

University of Luxembourg

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Symposium Contribution:
Looking back or forward? The cultural identity
construction of immigrant youth.

**Insights from a qualitative study of second-generation
young Tamils growing up in Germany**

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- A growing body of research focuses on identifications of persons growing up with **multiple cultural experiences** and how these influences are **negotiated** within themselves.
- This study examines identity construal processes of second generation Tamils growing up in Germany.

Background: Tamils in Germany



- Tamils emigrated from Sri Lanka in fleeing from civil war.
- The first wave arrived in 1983. Today, about 65000 persons of Tamil origin live in Germany.
- **Tamils schools** were set up in Germany in the early 90s.
 - Attendance is voluntary – on Saturdays (09:00 – 13:00) and mirrors in terms of structure the German school system
 - About 120 such schools exist across Germany – all following the same curriculum. Focus is on language learning and culture.
 - A three year training programme will qualify for teaching at the school.
- Most Tamils in Germany follow the Hindu religion. The second largest Hindu Temple in Europe, the **Sri-Kamadchi-Ampal-Temple** is located in Germany.

Traditional Tamil values include:

- Making parents proud
- Conservative understanding of gender roles
- Emphasis of duty over joy. Rule-based – strong emphasis on education and career.

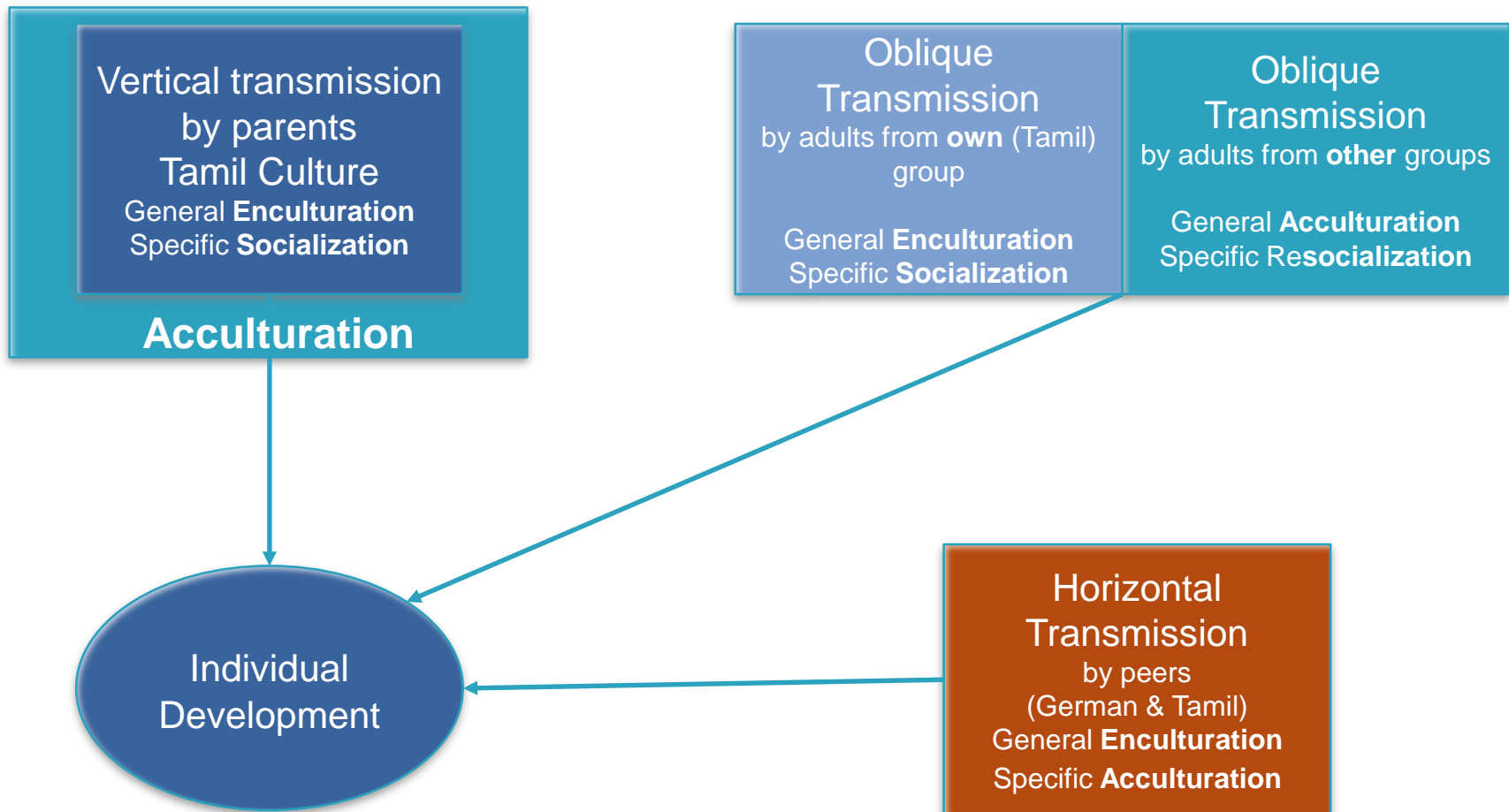
Germany – more on the individualistic spectrum

