

CHAPTER 5

WHAT IS CULTURE SHOCK?



CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Unpacking Culture Shock
 - Characteristics of Culture Shock
 - Pros and Cons of Culture Shock
 - Approaching Culture Shock: Underlying Factors
 - Initial Tips to Manage Culture Shock

- Intercultural Adjustment: Developmental Patterns
 - The U-Curve Adjustment Model
 - The Revised W-Shape Adjustment Model
 - Culture Shock: Peaks and Valleys

- Reentry Culture Shock
 - Reentry Culture Shock: Surprising Elements
 - Resocialization: Different Returnees' Profiles

- Intercultural Reality Check: Do-Ables

When I found out I got accepted into the JET program in Japan to teach, I was super excited. Even though I spoke no Japanese, I was motivated to learn as much as I could—I craved any kind of adventure. But I never realized how “western” I was until I sat down with three Japanese teachers and tried to plan my first lesson. My mind was functioning in a linear pattern of “first, next, last,” while the Japanese teachers were discussing, thinking in silence, examining every single detail, and consensus building. Just as I was contemplating shoving a sharp pencil into my skull, a consensus was reached and the lesson plan was finished—three hours later!

After the lesson (first time EVER conducting a class!), I asked one of my Japanese colleagues for some constructive criticism regarding a specific activity. Was it good? Should I do it again? Should I make some changes? “Maybe.”

“Maybe” was the extent of the feedback I received. And then it dawned on me: I had been living in Japan for almost two months now and I was yet to hear the Japanese word “*ie*” (no). For two solid months, absolutely no one has said “no” to me directly. What an adventure!

—K. Abbott, *Graduate Student*

Millions of global citizens cross cultural boundaries every year to work, to study, to engage in government service, and to volunteer their time in global humanitarian work. Likewise, millions of international students, cultural exchange teachers, artists, scientists, and business people come to the United States to learn, to teach, to perform, to experiment, and to conduct business. When individuals move from their home cultures to a new culture, they take with them their cultural habits, familiar scripts, and interaction routines. For the most part, these old cultural habits may produce unintended clashes in the new culture.

Culture shock is about the stress and the feeling of disorientation you experience in a new culture. If you are temporarily visiting (sojourning to) a new culture for the first time, it is likely that you will experience some degree of cultural shock. Even if you do not plan to go overseas to work in the next few years, international classmates and coworkers may be sitting right next to you—working side by side with you. By learning more in depth about their culture shock experiences, you may develop new knowledge, display more respectful attitudes, and learn to apply more flexible intercultural skills in communicating with your international coworkers or classmates. This chapter asks three questions: What is culture shock? Can we track meaningful patterns of the intercultural adjustment process? What are some creative strategies we can use when we are crossing cultural boundaries and encountering culture shock problems?

This chapter is divided into four sections. We first address the role and definition of culture shock. We then explain two intercultural adjustment models that many sojourners or international students find useful. Third, we explore the concept of reentry culture shock. Finally, we present a set of do-able checkpoints to guide you through your international discovery journey.

UNPACKING CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is an inevitably stressful and disorienting experience. Let's check out the story in Blog Post 5.1.

People encounter culture shock whenever they uproot themselves from a familiar setting and move to an unfamiliar one (e.g., relocating from Lima, Peru, to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, or making the transition as a high school senior to a college freshman). Because culture shock is unavoidable, just how we manage culture shock will determine the adaptive process and outcome.

Culture shock is, first and foremost, an emotional experience. Intense emotions are involved in combination with behavioral confusion and inability to think clearly. Both short-term sojourners and long-term immigrants can experience culture shock at different stages of their adaptation. Sojourners, such as cultural exchange students, businesspersons, diplomats, journalists, military personnel, and Peace Corps volunteers, often play temporary resident roles with a short to medium span of stay. This section covers the definitional characteristics

of culture shock, discusses the pros and cons, describes factors that affect the culture shock experience, and provides some initial helpful tips to manage the culture shock experience.

Characteristics of Culture Shock

Before you read this section, work through my.blog 5.1 and check out your culture shock index when you encounter an unfamiliar environment.

Culture shock basically refers to a stressful transitional period when individuals move from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one. In this unfamiliar environment, the individual's identity appears to be stripped of all protection. Previously familiar cues and scripts are suddenly inoperable in the new cultural setting. Let's check out a brief story in Blog Post 5.2.

For many international students or sojourners, the previously familiar cultural safety net has suddenly vanished. Communication scripts have changed. From how to say a proper "hello" to how to say a proper "goodbye" in the new culture, every interaction moment could create unintentional awkwardness or

BLOG POST 5.1

Three American universities accepted my undergraduate applications—one in Hawaii, one in Ohio, and one in Iowa. Because I had no clue as to how one university differed from another, I wrote down the names of the universities on three pieces of paper and asked my then nine-year-old brother, Victor, to pick one with his eyes closed. He picked Iowa. I decided fate had called me to the University of Iowa. Iowa City, in those days, was an all-white campus town. The university campus was huge—spread out and

cut off by a river running through it. I was one of the first group of international students being admitted to the university from Asia.

Life was composed of a series of culture shock waves in my first few months there. From overdressing (I quickly changed my daily skirts to jeans to avoid the question: “Are you going to a wedding today?”) to hyperapprehension (e.g., the constant fear of being called upon to answer questions in the “small power distance” classroom atmosphere). I experienced intense loneliness and homesickness at times. The months flew by quickly, however.

—Stella, college instructor

stress. Unfamiliarity creates perceived threat, and perceived threat triggers fear and emotional vulnerability.

An anthropologist named Oberg (1960) coined the term *culture shock* over five decades ago. He believed that culture shock produces an identity disorientation state, which can bring about tremendous stress and pressure on the well-being of an individual. Culture shock involves (1) a sense of identity loss and identity deprivation with regard to values, status, profession, friends, and possessions; (2) identity strain as a result of the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptation; (3) identity rejection by members of the new culture; (4) identity confusion, especially regarding role ambiguity and unpredictability; and (5) identity powerlessness as a result of not being able to cope with the new environment (Furnham, 1988). An identity disorientation state is part of the culture shock experience.

my.blog 5.1

Recall the last time you traveled to an entirely new place or an unfamiliar environment. Think of that initial experience and put a check mark by the words that best capture your feelings:

Awkward	_____	Bizarre	_____
Disoriented	_____	Energized	_____
Excited	_____	Exhausted	_____
Embarrassed	_____	Surprised	_____
Alive	_____	Anxious	_____
Insecure	_____	Intense	_____
Challenged	_____	Rewarded	_____

In fact, Ward et al. (2001) discuss the *ABC's of culture shock* in terms of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive disorientation dimensions. *Affectively*, sojourners in the initial culture shock stage often expe-

