		<p>My good friend and colleague, Dolon, is Bengali and grew up in a home not far from where I did. I have known her for over 15 years now. And what language do we speak to each other in? English. There is a freedom to using English to exchange ideas, to speak about abstractions, to talk about the world. Dolon and I are more ourselves in English with each other than we would be in Bengali.</p> <p>Human beings are a multiplicity. A second language does not take away from the first. It gives you a new medium to connect and express who you are. I have as many selves as languages I speak and as people I know.</p>
00:11:53	Joseph	Wow, this blows me away. I love how she says there is no single true self. And you know, I have seen Ishita negotiate with an auto rickshaw driver in Hindi.
00:12:04	Lia	Well, I really relate to this, but in a different way. I definitely feel that I have different modes, like when I'm speaking Norwegian, Tagalog, and English. But it's not nearly as smooth for me.
00:12:17	Joseph	And that brings us to part two - It Takes Effort.
Part Two – It Takes Effort		
00:12:29	Joseph	So I loved how for Ishita, navigating in different languages and cultures is about relationships. It's how you connect.
00:12:36	Lia	But it is not like some switch you can flip. Alienation is always just around the corner.
00:12:42	Joseph	I think it's easy to underestimate how hard it is to learn a language and adapt deeply. And that's something podcast team member Emre Seven learned in the United States. He did a college degree in English. He was interested in American culture, but it was still a struggle.
00:13:03	Emre	When I went to the United States, I got a job working in Louisiana at Burger King. But I had trouble understanding anything the other employees were telling each other. The worst was when I heard one of my coworkers say: "This guy does not understand English."

		<p>I was shocked to find out that many people had not even heard of my country, Turkey. One day, a young woman I worked with asked me: "Where are you from?" I replied: "Turkey." She said: "What? There is a country with the same name as the animal?" And then she burst into laughter. I was furious. But before I could say anything, another colleague said: "Turkey, where is that?". I said: "Come on, it's between Europe and Asia." She just said: "Oh, yeah, never heard of that."</p> <p>It was a very humbling experience. I wondered, is something wrong with me or with them?</p>
00:14:23	Joseph	Wow. Having people treat you that way, that can be really tough.
00:14:28	Lia	<p>That's what I mean by alienation is just around the corner. Some offhand comment from a colleague or things you don't understand. It's like being a child again.</p> <p>I was young when I moved to the Philippines the first time as part of a volunteer training program. I was only 19, and at that age, you really want to fit in. And even though I loved the Philippines from the start, it was hard adjusting. I ended up staying more than three years. I worked very closely with Filipinos during that time, but I still doubted I could ever fully fit in.</p>
00:15:02	Joseph	Then you went back to Norway, but then later you moved to the Philippines again.
00:15:08	Lia	And by then I had met a lot of foreigners in Norway. I saw that they worked really hard to adapt to life in Norway. So I told myself, going back to the Philippines, I cannot spend years there and not speak the language and not have Filipino friends because I will lose my integrity.
00:15:25	Joseph	<p>You know what I hate? When people hear that I live in Japan and they say: "Oh, I assume you picked up the language." As though you can just soak it in through your skin.</p> <p>For me, learning Japanese was a lot harder than Spanish. It really scrambled my brain.</p>