- Following own goals
- Equality
- Emphasis of joy over duty

Theoretical Background

Value Transmission – Parents

Developmental context



Adapted from: Tesch-Römer, C. & Albert, I. (2012). Kultur und Sozialisation [Culture and Socialization]. In W. Schneider & U. Lindenberger (Eds., Oerter/ Montada), *Entwicklungspsychologie* (7. Auflage, pp. 137 – 156). Weinheim: Beltz Verlag.

Multicultural identity integration framework (Amiot et al., 2007; Yampolsky et al., 2013) :

- **Categorization:** People identify with one of their cultural groups over others
- **Compartmentalization:** People maintain multiple, separate identities within themselves
- **Integration:** People link their multiple cultural identities.

Research question:

Given the opposing cultural value systems –

- How do second generation Tamils growing up in Germany organize their cultural identities?
- What compromises do they make in order to live up to cultural expectations?
- How do they negotiate their cultural influences?

Research Question:

Building on the multicultural identity integration research we were particularly interested whether participants

- identify with one cultural group over others (categorization),
- keep their influences separate (compartmentalization) or
- link their cultural influences (integration).

Method

- 10 Participants
 - Five male, five female
 - Age range– between 18 – 23 ($M_{female} = 19.6$; $M_{male} = 20.2$)
 - All born & grown up in Germany
 - All fluent in German and Tamil
 - All parents first generations immigrants to Germany – born in Sri Lanka, are married and live together.
 - All participants attended & completed the Tamil school
 - All achieved higher education entrance qualification (Abitur)
 - For all, the home language is Tamil.
 - 9 participants follow Hinduism – 1 Christian.
 - 9 participants have German citizenship – 1 Indian citizenship.
 - 7 live at home – 3 moved out, but are in daily contact with their parents

- Socio-demographic questionnaire
- Semi-structured interviews – (remote – Pandemic)
 - Interviewer – second author – herself a product of two cultures.
 - Interviewees were recruited through her network
 - All interviews were conducted in German – with Tamil expressions, as well.
 - All interviews were recorded and transcribed
- Opening question: Where are you from?
- Three exercises