BLOG POST 5.2 CULTURE SHOCK: AN INTERVIEW FOR A CUP OF TEA

My first visit abroad was to Missoula, Montana, USA. I was a visiting Tibetan Buddhist Scholar at a small Tibetan Buddhist Center. One day Carleen, my friend, took me to Starbucks in the downtown. I had to go through an interview to get a cup of tea! I stood in the line to order a cup of tea and the girl at the counter asked me, “What kind of tea?” She listed a couple of teas, including herb tea that I had no clue about. She had no Lipton Tea which I wanted so I settled with English Breakfast Tea. I assumed she would provide milk in my tea but she did not. So I asked for milk to which she said, “Do you want half and half, whole milk, or 2 percent?” I had never heard these choices in my life so I asked for regular milk. She looked baffled and waited for my answer. I looked at Carleen who said half and half would be fine. I like

sweet tea so I asked if I can get some sugar and she asked me, “Would you like sweetener or this or that?” I had no idea of these choices so I said, “Sugar, please.” Finally, I sat at a table with Carleen who had gotten her coffee. When Carleen finished her coffee, the girl refilled her cup but she did not ask me if I wanted more tea. I said, “Could you give me some more tea?” She said, “You need to pay first.” I was a bit shocked and frustrated. I told Carleen that I would rather buy tea materials and make good tea for myself than go through this “tea interview and discrimination experience.” We both had a good laugh. She took me to Safeway to buy tea materials and I could enjoy my tea in peace. (In India, “tea” is understood as sweet tea with milk. I did not know all the American choices for tea, milk, etc.).

—Tenzin, college instructor

rience anxiety, bewilderment, confusion, disorientation, and perplexity as well as an intense desire to be elsewhere. *Behaviorally*, they are at the confusion stage in terms of the norms and rules that guide communication appropriateness and effectiveness. They are often at a loss in terms of how to initiate and maintain smooth conversations with their hosts and how to uphold themselves in a proper manner with the proper nonverbal cadences. *Cognitively*, they lack cultural interpretive competence to explain many of the “bizarre” behaviors that are occurring in their unfamiliar cultural settings.

Culture shock is sparked by the anxiety that results from “losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social discourse. These signs or cues include a thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips” (Bochner, 1986, p. 48). Despite having repeated practice in these interactions in our own culture, we are not aware of its taken-for-granted significance until we are away from our culture. When we start feeling very inept in the new cultural environment and when our peace of mind is jolted suddenly, we start realizing the importance of intercultural learning and intercultural competence skills (Berg & Paige, 2009).

Pros and Cons of Culture Shock

Culture shock can have both positive and negative implications. Negative implications include three major issues: (1) psychosomatic problems (e.g., headaches, stomachaches) caused by prolonged stress; (2) affective upheavals consisting of feelings of loneliness, isolation, depression, drastic mood swings, and interaction awkwardness caused by the inability to perform optimally in the new language; and (3) cognitive exhaustion caused by difficulty in making accurate attributions.

On the other hand, culture shock, if managed effectively, can have the following positive effects on the newcomer: a sense of well-being and heightened positive self-esteem, emotional richness and enhanced tolerance for ambiguity, behavioral competence in social interaction, cognitive openness and flexibility, and an enhanced optimism about self, others, and the everyday surroundings. Culture shock creates an

environment and an opportunity for individuals to experiment with new ideas and coping behaviors. It forces individuals to stretch beyond the usual boundaries of thinking and experiencing.

Approaching Culture Shock: Underlying Factors

The following factors have been found to influence why people manage their culture shock experience differently: motivational orientations, personal expectations, cultural distance, psychological adjustment, sociocultural adjustment, communication competence, and personality attributes.

Sojourners’ **motivational orientation** to leave their home countries and enter a new culture has a profound influence on their culture shock attitudes. Individuals with voluntary motivations (e.g., Peace Corps volunteers) to leave a familiar culture and enter a new cultural experience tend to manage their culture shock experience more effectively than do individuals with involuntary motivations (e.g., refugees). Furthermore, sojourners (e.g., international students, tourists) encounter less conformity pressure than do immigrants because of their temporary visiting role. Host cultures often extend a more friendly welcome to sojourners than to immigrants or refugees. Thus, sojourners tend to perceive their overall international stay as more pleasant and the local hosts as more friendly than do immigrants or refugees.

Personal expectations have long been viewed as a crucial factor in the culture shock management process. Expectations refer to the anticipatory process and predictive outcome of the upcoming situation. Two observations have often been associated with such expectations: The first is that realistic expectations facilitate intercultural adaptation, and the second is that accuracy-based positive expectations ease adaptation stress (Pitts, 2009; Ward, 1996). Individuals with realistic expectations are psychologically prepared to deal with actual adaptation problems more than are individuals with unrealistic expectations. Furthermore, individuals with positive expectations tend to create positive self-fulfilling prophecies in their successful adaptation (e.g., believing relocation is a great move and your positive thinking affects your

actions); negative expectations tend to produce the opposite effect.

Most international students tend to carry positive expectation images concerning their anticipated sojourn in the new culture (Sias, Drzewiecka, Meares, Bent, Ortega, & White, 2008; Ward et al., 2001). Overall, realistic and positively oriented expectancy images of the new culture can help to facilitate intercultural adaptation for both business and student sojourners. Expectations influence newcomers' mindsets, sentiments, and behaviors. A positively resilient mindset helps to balance the negative stressors a newcomer may encounter in his or her adaptive efforts.

Overall, sojourners tend to encounter more severe culture shock when the cultural distance between their home cultures and the host society is high. **Cultural distance** factors can include differences in cultural values, language, verbal styles, nonverbal gestures, learning styles, decision-making styles, and conflict negotiation styles, as well as in religious, sociopolitical, and economic systems. Interestingly, however, when sojourners expect low cultural distance, they may actually encounter more intercultural frustration. These individuals become less culturally astute in dealing with the hosts from a perceived similar language/cultural background (e.g., British dealing with Aussies in Australia; Columbians from Columbia dealing with Mexicans in Mexico). Because of this "assumed similarity" factor, cultural differences may be glossed over; guests may overlook the vast differences in political or business practices or they may start using disparaging remarks in attacking the personality traits of their new cultural hosts. Both hosts and guests may encounter more frustrations without realizing that they are caught up in an understated culture clash spiral.

Psychological adjustment refers to feelings of well-being and satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions (Ward et al., 2001). Chronic strain, low self-esteem, and low mastery have a direct effect on adjustment depression. As cultural distance widens and stress level increases, newcomers must use different strategies to deal with such differences.

To counteract psychological stress, researchers recommend the use of positive self-talk strategies and positive situational appraisal strategies (Chang, Chua,

& Toh, 1997; Cross, 1995). Positive self-talk strategies (e.g., giving yourself a pat on the back for being so adaptive in the new culture, rewarding yourself with a nice treat for mastering all the intricacies of saying "no" in this new culture without actually saying "no!") can create a more resilient mindset. A resilient mindset can deal with the bombarded stimuli more effectively (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Positive situational appraisal strategies involve changing perceptions and interpretations of the stressful events or situations. For example, you start to talk yourself into taking more Italian-speaking classes from the "mean" teacher and reframe the situation: the "mean and demanding" teacher is actually helping you to master your Italian faster than the "nice" teachers. Research indicates that the use of cognitive coping strategies (i.e., positive self-talk and situational reinterpretation) is associated with lower levels of perceived stress and fewer symptoms of depression in East Asian students in Singapore (Ward, 2004). Thus, cognitive reframing appears to soften the psychological stress level for East Asian students who are attempting to adapt to a collectivistic cultural environment. The nature of the stressful event and the degree of control and success that the students can assert on the distressing situation may explain this finding.