		And just to speak normally, I had to learn honorifics, to think about things like in group, out group.
00:15:50	Lia	In the Philippines, I really studied the language as much as I could. I woke up early, went to bed late. I listened to Filipino music all the time. And I didn't hang out with foreigners, just Filipino friends.
00:16:03	Joseph	Well, that is hardcore. And honestly, most people aren't willing to do that.
00:16:08	Lia	It was hard, super hard. Even with my love for the language, the culture, the country and all of it. It was still exhausting, not keeping up, being the only foreigner.
00:16:21	Joseph	I think some people who hear that might not understand. Like, how can you love the country, love the language, want to be there, yet still find it really difficult?
00:16:31	Lia	One thing is, I stand out in the Philippines and people react to that. I've had people say to me: "Why do you foreigners always think you're right, you white people?"
00:16:43	Joseph	Wow. Well, I have experienced some of that in Mexico. There's an expression, " <i>Pobre de Mexico, tan lejos de Dios, y tan cerca a los Estados Unidos</i> ". Which means: "Oh, poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States." So, I was always the 'gringo', the 'gabacho'.
00:17:09	Lia	As a foreigner, you're too visible. As an individual, you're invisible. And you're also invisible because you just can't keep up. I discovered that I can only understand Tagalog for a couple of hours, right? So I'm with people who I want to build a relationship with. And some of them only speak Tagalog. So I would be speaking Tagalog for hours. Then we hit 8pm or 10pm and my brain would be gone. You feel like a failure. It could be anything at work, or maybe it's a birthday party. I would love to be more out there talking to people, but all of a sudden, I'm too tired to even get what people are talking about.
00:17:46	Joseph	And it feels to me like in situations like that, people don't really notice how tiring it is for you.

00:17:53	Lia	They don't. I'm like, this is just normal for Filipinos to be this way. And I'm making all this effort, and maybe I've moved like, one step closer. But for the people at the party, it's still invisible because I'm still out of it. Still different.
00:18:11	Joseph	You know, people sometimes ask me if in Japan I'm ever fully accepted. And what I say is, well, people accept me as a foreigner. And yes, I have great friends, colleagues, and I'm very comfortable in Japanese. But so much of the time I have to work around the fact that I am a foreigner.
00:18:29	Lia	I can definitely relate to that. But alienation can also be waiting for you if you go back to your home country. I went quite deep into my life in the Philippines. I spent years there. And somehow I did shut off my Norwegian side. When I moved back to Norway, I didn't want to come back. Like, I just wanted to stay in the Philippines forever. And I probably still feel that way.
00:18:54	Joseph	I didn't go back to live in the US but when I visit, I do feel out of place. It's almost like being a spy that knows the language perfectly, but actually has a secret life that other people don't know about.
00:19:07	Lia	Well, I think there are parts of my Norwegian self that I don't have anymore. Like, I don't want to be outside. I don't want to feel cold. Norwegians love being in nature. They go out hiking and walking. I used to do it too. Like, every day with different friends. But since I came back to Norway, I hate it. We have this saying: "There is no such thing as bad weather. There's only bad clothing." And I am like, that's bullshit. There is such a thing as bad weather, and I'm not going outside.
00:19:38	Joseph	Wow. And I guess that's especially true if you compare it to the Philippines. But let's get back to where we started.

		This idea of making connections across culture because we're making adjustment sound pretty miserable. But in the end, you did make deep connections, right?
00:19:57	Lia	Absolutely. People I never would have connected to otherwise. Like with my dance teacher, Lloyd. I had never danced before when I went to the Philippines. And Lloyd is very unique and just so different for me. And I had a feeling that I really wanted to be his friend. Over the years, we've spent hours dancing and hanging out together, and I still join his dance classes online.
00:20:22	Joseph	Well, for me, I found that it's not only individual friendships. We also connect to places, to a particular neighborhood or just a lifestyle. Like in Mexico. I just loved taking a walk around the plaza on Sunday when the families were all out.
00:20:39	Lia	When I was working in poverty reduction, I hung with people with very limited economic backgrounds. And sometimes they would pay for the meal to show me that our relationship was not about money. People who are smarter than me, doing incredible things with very little. Those connections will never leave me.
00:21:01	Joseph	And that brings us to part three - What Does the Science Say?
Part Three – What Does the Science Say?		
00:21:17	Joseph	So, Lia, we've been hearing about people switching between cultures, about personality and culture. But let's get geeky, and let's take a look at what the research says. One thing that psychologists debate is whether there are personality traits that are perceived in the same way across cultures. And if so, what are they?
00:21:39	Lia	People refer to this as the Big Five. Researchers have given surveys all over the world and concluded that there are five of these universal personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