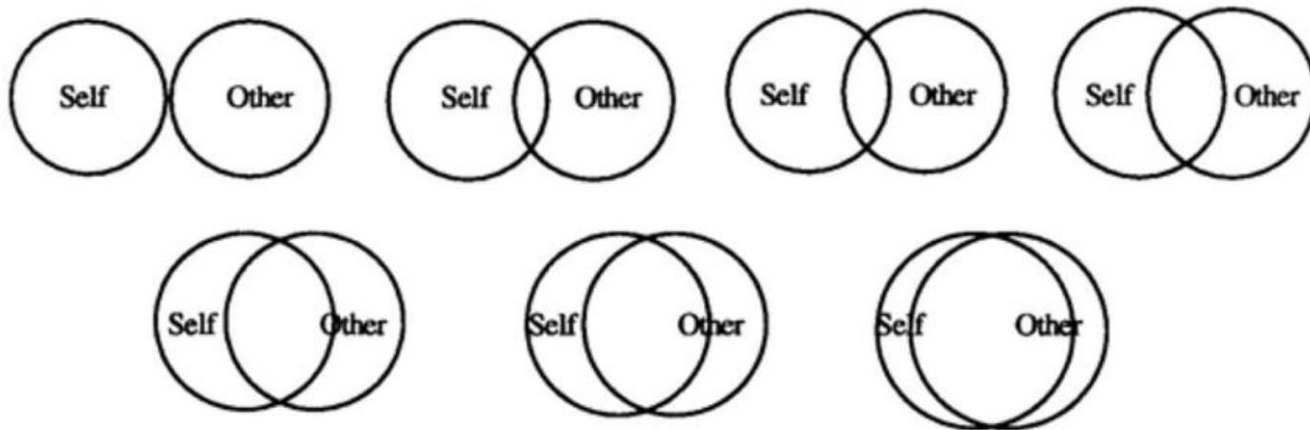
■ Exercise 1: Bidimensional arrow

- Instruction: Here you see a line with Tamil culture on one side and German culture on the other. Please mark on the line where you would place yourself.



- **Exercise 2:** Adapted Inclusion of Self in Other (IOS) – Scale (Aron et al. 1992):
 - Instruction: Which of these constellations best reflects your relationship with your different cultures?

Please circle the picture below which best describes your relationship

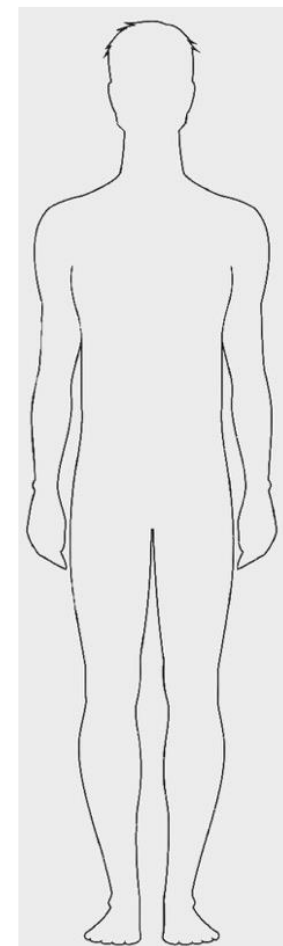
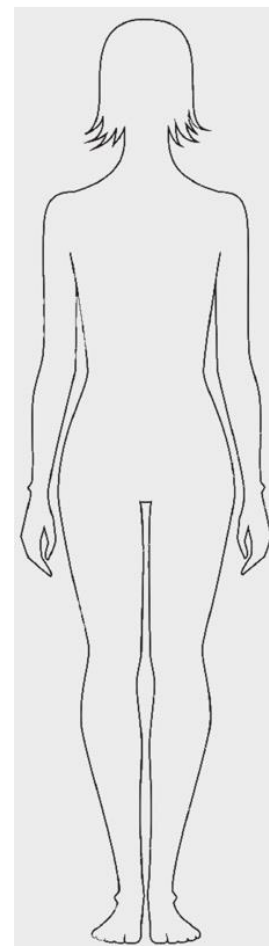


Exercise 3 – Outline of a Person

adapted from Brasad (2014)

Instruction:

You see an outline of a person and have some pencils.
Choose a color that represents **Germany** for you and another color that represents **Sri Lanka**.
Now please color in which parts of your body represent your countries.