Sociocultural adjustment refers to the ability to fit in and execute appropriate and effective interactions in a new cultural environment (Ward et al., 2001; see Table 5.1). It can include factors such as the quality or quantity of relations with host nationals and the length of residence in the host country (Gareis, 2000; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Mortensen, Burleson, Feng,

TABLE 5.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT VERSUS SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Psychological adjustment	Sociocultural adjustment
Stress management	Relationship management
Psychological-related	Network-related
Perceptual interpretation	Relationship quality
Intrapersonal control	Host culture receptivity
Digging in	Reaching out
Cognitive reframing	Sociocultural climate

& Liu, 2009). International students, for example, report greater satisfaction with their host culture when host nationals take the initiative to befriend them. It has also been revealed that international students' friendship networks typically consist of the following patterns: (1) a primary, monocultural friendship network that consists of close friendships with other compatriots from similar cultural backgrounds (e.g., Nigerian international students developing friendship ties with other African students) (Brown, 2009; Matusitz, 2005); (2) a bicultural network that consists of social bonds between sojourners and host nationals, whereby professional aspirations and goals are pursued (Holmes, 2005; Lee, 2006); and (3) a multicultural network that consists of acquaintances from diverse cultural groups for recreational activities (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). Research further indicates that greater sociocultural adjustment and social support in the new cultural environment are associated with lower levels of

depression and hopelessness in international students (Lee, 2006, 2008; Lin, 2006; Paige & Goode, 2009; see my.blog 5.2).

Overall, culture-specific knowledge, language fluency, more extensive contact with host nationals, and a longer period of residence in the host culture are associated with lower levels of sociocultural difficulty in the new culture (Kohls, 1996; Ward, 1996). In addition, the host culture's receptivity to new arrivals, the degree of cultural conformity expected, and the current political climate of open-door versus closed-door attitudes toward international students and visitors can also either facilitate or create roadblocks to sojourners' sociocultural adjustment process.

In the intercultural **communication competence** field, researchers have identified the following components as critical to sojourners' adjustment process (Deardorff, 2009; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009): culture-sensitive knowledge, motivation to adapt, the

my.blog 5.2 ASSESSING YOUR SOCIAL SUPPORT CIRCLE

Think of a stressful situation in which you have made a major transition (e.g., from high school to college; from an old job to a new job; from home to living on your own), read each item, and circle T = True or F = False. In this new environment, you actually have friends or acquaintances:

- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 1. | To listen to you and talk with you whenever you feel lonely or depressed. | T or F |
| 2. | To reassure you that you are supported and cared for. | T or F |
| 3. | To explain things and to make your situation clearer and easier to understand. | T or F |
| 4. | To spend some quiet time with you whenever you do not feel like going out. | T or F |
| 5. | To explain and help you understand the local culture and communication issues. | T or F |
| 6. | To provide necessary information to help orient you to your new surroundings. | T or F |
| 7. | To help you interpret things that you don't really understand. | T or F |
| 8. | To tell you about available choices and options. | T or F |
| 9. | To show you how to do something that you didn't know how to do. | T or F |

Scoring: Add up all your answers on TRUE.

Decoding: 1–3 = low social support; 4–6 = moderate social support; 7–9 = high social support.

Interpreting: The higher your score, the greater your social support circle. The greater the social support circle, the easier it is for you to adjust to your transitional phase in a new environment.

Source: Adapted from Ong (2000). "The Construction and Validation of a Social Support Scale for Sojourners: The Index of Sojourner Social Support." Unpublished master's thesis, National University of Singapore, as cited in Ward et al. (2001), p. 89.

activation of appropriate and effective communication skills, the mastery of culture-based contextual rules, and the achievement of conjoint outcomes between the intercultural communicators. On the behavioral tendency skills level, intercultural competence scholars also emphasize the following mindset tendencies and skillset (Gudykunst, 2005a, 2005b; Pusch, 2009): mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, behavioral flexibility, and cross-cultural empathy.

According to Pusch (2009), *behavioral flexibility* refers to “the ability to adapt and accommodate one’s own behavior to people from other groups,” and *cross-cultural empathy* means “being able to participate in another person’s experience in your imagination; thinking it intellectually and feeling it emotionally. The ability to connect emotionally with people and showing compassion for others, and being able to listen actively and mindfully” (p. 70). Whereas intercultural scholars emphasize the importance of communication competence skills and then sociocultural and psychological adjustment factors, cross-cultural psychologists tend to emphasize the importance of psychological adjustment and then sociocultural adjustment and communication competence skills (Gudykunst, 2005b, 2005c; Matsumoto, Yoo, & LeRoux, 2010).

In regard to **personality attributes**, such personality traits as high tolerance for ambiguity (i.e., high acceptance of ambiguous situations), internal locus of control (i.e., inner-directed drives and motivations), personal flexibility, and mastery can contribute to generally good adjustment and positive psychological well-being. Interestingly, Ward (2004) also suggests a “cultural fit” proposition, which emphasizes the importance of a good match between personality types (e.g., extraversion and introversion) of the sojourners and the host cultural norms. For example, we can speculate that independent-self sojourners may be more compatible with individualistic cultural norms, whereas interdependent-self sojourners may be more compatible with collectivistic cultural norms. The synchronized match between a particular personality type and the larger cultural norms produces a “goodness of fit” and possibly cultivates a positive adaptive experience for the visiting residents.

Initial Tips to Manage Culture Shock

The fundamental need for newcomers in an unfamiliar culture is addressing the sense of emotional insecurity and vulnerability. The more competent newcomers are at managing their identity threat level, the more they are able to induce effective adaptation outcomes (Matsumoto, Yoo, & LeRoux, 2010).

New arrivals can defuse their perceived threat and, hence, anxiety level by (1) increasing their motivations to learn about the new culture; (2) keeping their expectations realistic and increasing their familiarity concerning the diverse facets of the new culture (e.g., conducting culture-specific research through readings and diverse accurate sources, including talking with people who have spent some time in that culture); (3) increasing their linguistic fluency and learning why, how, and under what situations certain phrases or gestures are appropriate, plus understanding the core cultural values linked to specific behaviors; (4) working on their tolerance for ambiguity and other flexible personal attributes; (5) developing strong ties (close friends) and weak ties (acquaintanceships) to manage identity stress and loneliness; and (6) being mindful of their interpersonal behaviors and suspending ethnocentric evaluations of the host culture.

INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT: DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS

The term **intercultural adjustment** has been used to refer to the short-term and medium-term adaptive process of sojourners in their overseas assignments. Tourists are different from sojourners in that tourists are visitors whose length of stay exceeds twenty-four hours in a location away from home and who have traveled for voluntary, recreational holiday-enjoyment purposes. Sojourners, on the other hand, are temporary residents who voluntarily go abroad for a set period of time that is usually related to task-based or instrumental purposes. Both tourists and sojourners can, of course, experience culture shock—especially when the country they visit is very different from their own (see Blog Pic 5.1). In fact, do you know where the top five worldwide tourist destinations are? Take a guess and then check out Jeopardy Box 5.1. Where do you think



Blog Pic 5.1 Does this bowl of “goodness” look appetizing?

JEOPARDY BOX 5.1 TOP FIVE WORLDWIDE TOURIST DESTINATIONS, 2010

Country
1. France
2. United States
3. Spain
4. China
5. Italy

Source: World Tourism Organization (August, 2010), http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/highlights/UNWTO_Highlights10_en_HR.pdf (retrieved April 23, 2011).

most tourists to the United States come from (i.e., their countries of origin)? What do you think are the top five tourism cities in the United States? Take a quick guess and check out Jeopardy Boxes 5.2 and 5.3. A tourist, while visiting another country, can be a welcome guest, a nuisance, or a downright intruder in a sacred land. Tourists, their hosts, and businesses/service providers all weave together interdependently to form impressions, to trade, and to share some memorable moments through brief encounters and amusing contacts.

Sojourners, however, are typically individuals who commit to a temporary residential stay in a new culture as they strive to achieve both their instrumental and their socioemotional goals. *Instrumental goals* refer to task-based or business or academic goals that sojourners would like to accomplish during their stay in a

JEOPARDY BOX 5.2 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF VISITORS TO THE UNITED STATES, 2010

Country
1. Canada
2. Mexico
3. United Kingdom
4. Japan
5. Germany

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (March, 2010), http://www.tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/Fast_Facts_2010.pdf (retrieved April 23, 2011).

JEOPARDY BOX 5.3 TOP FIVE TOURISM CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES, 2008–2009

City	State
1. New York	New York
2. Miami	Florida
3. Los Angeles	California
4. Orlando	Florida
5. San Francisco	California

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (2009), http://www.tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/2009_States_and_Cities.pdf (retrieved April 23, 2011).

foreign country. *Socioemotional goals* refer to relational, recreational, and personal development goals during their sojourning experience. Thus, a Peace Corps volunteer might take an overseas assignment for a year or two for both task and personal enrichment purposes. A business person might accept an international posting for between three and five years. A missionary might go for a longer period, and military personnel are often posted overseas for shorter “tours of duty.” Each year, for example, over 1.3 million students worldwide choose to study outside their countries. Right now, there are approximately 690,000 international students studying in different U.S. colleges with the explicit aim of getting their college degrees here. They also bring \$20 billion into the U.S. economy via out-of-state tuition and living expenses. In fact, do you know where most of the international students come from? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 5.4. Do you know what are the top pick countries for U.S.

JEOPARDY BOX 5.4 TOP FIVE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO THE UNITED STATES, 2009–2010

Country
1. China
2. India
3. South Korea
4. Canada
5. Taiwan

Source: Institute of International Education. (2010). *Top 25 Places of Origin of International Students, 2008/09–2009/10: Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2008-10> (retrieved April 23, 2011).

student-abroad programs? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 5.5.

Indeed, most of the international students come from communal-oriented cultures, such as China, India, South Korea, Canada, and Taiwan, and they study in California, New York, and Texas (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2011). There are also approximately 260,330 U.S. students nationwide who embark on one-year study-abroad programs. The favorite study-abroad destinations of U.S. college students are the UK, Italy, Spain, France, and China (IEE, 2011). However, the number of U.S. students studying in Chile, South Korea, and Peru increased by more than 25 percent, whereas the top four destinations dropped in popularity. Students surveyed cited personal growth, new perspectives on world affairs, and career enhancement as some of the reasons for why they opt to go abroad to study. Beyond instrumental goals, international exchange sojourners also pursue socioemotional goals or fun activities, such as developing new friendships with the local students and hosts, visiting local marketplaces and museums, and learning about local histories, sports, and folk crafts (check out Hits-or-Misses 5.1, 5.2, 5.3).

In the remainder of this section, we explore the developmental models of the short- to medium-term adjustment process of sojourners. By understanding the developmental phases of intercultural adjustment, we can increase our competencies in dealing with our own and others' change process.

JEOPARDY BOX 5.5 TOP FIVE STUDY ABROAD LEADING DESTINATIONS FOR U.S. COLLEGE STUDENTS, 2008–2009

Country
1. United Kingdom
2. Italy
3. Spain
4. France
5. China

Source: Institute of International Education. (2010). *Top 25 Destinations of U.S. Study Abroad Students, 2007/08–2008/09: Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Leading-Destinations/2007-09> (retrieved April 23, 2011).

HIT-OR-MISS 5.1 TOP FIVE U.S. UNIVERSITIES ENROLLING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

See if you "Hit" or "Miss" as you name the top five U.S. universities that enroll the highest numbers of international students:

- _____ (California)
- _____ (Illinois)
- _____ (New York)
- _____ (Indiana)
- _____ (New York)

Answers: 1: USC (University of Southern California); 2: University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign; 3: NYU (New York University); 4: Purdue University; 5: Columbia University.

Source: International Institute of Education. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.iie.org>

The U-Curve Adjustment Model

A number of researchers have conceptualized the sojourner adjustment process from various developmental perspectives. An interesting consequence of these stage-oriented descriptive models centers on whether sojourners' adaptation is a U-curve or a W-curve process. In interviewing over two hundred Norwegian Fulbright grantees in the United States, Lysgaard (1955) developed a three-phase intercultural adjustment model that includes (1) initial adjustment, (2) crisis, and (3) regained adjustment:

HIT-OR-MISS 5.2 TOP FIVE FIELDS OF STUDY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

From the list below, see if you “Hit” or “Miss” as you identify the top five fields of study for international students studying in the United States.

- _____ Agriculture
- _____ Business and Management
- _____ Education
- _____ Engineering
- _____ Fine and Applied Arts
- _____ Health Professions
- _____ Humanities
- _____ Math and Computer Science
- _____ Physical and Life Sciences
- _____ Social Sciences

Answers: 1: Business and Management (145,514); 2: Engineering (127,441); 3: Physical and Life Sciences (61,285); 4: Math and Computer Science (60,780) 5. Social Sciences (59,865).

Source: International Institute of Education, *Open Doors 2010 Fast Facts*. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.iie.org>

(1) is the optimistic or elation phase of the sojourners’ adjustment process, (2) is the stressful phase, when reality sets in and sojourners are overwhelmed by their own incompetence, and (3) is the settling-in phase, when sojourners learn to cope effectively with the new environment.

