



CRASH COURSE REVIEW – ACCULTURATION

Why should you study acculturation? This important concept means that a minority culture can be changed by contact with another, more dominant culture. Be prepared to see key concepts like acculturation on the AP Human Geography exam.

A good AP Human Geography study guide will explain why should you pay attention to acculturation as it applies to the AP Human Geography exam. It will also review the diffusion of culture traits and how cultural landscapes evolve over time. Before we get too deep into acculturation, let's examine the overarching concept of culture and define a few other key terms.

Culture

Culture is everything about a group of people that makes them unique, like their lifestyle, beliefs, and values. Culture is transferred within a society by imitation, teaching, and example. Culture is also a learned process, and you don't inherit it from your parents. It is important then, for any study in AP Human Geography, to investigate how and why a culture exists in a particular spot on earth.

Cultural Concepts

There are key cultural concepts that will help us to understand the concept of acculturation. The first of these are culture traits. A culture trait is a single feature of culture, like their belief system or types of food they consume.

Another concept that is related to acculturation is **cultural diffusion**. Cultures spread from one region to another as part of this process. Diffusion involves the movement of people, ideas, and goods from one place to another. A culture trait, like language or religion, is spread from one area to another by cultural diffusion.

A **culture hearth** is a place where new thoughts and ideas originated and then diffused to other regions. Sometimes barriers, like a taboo for example, keep culture traits from spreading because those habits are prohibited by that society's customs and rules.

Changes in societies are not processes that happen quickly. Cultural change is a process that occurs over an extended period, perhaps several generations, and is often very painful for one group or the other.

Understanding Acculturation

Now that you know what culture is, we can more fully understand the terms associated with the theory of **acculturation**.

Acculturation is the change that occurs within a culture when it adopts a practice or practices from another culture. When individuals or groups of people transition from living a lifestyle of their own culture to moving into a way of life of another culture, they must acculturate, or come to adapt the new culture's behaviors, values, customs, and language.

Acculturation typically involves a host culture and a minority culture. Acculturation is the process of the minority culture adopting some of the values, customs, or behaviors of the host culture. The host culture is the larger group into which the minority culture moved. For example, immigrants may adopt the language and maybe several other customs of their host group, but they still may retain many of the distinctive customs and traditions of their culture. A good example would be a Somali living in the United States who speaks English in America but Somali to his friends and from Somalia.

The concept of **transculturation** is different than acculturation because in transculturation there is an equal exchange, or two-way flow, of traits between two cultural groups. For example, Buddhism originated in India, but diffused throughout Eastern Asia and interacted with Confucianism. Transculturation occurred because both religions were strong and Buddhism and Confucianism remained in place to influence large populations throughout East Asia.

In contrast to acculturation and transculturation, **syncretism** is the birth of a new culture trait from blending two or more culture characteristics. These changes lead to a wide range of differences, including languages and religions. A good example of syncretism comes from Japan with the blending of religious practices of the Buddhist and Shinto. This syncretic religion is known as Shin-Buddhist co-practice.

What Other Ways can Cultures Change?

Now that we know all about acculturation and how cultures change over time, what are other ways cultures spread and change?

A group can lose part of its culture when the immigrants become totally integrated into the host culture. In this case, the dominant culture completely absorbs the less dominant one. This process is called **assimilation**. The immigrants are aware of the differences between the two cultures but retain their ethnic identity.

Picking up new ideas about a culture might include learning how to prepare food, learning what types of acceptable clothing is worn, or adopting new habits. A person who fully assimilates has picked up all the habits and attributes of their non-native culture. In a global context, assimilation can be benign when

the host country incorporates immigrant minorities into their host societies, which is the case in the United States.

In some countries, immigrants are often marginalized and required to completely assimilate by not being able to use their native language or practice their ethnic religion. The Portuguese adopted the policy of assimilation as part of their colonial occupation of West and Central Africa during the early part of the twentieth century.

Globalization is a hot-button topic in the world we live in today. As a global community, we are increasingly becoming interconnected through politics, communication, transportation, marketing, manufacturing and social processes. Globalization has its advantages, but it brings on problems as well. Sharing knowledge can improve the quality of life, but it can also result in loss of cultural identity, language, and perhaps a monocultural sameness.

Another concept making news today is **cultural appropriation**, which is the adoption or use of elements of one culture by members of another culture. Cultural appropriation can be controversial when a group's cultural property is used without the consent of the members of the originating culture and can be a violation of that group's intellectual property rights. In a contemporary sense, this practice differs from the concept of acculturation or assimilation, in that the appropriation or misappropriation, refers to the adoption of these cultural elements in a colonial fashion.

Critics of cultural appropriation argue that elements are copied from a minority culture by members of the dominant culture, and used outside of their original cultural context, even against the wishes of the originating group. Often, the traditional meaning of those elements is skewed or minimized, and such displays can be insulting to those members. Supporters choose to call this process "cultural exchange" and is seen as inevitable and supports their right to free expression.

There are many examples of cultural appropriation making the news today. The practice of non-native sports teams deriving team names and mascots from indigenous groups is still common in the United States. This problem persists to a degree, even in the face of protests from native groups. Schools and universities are brought to task because these practices may be harmful to educational institutions whose purpose is to promote ethnic diversity and inclusion. Universities are, however, taking steps to eliminate names and mascots that are deemed hostile or abusive, resulting in the change of many names derived from Native American culture.

Acculturation and the AP Human Geography Exam

So how should you approach acculturation when you prepare for the AP Human Geography exam? The different ways that acculturation happens are important to understand when you look at the history of a culture and how it has changed over time. It is also key to understand how values, customs, and traditions of a cultural group may have adopted or even totally integrated into the host culture of the particular area they live in today.

The AP Human Geography Course Description shows us that recent exams have not specifically covered the concept of acculturation. However, you may be asked to consider many cultural concepts, including acculturation, on your exam. Any question will likely require you to know what acculturation is and why it's important to understand the customs and traits of cultures they possess today, and where those

values, customs, and behaviors came from. You may also be asked to know the difference between acculturation, assimilation, and globalization.