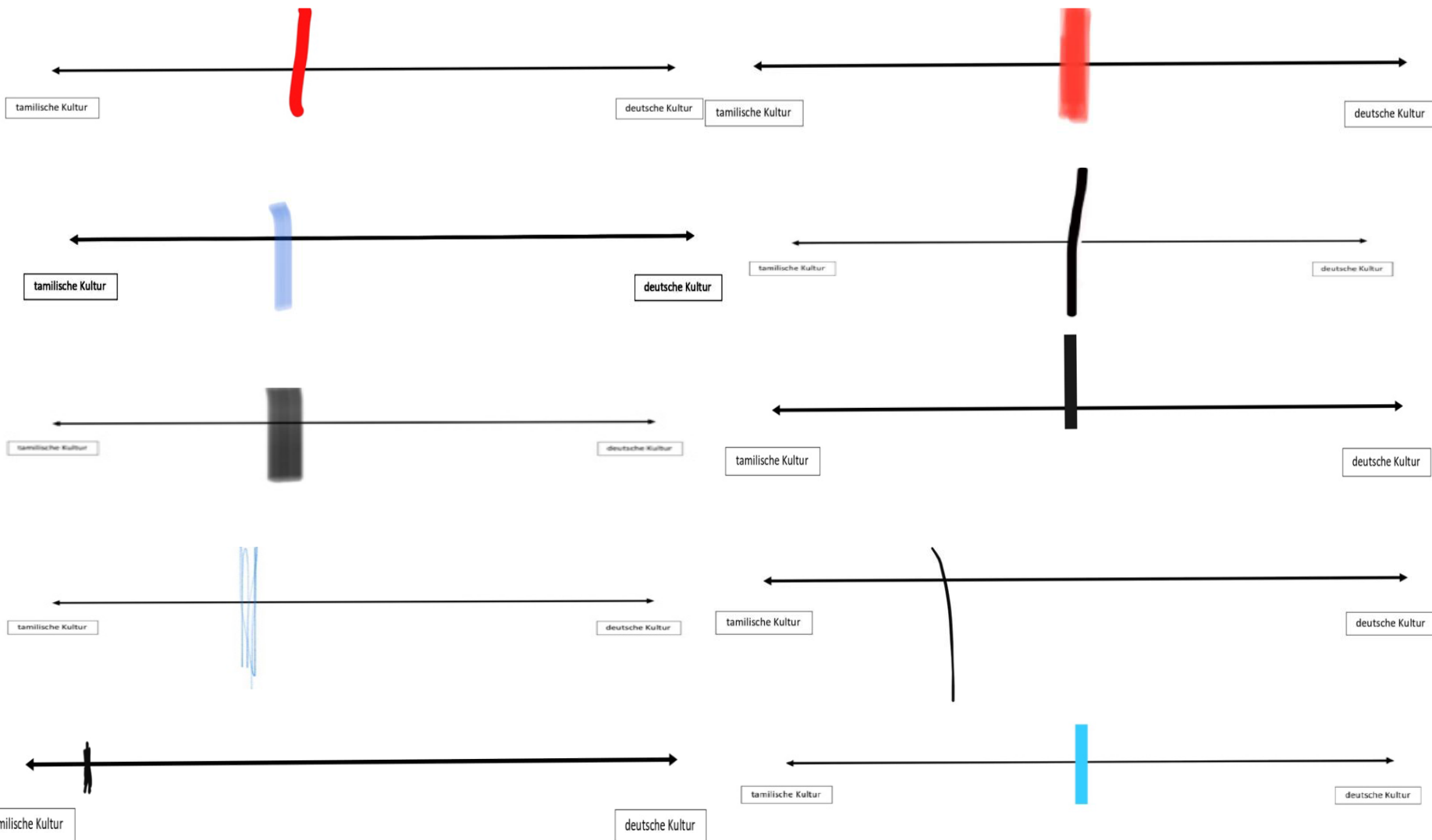


Results

Exercise 1:

Female

Male





PT1: *Well, since I grew up in the Tamil culture, I naturally feel more attracted to it. So I know a lot more about Tamil culture than about German culture, although I also grew up in Germany. Of course, I also know the (public) holidays and so on. But I stick more to Tamil culture than to German culture.*

I: Are there things with which you clearly identify with German culture?

PT1: *With German culture,[um] the freedom and equality. I presuppose other goals, I would say other goals, other values. In German culture, you don't place a lot of value to what other people think. A little, but not very much. You are rather working on oneself. In Tamil culture, you also pay attention to what society thinks of you. You have to have a good reputation.*

I: Are there things with which you clearly identify with Tamil culture?