Drawing from the above ideas, Lysgaard (1955; see also Nash, 1991) proposed the U-curve model of the sojourner adjustment process, suggesting that sojourners pass through an initial honeymoon phase, then experience a “slump” or stressful phase, and finally pull themselves back up to an effective phase in managing their assignments abroad. In extending the U-curve model, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) proposed a six-stage W-shape model, with successive honeymoon, hostility, humorous, at-home, reentry culture shock, and resocialization stages. Expanding the ideas of Gullahorn and Gullahorn, we have developed the following seven-stage revised W-shape adjustment model to explain

HIT-OR-MISS 5.3 TOP FIVE FIELDS OF STUDY FOR U.S. STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD

From the list below, see if you “Hit” or “Miss” as you identify the top five fields of study for U.S. students studying abroad:

- _____ Agriculture
- _____ Business and Management
- _____ Education
- _____ Engineering
- _____ Fine and Applied Arts
- _____ Health Professions
- _____ Humanities
- _____ Math and Computer Science
- _____ Physical and Life Sciences
- _____ Social Sciences

Answers: 1: Social Sciences (53,888); 2: Business and Management (50,764); 3: Humanities (32,020); 4: Fine and Applied Arts (19,004); 5: Physical and Life Sciences (19,000).

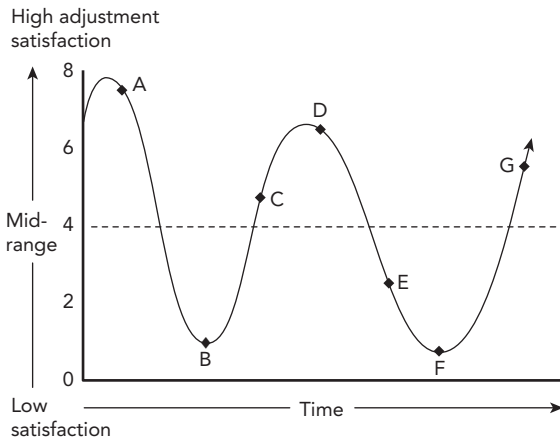
Source: International Institute of Education, *Open Doors 2010 Fast Facts*. Retrieved March 25, 2011, from <http://www.iie.org>

sojourners’ short-term to medium-term adjustment process (see Figure 5.1).

The Revised W-Shape Adjustment Model

The revised W-shape adjustment model consists of seven stages: the honeymoon, hostility, humorous, in-sync, ambivalence, reentry culture shock, and resocialization stages. The model applies especially to international students’ experience abroad. Take a look first at Blog Post 5.3 and check out the experience abroad of one college student, Laleh.

In the **honeymoon stage**, individuals are excited about their new cultural environment. This is the initial landing phase in which everything appears fresh and exhilarating. Sojourners perceive people and events through pleasantly tinted (or rose-colored) glasses. Nonetheless, they do experience mild bewilderment and perplexity about the new culture; they also experience bursts of loneliness and homesickness. However, overall, they are cognitively curious about the new culture and emotionally charged up at meet-



A: Honeymoon stage
 B: Hostility stage
 C: Humorous stage
 D: In-sync stage
 E: Ambivalence stage
 F: Reentry culture shock stage
 G: Resocialization Stage

FIGURE 5.1 Revised W-Shape Adjustment Model

ing new people. They may not completely understand the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that surround them, but they are enjoying their initial “friendly” contacts with the locals.

Check out the story in Blog Post 5.4.

In the **hostility stage**, sojourners experience major emotional upheavals. This is the serious culture shock stage in which nothing works out smoothly. This stage can occur rapidly, right after the glow of the honeymoon phase is over and reality sets in sooner than expected. At this stage, sojourners experience a major loss of self-esteem and self-confidence. They feel consciously incompetent and emotionally drained in many aspects of their life. Many of these sojourners

can either become very aggressive/hostile or totally withdrawn. Anderson (1994), for example, identifies three types of “culture shockers” as follows: (1) the early returnees—those who tend to use aggressive or passive aggressive strategies to deal with the “hostile” environment and exit prematurely back to their home cultures; (2) the time servers—those who are doing a minimally passable job with minimal host contact and who are emotionally and cognitively “serving their time,” but eagerly looking forward to returning home; and (3) the participators—those who are committed to adjust in an optimal manner and participate fully in their new culture and who take advantage of both instrumental and socioemotional learning in the new environment.

The “early returnees” tend to use *pounce* strategies or passive aggressive strategies and blame all the problems on the new culture. They constantly use their ethnocentric standards to compare and evaluate the local practices and customs. They exit their overseas assignments prematurely because of their interpretations of a stressful “hostile” environment and the “uncivilized” people they have to deal with on a daily basis (Brown, 2009). Yiping, a young woman from China who had been studying in the United States for seven months, complained to her friends and Chinese international classmates: “This semester, you must *talk* to earn your participation points in the classroom. We have three parts of the grade in this class. One third is discussion participation, the other two-thirds is writing articles. So if you don’t talk, you lose one third of your points. So you have to talk. Talking is so exhausting! And it’s not just talk, you know, from the material. You need to say what you *think* about it. But in China, you just

BLOG POST 5.3 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT— HONEYMOON STAGE

W-Shape Model Narrative . . .

I feel like I went through several of the stages of culture shock while I was doing a Junior [Year] Abroad study program in Spain. The honeymoon stage was great. This was right when I got there. I thought that everything was wonderful. I didn’t really miss being at home because I was doing so many new and exciting things.

I was traveling through the south of Spain, who would ever think that there was something better than that? I was having such a good time and didn’t really seem to even notice that I was so far away. I thought that Spain was a great place. I wasn’t able to see any of the downfalls. I would practice my Spanish with as many people as I could find. It was a very exciting time. I would say that this period lasted for about two weeks, while I was traveling through Spain.

—Laleh, college student

**BLOG POST 5.4 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT—
HOSTILITY STAGE**

Then the *hostility stage* hit. I think that the turning point was the first night when I was at my *señora* house. This experience was a huge shock to me. The apartment that I was living in was about a sixth of the size of my house. I was sharing a room that was the size of a shoebox. Needless to say I was really unhappy, at first. The minute that I got there it really hit me that I was living in another country for a long time without my family. To make things even worse, the room had no windows. All I wanted to do was go home. I didn't want to be in this little apartment with some woman that I didn't know, who didn't speak a word of English. I immediately called my dad crying. I told him that I wanted to come home and that I wasn't going to stay in Spain for a whole semester. After about a half an hour of listening to me whine and

cry, my dad told me that I had to stay because he knew that that was what I really wanted and that this was just a bump in the road. He told me that I would get used to things and that everything would be all right. I thought that he had gone crazy.

The following few weeks were full of ups and downs. I was in an environment [in which] I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know where to buy the basic things that I needed. I felt like I was in a whole other world that didn't exist to me before. I had to learn how to take public transportation, which is something that I had never done before. After countless times of getting on the wrong bus, I finally figured it out. I would get frustrated because I wasn't able to express what was going on, because I was able to put together only the most basic of sentences.

—Laleh, college student

remember the expert answer. . . . We have one, and only one correct answer. That's my educational experience in China. But here it's like, okay, no right answers. Everyone is good. Every answer is correct. You just need to give your own perspective loudly and with back-up evidence. I'm so worn-out from talking and stressed all the time. I'm here to learn from the expert professors, why do they care about my opinions? I'm so ready to go home to China now!"

