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Have you ever looked around and noticed that people are- not staring- but ignoring? After a couple of hours in Paris, I started to notice the difference between being noticed, identified and scolded to being noticed, identified and shunned.

Let me explain what I mean. While on the plane, as always, the Americans were the ones to stay up late talking loudly, blasting music, and typing away on their computers, iPads, and gadgets. Those flying home attempted to sleep or converse lightly with the person next to them with absolutely no screaming from one aisle or zone of the plane to the other- the conversation could wait.

Once we landed, our herd moved to baggage claim loudly and obnoxiously, taking up entire walkways, stairways, escalators and general paths. We extended lines and generated a lot of excess noise. All of these would be fine in the US; they may cause annoyance and mumbled conversations, maybe even eye rolls and sighs. However, in Europe, no one stopped to yell, no one took the time to complain (at least not in English)- they made their own path and kept walking.

We were told countless times before leaving, “Americans are known to be loud”. I have traveled to 18 countries in 3 years. 13 of those experiences have been with a group larger than 20. After looking back, it seems clear to me that this has happened in every single place on every single trip. Americans are the loudest group in whatever area at the time, by far. They are often the least courteous, the most boisterous, talk about the most inappropriate things, and lack cultural sensitivity upon all levels of the phrase.

As we entered trains, trams, and subs people would move to the next car. As we ordered at restaurants and walked down streets, citizens would look away. They want to get away from us when we are touring their countries. How intensely upsetting is that? We are coming to share the history and experience their culture, yet we outcast ourselves by not divulging our efforts into becoming one of their numbers.

Don’t get me wrong though. In France, it became an on-going joke among us to see if we could tell a native French person apart. What I came up with? The French stare you down. When you aren’t looking, when you’re making direct eye contact, when they’re holding a conversation with someone else, and when you are walking right at them. It doesn’t matter. They have no consideration for personal space or self-awareness. But why should they? We are in their country! That is their culture! Yet we pick them out and mock their way of life, because we are uncomfortable with it.

I am still sorting through the details in my head, but the experiences that I had combined with the reflection that I am currently going through have led me to one conclusion on the social register. Unless we made the initial and correct move to socialize with a group of French for Belgian citizens, we were clearly going to be kept out. No one came up to me to offer help or start a conversation while I was in a group. No one willingly through themselves at the opportunity to talk to a group of young Americans. It was only when I confronted someone alone or with one other person that we saw true results and had the opportunity to build relationships.

I’ve come to the realization that part of this could be the intimidation of a large crowd. Part could be that when we had these intimate learning experiences, our American guy friends did not surround us. Still, a factor could be the way we approached those around us. Regardless, the tests all came back negative for their interactions being self-motivated or encouraged.

I had a wonderful time with my fellow Kolodzik Business Scholars. We are most definitely a group of well-qualified and exciting individuals, but my next study abroad will be in a much smaller group if not by myself. I want to text this theory. I want to see if I am approached when I stand-alone compared to when I am surrounded. I would like to experience being welcomed into a culture and country without being second-guessed, mocked, or ignored. I will write another journal in response to this one on my personal blog after m return from this proposed trip. Stay tuned.