PT1: *Um, in any case, uh, with the language. With the language, also with some, not all traditions, not all. Maybe I don't know all the traditions either. But with the ones I know, I also identify with.*

Okay, so **blue** is supposed to stand for **Tamil culture**. I associate it with my home country. So our island is surrounded by the sea and whenever I think of Sri Lanka, I think of the sea. I think of the sea and the blue sky that I see every day.

Green Germany, because we are surrounded by a landscape here. There is a lot of green here. Green stands for me also, like the traffic light shows green, for us, um, now you can go through, so "go, go, go".



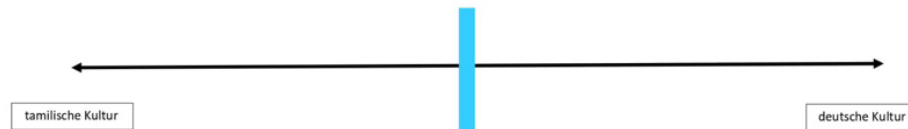
Exercise 3

Rationale for coloring in:

In my head it should be half painted like this. Blue and green. (...) So blue, it's my skin color. Because the Tamil culture is in me. Green, because you don't see it on the outside, but in my head you can see that I also have German culture in me. It is something that you outwardly don't see. Actually this should show my veins, so green and blue flow in me. Not just one. In my head you can see that I also have German culture in me. It is something that you see outwardly.

Actually it should show my veins, so green and blue flow in me. Not just one. It's also what I can show on the outside, i.e. how I dress myself. In Tamil culture, we women place a lot of value on our intimacy, intimate things about ourselves, that our bodies are not misrepresented. And even if I show some cleavage I don't show everything. Do you understand? Yes and that's where I always feel, I think in the Tamil culture mindset. It's a private thing for me and I think again, it's only supposed to be seen by one person. But if another person besides me is allowed to see it, it would only be, uh, my future partner. I can show the stomach area can show it to both cultures. The same reasoning applies to the intimate area as to the chest area. Leg area, you see it's painted more green and blue flows around it. But is it actually like the veins. Both in me, both can be shown.





PT10: *So I love the whole Tamil culture, because it is so damn versatile. Somehow --- I can't - I don't want to identify with it sometimes because some ideologies just don't appeal to me. Some things that Tamils take for granted, I can never take for granted. It just doesn't make makes no sense to me at all.*



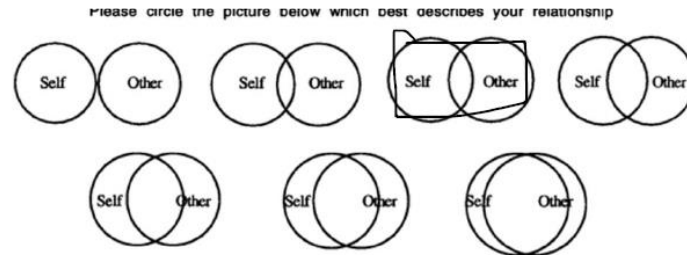
PT10 – German side:

The thinking, the understanding of some of the actions that people commit, I would say. Or just how one simply takes things in, that -- that's where I can see that I'm western influenced. We know both sides and we can decide what makes more sense for us.

PT10 – Tamil side:

Be very very open to strangers, be kind to them. No matter how strange that they don't see them as strangers.

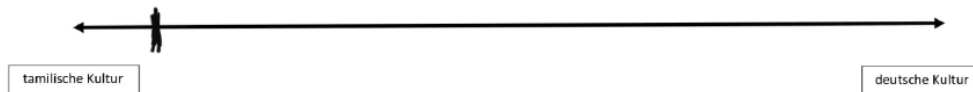
PT 10 Exercise 2



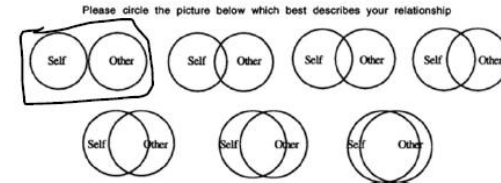
PT 10: *This represents the German and the Tamil culture. The other cultures also influence --- the evaluation of things --- or when you are in a German situation then you evaluate the situation a little differently than if you are completely German. That also applies the other way round.*

I: In which situations do you realise that you have grown up between two cultures?