The "time servers" tend to use *avoidance* strategies. They use either physical avoidance or psychological withdrawal strategies to avoid interacting with host members. They do their job or fulfill their role in moving ahead in attaining their instrumental goals. However, they are fairly dissatisfied in the socioemotional connection area and feel quite isolated. They also tend to engage in wishful-thinking strategies and counting the days until they can go home. In an interview, Mariko, who had been studying in the United States for seventeen months, described her problem with her roommate and how she handled it: "Sometimes when I'm tired or not feeling very well, it appears on my face. And my American roommates started to tell me how small my eyes are. 'You are Japanese, and your eyes are usually small, but it's getting smaller, and smaller, and I couldn't see them.' I took it as a joke at first. But she kept telling me this stuff. I kind of get used to that, because she usually does that. But the problem is, she couldn't stop. Even though I tried to show that I was becoming annoyed, like, "Please stop

it. I'm too tired right now." . . . I don't know but she always says those kinds of things without being afraid of being misunderstood. . . . Whenever I tried to tell her about my problems, she started telling me it's my cultural background, or tried to talk about her own problems instead. . . . But she was never really respectful or caring of me. I now tried to avoid my roommate and stayed in the library more. I'm secretly trying to look for a new place to stay and looking for a new roommate to room with. I'm now counting down my months when I can go home and sleep on my own cozy futon bed."

The "participators," on the other hand, use active commitment strategies to realign their identities with the new culture. They try to engage in positive self-talk and positive situational appraisal strategies. They also intentionally develop new communication competence practices to connect with their new culture. They are committed to using an ethnorelative lens to view things from the other culture's frame of reference (Iyer, 1989). With the help of supportive networks, incremental task goal progression, and their personal emotional resilience, many sojourners can pull themselves out from the hostility stage and arrive at the recovery curve. Natalia, a Columbian student who has been in the United States for eighteen months, talked about how her attitude changed to become more of a participant in U. S. culture: "I think it changed when I started applying (for the master's program). Because I see that I will stay here for two years or more. So that's a lot of

**BLOG POST 5.5 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT—
HUMOROUS STAGE AND IN-SYNC STAGE**

The *humorous stage* was a little bit more enjoyable. I did have many times when I found myself doing something wrong and was able to laugh at myself. Once I was able to laugh about it and not worry so much about what I was doing, I felt a lot better. However, I still haven't gotten the hang of the whole kissing on both cheeks when you meet. I will still offer them my hand and they will be leaning in to kiss me. It is like an awkward first date goodbye. I do not think that I fully experienced that in-sync stage. I feel like I became more accustomed to what was

going on, but I was never completely comfortable with many of the "strange" cultural situations. The longer I stayed there the more I got used to things. However, I was still wishing that things could have been more like home. I never understood why you couldn't just go in somewhere and order a nice turkey sandwich. There were little things that would get on my nerves on a daily basis, but I was able to work through them. I guess I became more in sync with what was going on around me. I knew what I needed to do to get what I wanted, which was a big accomplishment.

—Laleh, college student

time. Then in this process, I have to start to make new American friends, and not to talk too much with the same friends in Colombia. . . . I make a decision to participate more in the American culture—watch more American news, talk more to American students in class, and learn to visit Professors in their office which I'm not used to back home. I want to really know how the American mind ticks, why they all seem so confident and carefree!"

Now let's check out Blog Post 5.5, the humorous stage description.

At the **humorous stage**, sojourners learn to laugh at their cultural *faux pas* and start to realize that there are pros and cons in each culture—just as there are both good and evil people in every society. They experience a mixture of stress–adaptation–growth emotions (Y. Y. Kim, 1988, 2005), such as small frustrations and small triumphs. They are able to compare both their home and their host cultures in realistic terms, and they no longer take things as seriously as in the hostility stage. They can now take a step backward and look at their own behavior and reactions objectively. Taskwise, they are making progress in attaining their instrumental goals (e.g., achieving their MBA degree or acquiring new business skills). They are beginning to form new friendships and social networks. These sojourners eventually arrive at the next stage.

At the **in-sync adjustment stage**, sojourners feel "at home" and experience identity security and inclusion. The boundaries between outsiders and insiders become fuzzier, and sojourners experience social acceptance and support. They are now easily able to interpret "bizarre" local customs and behaviors. They

may be savvy enough to speak the local language with flair, even catching some verbal jokes and puns and perhaps responding with a one-up joke. They may now even act as role models or mentors to incoming sojourners from their home cultures. During the in-sync adjustment stage, sojourners develop a sense of trust and empathy and a wide spectrum of other positive emotions. They become much more creative and adaptive in the new environment. They are capable of making appropriate choices in connection with any new situations that may arise, just as they arrive at a "comfort level" of their sojourn. However, they must get ready to pack their bags and go home.

Let's check out Laleh's ambivalent feelings in Blog Post 5.6.

In the **ambivalence stage**, sojourners experience grief, nostalgia, and pride, with a mixed sense of relief and sorrow that they are going home. They recall their early awkward days when they first arrived and they count all the new friends they have made since then. They also look forward eagerly to sharing all their intercultural stories with their family members and old friends back home. They finally say goodbye to their newfound friends and their temporarily adopted culture.

At the **reentry culture shock stage**, sojourners face an unexpected jolt (see the "Reentry Culture Shock" section that follows). Because of the unanticipated nature of reentry shock, its impact is usually much more severe, and returnees usually feel more depressed and stressed than they did with entry culture shock. There is a sharp letdown (e.g., their friends or family members have no interest in hearing all their

**BLOG POST 5.6 INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT—
AMBIVALENCE STAGE**

I had two different experiences with the ambivalence stage. When I was leaving to come home for Christmas, I had a feeling like I hadn't accomplished everything that I wanted to, which was why I decided to stay for another semester. There were so many things that I still wanted to do, and I felt that if I didn't stay for another semester that I would be cheating myself out of more wonderful

cultural experiences. The second experience that I had with the ambivalence stage was quite different. When it was getting to the end of the second semester, I was totally ready to go home. I was ready to get out of there three weeks before school was over. I was tired of not being able to communicate like I wanted to. I had all my bags packed and [was] ready to take off and share all my wonderful stories with my family and friends.

—Laleh, college student

wonderful intercultural stories) and identity chaos: the greater the distance (i.e., on the cultural values and communication dimensions) between the two cultures, the more intense the reentry shock. Additionally, the more integrated into and time spent in the abroad country, the more difficult this stage becomes. By now, however, most sojourners have become resourceful and resilient individuals. They can recycle some of the commitment strategies they used abroad to pull themselves through to the next stage.

In the **resocialization stage**, some individuals (i.e., the resocializers) may quietly assimilate themselves back to their old roles and behaviors without making much of a “wave” or appearing different from the rest of their peers or colleagues. They bury their newly acquired ideas and skills together with the pictures on their Facebook page and try not to look at them again. Looking at these pictures can only cause identity dissonance and disequilibrium. Other individuals (i.e., the alienators) can never “fit back” into their home cultures again. They are always the first to accept an overseas assignment. They feel more alive abroad than at home. For example, Jenny, a college junior, has been to Spain, Italy, Mexico, and Hong Kong on study-abroad programs. She confessed feeling unease and restlessness at her own university and will spend the next semester in Argentina. Jenny, an alienator, may eventually become a global nomad who claims the global world as her home base rather than any single place as her national cultural affiliation.