00:21:55	Joseph	And the idea is that everywhere around the world, people will recognize that some people are more open than others or more extraverted.
00:22:03	Lia	Not everyone except the so called Big Five. I found an article that studied forager farmers in the Amazone and concluded that the Big Five did not fit completely.
00:22:12	Joseph	And there are other criticisms as well. One is that these five traits were conceptualized in English and then the instrument was built around them.
00:22:22	Lia	<p>Filipino psychologists created their own branch of psychology in the 1970s as a reaction to Western psychology. They created personality models more focused on shared identity. “Kapwa” or us-ness.</p> <p>Personality, according to Filipino psychology, is more about knowing how to move smoothly within a group and less about being a unique individual.</p>
00:22:45	Joseph	<p>And that makes total sense to me because we know that people in more collectivist societies tend to have a more interdependent sense of self.</p> <p>When I think about the categories of the Big Five, it's not surprising that a broad category like openness or extraversion can be found all over the world. I'm not sure how that helps me when I'm in a foreign country.</p>
00:23:10	Lia	Right, if I want to connect to people in the Philippines, then knowing that I will find extroverts there doesn't help me that much.
00:23:17	Joseph	You know, after looking at all this research, it just takes me back to something you said earlier. That when you are in deep, it's really hard to separate personality from culture.
00:23:28	Lia	Part of that is simply because we use personality words to talk about cultural differences.

		Like if someone says: “Oh, Japanese are so shy.” or, “Norwegians are so serious.”
00:23:39	Joseph	It's a fundamental misunderstanding. Because shyness is a personality trait. You are shy compared to what is typical. But it's not possible that 130 million Japanese are all shy.
00:23:52	Lia	Someone from a more expressive society might feel that Japanese are so called shy, compared to where they are from, but they are using their own cultural standard when they say that.
00:24:08	Joseph	So, let's get back to the research because there is some interesting stuff.
00:24:12	Lia	One article which caught my attention looked at whether cultural frame switching can make people seem less authentic in Western countries. They tested biculturals in the US and Canada and one result was that biculturals report feeling less authentic when they frame switch, when they adapt their behavior based on the context.
00:24:33	Joseph	And the research also found that they are perceived as less authentic to others. So, there can be a psychological cost to frame switching, which is really too bad.
00:24:45	Lia	I also found an article with the promising title: <i>“Do Bilinguals have Two Personalities? A special case of cultural frame switching.”</i> The basic idea is that switching languages activates different cognitive networks, different sets of associations. They tested whether bilingual Spanish English speakers answered personality questions in a way that reflected culture.
00:25:06	Joseph	For example, in Mexican culture, there is a value placed on ‘simpatia’, which is a kind of agreeableness, being non-confrontational. And the results show that yes, bilinguals scored higher on agreeableness when answering in Spanish. I also found a study that showed bicultural bilingual Spanish English speaking women, interpreted advertisements quite

		<p>differently depending on the language they used. For example, answering in Spanish they would say: “Oh, that person looks lonely standing on the top of the mountain like that.”</p> <p>Whereas in English they would say: “Oh, that person looks like a real adventurer.”</p>
00:25:48	Lia	And this does make sense to me. I'm going to have a different reaction to something in Tagalog and in Norwegian.
00:25:54	Joseph	Well, in the end, I personally didn't feel like the research into personality is that helpful in a foreign environment. I think it's more useful to look at research into how culture shapes psychology, ways in which the mind is cultural. And these are the kinds of things that we talk about on this podcast. Like episode 41, we talked about cultural difference in motivation, or in episode 29 we talked about cultural difference in emotion.
00:26:22	Lia	But let's get back to our original idea of how we are different in different cultures. What can we learn from all this?
00:26:31	Joseph	Well, my takeaway is that the human mind is deeply cultural and that's why adapting deeply can be so hard.
00:26:39	Lia	But that's also what makes those connections so meaningful. Adapting to life in the Philippines was tough, but I wouldn't give it up for the world.
00:26:47	Joseph	<p>It's really two sides of the same coin, isn't it? All that effort comes at a cost, but it can lead to some uncommonly deep connections.</p> <p>And that's something that Emre Seven has experienced in the United States.</p>
00:27:06	Emre	The most uncommon connection I have had in my life was my flat mate Martha, when I was living in Destin, Florida, a tiny seaside town on Florida's Gulf Coast. At that time, I was 22 and Martha was 65.