PT10: *When there are arguments at home. When you fight with your parents. Your parents mean you no harm. But they feel that other things are right than what you do. Then you notice these overlaps between these two cultures.*



I follow the Tamil culture
and not the German
culture.



Rather the first. Because for me Tamil culture and German culture are not the same. Even if you think they are much stricter, but things like clothing, food, tradition, everything, are nothing like German. So no connections at all. So German for me are attitudes, punctuality. For example, also that for school you should participate in something like that. The way I think is also typically Tamil.

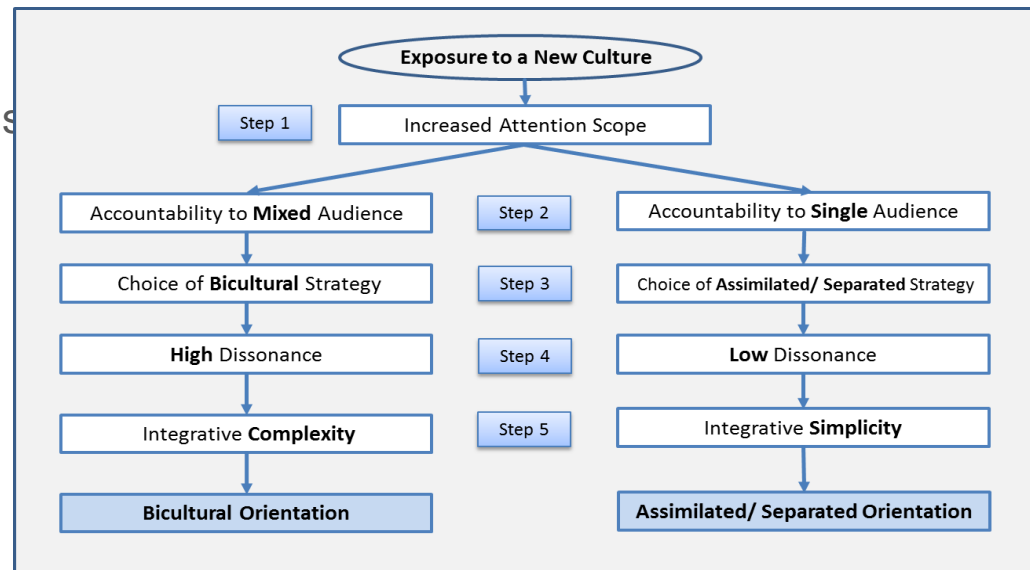
Conclusion

Dimensions for bicultural competence

- For most participants, dimensions for **bicultural competence** are met (LaFromboise et al., 1993):
 1. Knowledge of cultural beliefs and values
 2. Positive attitudes to both groups
 3. Bicultural efficacy
 4. Communication ability
 5. Role repertoire (range of culturally or situationally appropriate behaviors or roles)
 6. Sense of being grounded (stable social networks)

Accountability pressure:

- Most participants feel accountable to Tamil culture and Germany – (Acculturation Complexity Model (ACM), Tadmor & Tetlock (2006, p. 176).
- They are aware of differences, feel at times conflicted, but are willing to find compromises.
- Willingness to focus on what is



Multicultural Identification strategy:

The majority of participants **link** their cultural influences

=> follow an Integration strategy *within themselves*.

The majority of participants also **compartmentalize** their cultures.