Finally, yet other individuals (i.e., the “transformers”) are the ones who act as agents of change in their home organizations or cultures. They mindfully integrate their new learning experience abroad with what is positive in their own culture (Brown & Brown, 2009;

Brown & Holloway, 2008). They apply multidimensional thinking, enriched emotional intelligence, and diverse angles to solve problems or to instigate change for a truly inclusive learning organization. Geeta, from India, studied in the United States for two and one-half years and reflects on the experience as she returns to her home culture: “The U.S. has helped me become more assertive in a respectful way, not aggressive though. The ways of the U.S., this whole concept about space, about individualism versus collectivism, that certainly has merits. Although it has its demerits, it has some merits, too. And I think I’m inculcating those, because I think that makes me a stronger person. Saying ‘no’ cordially and not feeling guilty about it, that is something I’ve learned after coming here. And placing my own needs as important as the needs of others, and considering my own wants and needs as a priority is an eye-opening experience for me.”

Transformers are the change agents who bring home with them a wealth of personal and cultural treasures to share, actively and responsibly, with colleagues, friends, and families. They do so with interpersonally sensitive skills—something they’ve learned in the foreign environment. They have no fears of acting or being perceived as “different” or being situated in the “outgroup” category; they now have a “taste” of what it means to be different (however, this taste of difference is qualitatively different from the “difference” that many minority members experience in their everyday lives). They are comfortable in experiencing the cultural frame-shifting process, for example, being individualist and becoming collectivist, interacting in low context style with one set of individuals and switching to a high-context approach with another set of folks (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez,

2010). They practice a “third culture” approach in integrating and activating the best practices of both cultures and creatively fuse them into a third culture perspective outlook in decision making and problem solving. They are more compassionate and committed than before about social injustice issues and human rights issues on a global scale. Transformers are the individuals who have acquired (and are always in the process of acquiring) mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom.

Culture Shock: Peaks and Valleys

In sum, the revised W-shape adjustment model basically emphasizes the following characteristics, which can influence the progress of the sojourners’ identity change process: (1) They must understand the peaks and valleys, and positive and negative shifts, that constitute identity change in an unfamiliar environment, realizing that the frustration-and-triumph roller coaster ride is part of the change-and-growth process. (2) They must be aware and keep track of their instrumental, relational, and identity goals in the new culture; success in one set of goals (e.g., making new friends) can affect triumph in another set of goals (e.g., newfound friends can help to solve a school-related problem). (3) They must give themselves some time and space to adjust; they should keep a journal or blog to express their daily feelings and random thoughts, and they should also keep in touch with people in their home culture via Facebook, letters, e-mails, and Skype. (4) They must develop both strong ties (meaningful friendships) and weak ties (functional social connections, e.g., with supportive teachers, caring counselors, or friendly grocers) to cushion themselves and seek help in times of crisis. (5) They must reach out to participate in the host culture’s major cultural events—art and music festivals, parades, local museums, or national sports—and immerse themselves in this once-in-a-lifetime experience and learn to enjoy the local culture as much as possible.

The patterns of the revised W-shape adjustment model consist of back-and-forth looping movements within and between stages. Length of sojourn, alone or with family, degree of adaptation commitment, degrees and types of communication competence (e.g., linguistic competence), first-time visit versus

repeated visit, and realistic versus unrealistic goals are some other factors that will propel either progressive or regressive loops along the W-shape model. Remember the story from the opening chapter? Let’s explore more of Ms. Abbott’s experiences in Blog Post 5.7 to understand the flow of choppy waters of the model.

Church (1982) and Ward (2004), in reviewing the literature on these developmental models, comment that both the U-curve and the W-shape models appear to be too general and do not capture the dynamic interplay between sojourners’ and host nationals’ factors in the adjustment process. In addition, sojourners adapt and learn at different rates. The support for both models is based on one-time cross-sectional data (i.e., one-time surveys of sojourners) rather than longitudinal data (i.e., collection of surveys at different points during sojourners’ two-year adjustment). More controversial is the debate as to the initial phase (i.e., the *honeymoon stage*) of adjustment. Research (Adler, 1997; McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Osland, 1995; Rohrich & Martin, 1991) indicates that international students and managers both tend to experience severe identity shock (i.e., the *hostility stage* comes very early, side by side with the fleeting *honeymoon stage*) in the early phase of their sojourn abroad. However, the overseas stressors also motivate them to become more resourceful and resilient in their search for new knowledge and skills in managing the alien environment.

Despite some of the limitations of the developmental models, their positive implications are that they offer us a developmental portrait of the culture shock experience, illustrate that the culture shock process is filled with peaks and valleys, and contribute to a holistic understanding of the psychological, affective, and identity changes in the new arrivals. Additionally, in the W-shape model, we are made aware of the importance of understanding the role of *reentry culture shock*.

REENTRY CULTURE SHOCK

The phenomenon of reentry culture shock has received increased attention from intercultural researchers (Martin & Harrell, 1996, 2004; Sussman, 1986). Reentry shock involves the realignment of one’s new identity with a once-familiar home environment. After

BLOG POST 5.7 BACK AND FORTH ALONG THE W-SHAPE ADJUSTMENT MODEL

After graduating from the university, I moved to Japan to teach English in Japanese public school as a member of the JET Program. Upon my arrival to Japan, I spoke no Japanese, knew nothing about Japanese culture, and had no formal experience teaching children. My true purpose in coming to Japan was to escape the reality of getting a 9–5 job in America and to continue on my adventurous quest to see as much of the world as I possibly could.

I graduated with a degree in Political Science with a minor in Communication, got high marks, and considered myself a fairly intelligent person. But moving to the Japanese countryside rendered me an illiterate mute, unable to read even the simplest signs or communicate with the second graders I taught. It was an incredibly humbling experience to walk into a grocery store and not be able to read a single label, or have your third grade students check the penmanship of your hiragana characters.

What proved to be the real challenge in my daily life in Japan was communicating across cultures with the teachers I work with. Although the language barrier is an obvious hurdle, the many layers of Japanese culture and the context in which they conduct business was the most fascinating aspect of my experience. I found myself surrounded by a tangled web of unspoken rules, titles, hierarchy, formality, and cultural idiosyncrasies. Every day was a puzzle that I could not solve, but appeared easy and natural through the eyes of my coworkers. It was the process of solving this puzzle that left me either laughing hysterically or crying alone in a rice patty at the end of each day (mood depending).

I taught a class of fifth graders one day that were particularly unruly, difficult to control, and boisterous. The homeroom teacher willingly helped me gain control of the classroom, calmed the children down, and we finished up the lesson. She thanked me profusely for the lesson and I carried on my day, assuming it was a success. It wasn't until a few days later that my supervisor told me that the fifth grade teacher was displeased with the class activity and wanted me to make several changes to my lesson plan before the next session. I felt bad about the lesson, but I was confused as to why the teacher didn't just tell me herself, or why my supervisor waited three whole days to discuss this and what I perceive as now ancient history with me. And I realized the lessons I learned.

