“Cultural Glasses”, the term used by the speaker throughout the video to describe the lens that each person perceives the world through is my key takeaway from this video. Understanding and recognizing the fact that everybody perceives the world through their own, personalized pair of glasses, is the foundation in which the ability to communicate interculturally is built upon. That said, to be skillful in intercultural communication can accurately be described as our ability to replace our own glasses with those of the person we are communicating with. Furthermore, being able to change our glasses in turn allows us to better encode/decode messages that we are sending/receiving with the people that we are communicating with. This, at the end of the day, is what determines whether or not we are communicating effectively with others.

At the beginning of the video, the speaker talks about how he was surprised that a stranger was speaking to him. He was surprised by this because it is not the social norm in Norway for a stranger to do this. Because he was originally from a place where speaking to a stranger is perfectly acceptable, the psychological response of being surprised by this is a perfect example of the four stages of culture shock. This indicates to me that when this happened to him, he had already made it to “Stage Four”, and had embraced the Norwegian culture. As a result, when the stranger spoke to him in Brussels, he experienced “reverse culture shock” in response to something that he would have considered to be perfectly normal before spending 5 years in Norway. Rather than being rude to the stranger ang ignoring him though, he apologized for his response. This demonstrated his ability to minimize ethnocentrism and understand that the stranger was not trying to be rude, but merely socializing with him, which is a culturally normal thing to do in Brussels.

I can’t help think of how fortunate I am to have had first hand experience with different cultures over the years. For example, before moving back to Michigan, I spent 5 years living in a very diverse part of Texas. During my time there, I met people from all over the world, nearly daily. After reading the chapter and watching the video, one person that I met there immediately came to mind – my long time roommate and friend Jamie.

Jamie and I had a lot of time to get to know one-another being that we worked together and were roommates for nearly 3 years. His parent’s are both from Vietnam, and he would frequently talk about his culture. One thing he would reference frequently was respect – often in reference to things that would happen at work. The culture there was unique in the fact that most of us were in our early 20’s, single, and from different states. Jamie was no exception to this, in fact, he was from Grand Rapids, so him and I immediately hit it off. But as a result of the majority of us being away from our home and families, we all grew very close with one another, and would frequently joke and prank each other. Jamie was different in one way though, we all knew not to prank him. I realized why through discussions with him at home – he saw these pranks as disrespectful. Often times, after I had been subjected to a prank, I would find myself explaining to Jamie that I didn’t take it as disrespect, and that if anything I probably deserved harsher pranks; it got pretty brutal at times. I discovered through conversations with him, though, that he felt this way because that is how he was raised. His cultural glasses had caused him to see these pranks that we considered to harmless jokes as something completely different; actions of disrespect. His parents’ came from a high-context Vietnamese culture, so Jamie had been taught that actions that cause others to lose face was not acceptable. This always stood out to me, but I now see that it was different to me because in the United States, we generally exhibit more of a low-context culture.

Another example of differing culture that I recognized while living there was the level of collectivism. Compared to the culture that I had come from here in Michigan, Texans generally emphasized a higher degree of collectivism. They did this in a couple of ways, but the thing that stood out the most to me is the way that Texans, especially those of Mexican descent, would always make sure that everyone was fed. Before living there, I would have considered someone sharing their lunch with someone who had not eaten or forgot to pack their own to be an act of significant generosity. While I was there though, I witnessed this all the time. This was not only true among friends, but anyone who present. This was a bit of a culture shock to me, but ultimately a value that I grew to love. I never went hungry while I lived there (not even close), but I also learned not to pick-up or prepare a meal for just myself, as that would be considered rude there.