		<p>We were from different backgrounds, cultural, religious and professional. It was the first time for me to be in everyday contact with somebody who was so different.</p> <p>However, our relationship was much more than just sharing a living space. We spent great time together and it was one of the most fruitful periods of my life. My bond with her was one of the strongest I have had with anyone.</p> <p>Our conversations delved into deep topics, often focused on the different worlds we came from. Also, we cooked together, different dishes from our different backgrounds. She taught me how to cook meatloaf and I made Turkish style salad.</p> <p>We went on food adventures. We drove to Chinese and other ethnic restaurants. We tried new dishes together. Also we helped out each other in difficult times and gave each other some lovely surprises.</p> <p>Martha passed away in 2016 at the age of 71. She had lung cancer. I cannot describe the pain I felt when I heard the news. I am so grateful to know that she smiled a big smile when her sister in law gave her a message from me in her last days.</p> <p>I now understand that I have always seen Martha as a unique individual, more than part of a certain categorical group. She was not my older American flat mate, she was my Martha. And I was not her roommate from Turkey, I was Emre.</p> <p>She made me feel that. That was our deep connection.</p>
00:29:20	Lia	That's such an inspiration.
00:29:22	Joseph	Wow. And thanks to Emre for reminding us how deep these uncommon connections can go.
00:29:30	Lia	Well, we're just about out of time, but Joseph, you still haven't really given your answer to the question: Are you a different person in a foreign place?

00:29:39	Joseph	Well, this is how I think of it. Each of us has our own melody to play, so when we change languages or go to a different culture, we are still playing our own music, but we're just using a different instrument to do it.
00:29:51	Lia	I love that. It's been fun making this music together today.
00:29:57	Joseph	So, let's share some of our sources.
00:30:00	Lia	<i>Do Bilinguals have two Personalities? A Special Case of Cultural Frame Switching</i> , in the Journal of Research and Personality. <i>One Individual, Two Identities. Frame Switching among Biculturals</i> , in the Journal of Consumer Research. <i>The potential cost of cultural fit. Frame switching undermines perception of authenticity in Western context</i> , in Frontiers in Psychology.
00:30:26	Joseph	The Deep Culture Podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute, an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. I am the director of JII and if you're an educator, you can use the Deep Culture Culture Podcast in the classroom. We have free educational materials available for multiple episodes. Just do a web search for the Japan Intercultural Institute and click on resources. This podcast is noncommercial, so please support us by forwarding this episode to a friend following us on YouTube, writing a review on Apple Podcasts. To really connect with what we're doing, become a member of the Japan Intercultural Institute. Just do a web search or write us at dcpodcastsapanintercultural.org Leah Every time at the end of the episode I have to pronounce your name when I do the credits and I'm never sure if I have the pronunciation right. Can you like say your full name?
00:31:20	Lia	Torhild Liane Harr Skårnes.
00:31:23	Joseph	Torhild Liane Harr Skårnes. Oh my goodness.
00:31:27	Lia	Yes. Yes, that's good.
00:31:30	Joseph	Well thank you for helping me out with that.

		Thanks so much to Emre Seven and Sanne Bosma for sharing their experiences to co producer Ishita Ray, our sound engineer, Robinson Fritz, Ikumi Fritz and everyone at JII. And of course, thanks to you, Lia, for sharing this time with me.
00:31:47	Lia	Thank you, Joseph. I really enjoyed this.