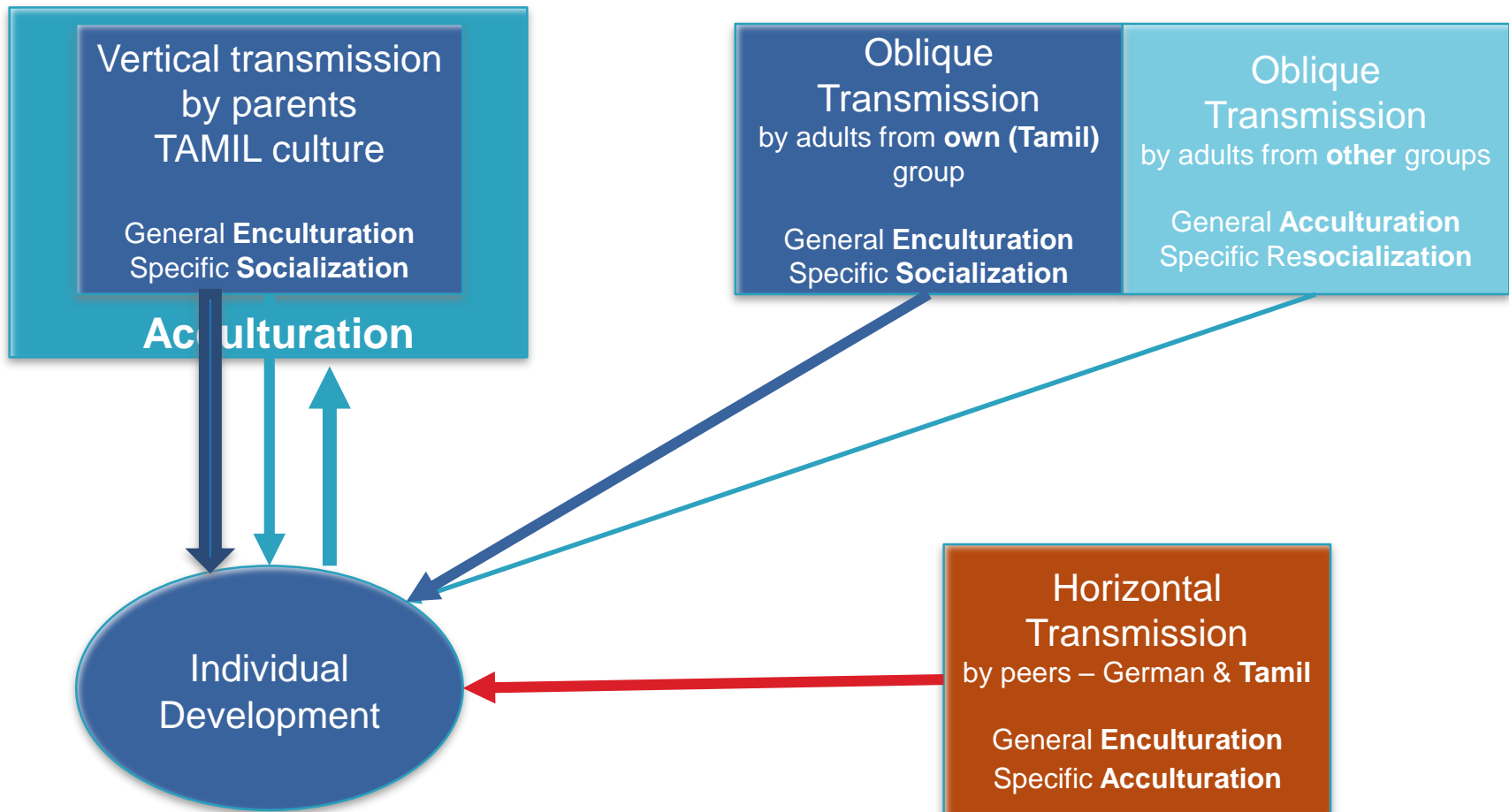
=> Tamil at home with parents/ family – German outside

⇒ Peers of Tamil descent form the link between both cultures

One participant identifies with one (Tamil culture) over Germany

=> Categorization

Value Transmission



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Concluding observations:

- Participants **actively engage** in the **linking** of their cultures.
- **Integration** is felt, but **compartmentalization** is practiced.
- Focus on what is **common**, whilst acknowledging the differences.
- Engaging in **active** negotiation practices – perspective taking and willingness to compromise. However, this is also experienced as effortful and at time stressful.
- Tamil culture is appreciated for its richness and diversity.



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