I always considered myself a highly logical person, working and thinking in a linear pattern, moving quickly from A to B and on to C; I assumed that this was the only logical way to do things. But the Japanese way of thinking moves in circles, darting from one end to the other, forming a web that is impossible to follow, moving forward and back, up and down, with seemingly no end in sight. It is a different type of logic and thinking all together, but it works if one is willing to observe closely, and with patience.

The reason that I haven't heard anyone say "no," or the reason that the supervisory teacher did not approach me with her concern up front, is because being frank and direct is a Western communication value—something so rude that a Japanese person would never consider doing. I realized that the teacher was afraid to offend me by telling me I was wrong. I now finally understand the difference between the direct, low-context and the subtle, high-context communication style by this cultural immersion process.

—K. Abbott

living abroad for an extensive period of time, reentry culture shock is inevitable.

Let's check out Kari's reentry feelings in Blog Post 5.8.

This identity realignment process can sometimes be more stressful and jolting than entry culture shock because of the unanticipated nature of one's own identity change and the accompanying change of one's friends and family.

Reentry Culture Shock: Surprising Elements

According to research (e.g., Chang, 2009; Osland, 1995), the often unanticipated, surprising elements that affect reentry culture shock include the following:

1. Sojourners' identity change—the newly acquired values, emotions, cognitions, role statuses, managerial methods, and behaviors are, surprisingly, not a "good fit" with the once-familiar home culture;
2. Sojourners' nostalgic and idealized images of their home culture—sojourners tend to remember the positive aspects of their culture and forget its negative aspects during their experience abroad, and thus, the reentry reality often produces a strong jolt;
3. Sojourners' difficulty in reintegrating themselves into their old career pathway or career roles because of their new cultural lenses;
4. Sojourners' letdown in their expectations as to close ties with family members and friends who

BLOG POST 5.8 REENTRY CULTURE SHOCK

I had problems readapting after spending a year in Italy. I have been feeling stuck in this reentry period for a little longer than normal. I feel like there is no one else who feels like I do; everyone else seems to transition effortlessly. But in a way, I feel bad for those people. I think that the reason that I feel the way I do is because I absorbed so much when I was there. I completely

opened myself up to whatever new culture I came across, and this had a direct impact on how I look at things. . . . Though I seem to be temporarily stuck in the depression phase of it all, I would rather feel like this than to have let the experience pass me by with no impact at all.

—Kari, college student

have become more distant because of the long separation;

5. Family and friends' lack of interest in listening to the sojourning stories of the returnee and their showing impatience with her or him;
6. The home culture's demand for conformity and expectations for old role performance;
7. The absence of change in the home culture (e.g., the old system or workplace looks stale and boring in comparison with the overseas adventure) or too much change (e.g., political or corporate upheavals), which can also create immense identity disjunction for the recent returnees.

Thus, reentry culture shock can be understood from three domains: the returnees' readiness to resocialize themselves in the home environment, the degree of change in the returnees' friendship and family networks, and the home receptivity conditions. Sussman (1986) recommends that on the individual level, awareness of change should be a major component of reentry training as individuals face a wide range of psychological and environmental challenges. Pusch and Loewenthal (1988) further recommend that preparation for a successful return should include (1) the recognition of what sojourners are leaving behind and what they have gained in their assignments abroad; (2) the emotional costs of transition; (3) the value of worrying (i.e., anticipating and preparing for difficulties that may occur); (4) the need for support systems and ways to develop them; and (5) the necessity of developing one's own strategies for going home.

Resocialization: Different Returnees' Profiles

Adler (1997) identifies three profiles of returnee managers in relationship to the specific transition strategies

they employ: resocialized returnees, alienated returnees, and proactive returnees. *Resocialized returnees* are the ones who do not recognize having learned new skills in the new culture. They are also psychologically distant from their international experience. They try to use the fit-back-in strategy and resocialize themselves quietly into the domestic corporate structure. They typically rate their reentry experience as quite satisfactory.

The *alienated returnees*, on the other hand, are aware of their new skills and ideas in their experience abroad. However, they have difficulty in applying their new knowledge in the home organizations. Rather, they try to use the "distance-rejective" strategy of being onlookers in their home culture. Of all the three types, they are the most dissatisfied group.

The *proactive returnees* are highly aware of changes in themselves and the new values and skills they have learned overseas. They try to integrate the new values and practices learned from the sojourning culture into the home culture and develop an integrated outlook in their reentry phase. While abroad, the proactive managers tend to use proactive communication to maintain close ties with the home organization via formal and informal means. They also have a home-based mentor to look after their interests and pass on important corporate information. Their mentor keeps the home-based headquarters informed of the sojourner's achievements while abroad.

Proactive managers might report the acquisition of the following skills in their assignments abroad: alternative managerial skills, tolerance of ambiguity, multiple reasoning perspectives, and ability to work with and manage others. They further report that the new skills improve their self-image and self-confidence. Not surprisingly, returnees who receive validation (e.g., promotions) from their bosses and recognition

from their colleagues report higher reentry satisfaction than do returnees who receive no such validation or recognition (Adler, 1997).

INTERCULTURAL REALITY CHECK: DO-ABLES

In this chapter, we explored culture shock as we crossed cultural boundaries. We explained the pros and cons and looked at some of the factors of why people manage culture shock differently.

We also talked about the developmental ups and downs of culture shock and suggested tips to manage culture shock adaptively. Last, we emphasized the importance of paying attention to reentry culture shock issues.

Overall, here are some practical tools for managing sojourners' culture shock effectively:

- Newcomers should realize that culture shock is inevitable. It is an unavoidable experience that most people encounter when relocating from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one.
- New arrivals should understand that culture shock arises because of the unfamiliar environment, when one is bombarded and saturated with unfamiliar cues. Developing a realistically positive outlook in viewing their one-time experience as a precious adventure and doing some positive reframing of surprising events may help to lower their stress level
- Making an effort to establish broad-based contacts with members of the host culture and learning to communicate with them can increase local knowledge and reduce such feelings of vulnerability. Cultivating a deeper, supportive friendship network and easing themselves into the new setting can also help to restore the identity equilibrium state.
- Likewise, the more members of the host culture extend a helping hand and the more they attempt to increase their familiarity with the new arrivals, the more they can increase the newcomers' sense of security and inclusion.
- Culture shock is induced partly by an intense feeling of incompetence. By seeking out positive role models or mentors, newcomers may be able to find reliable and competent cultural bridge persons in easing the stress level of their initial culture shock experience.
- Newcomers should realize that culture shock is a transitional affective phase of stress that ebbs and flows from high to low intensity. New arrivals must hang on to a resilient sense of humor and emphasize the positive aspects of the environment rather than engaging in prolonged concentration on its negative aspects, realizing that these "growing pains" may lead to long-term personal and professional growth and development.