



CULTURE SHOCK

AN EXAMINATION OF CULTURE SHOCK EXPERIENCES AND DIFFICULTIES IN CULTURAL ADAPTATION: RICH DESCRIPTION FROM SOJOURNERS, IMMIGRANTS, AND LONG-TERM REFUGEES

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ABSTRACT

Culture shock has been defined as a feeling of disorientation or discomfort due to the lack of familiar cues in one's environment (Martin and Nakayama, 2010). **The purpose of this research study is to examine and understand the culture shock experiences and struggles of cultural adaptation encountered by migrants (sojourners, immigrants, and long-term refugees) who have attempted to adjust to U.S. American culture. Such knowledge can heighten the cultural intelligence of migrants, as well as members of the host culture, resulting in the increased effectiveness of intercultural interactions.** Survey methodology was used to gather self-report data through interviews with 20 participants from 16 cultures. The sample - non-random, convenience, and purposive - includes: (1) international students and scholars studying at the UW-Eau Claire from Austria, Bolivia, China, Ethiopia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Moldova, Nepal, South Korea, Spain, Tunisia, and Ukraine and (2) community members that emigrated from other cultures (Kenya, Iran, Laos, and Portugal). The results reveal 10 different categories of culture shock experiences, which appear to be influenced and stimulated by, for example, direct challenges to the participants' learned cultural values, etiquette, verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors. The results reveal a variety of culture shock experiences in rich description. Note: This research is part of a larger study, "Culture Talk," conducted in 2008-2009 by UW-Eau Claire students J. Tierney, N. Severson, A. Moser, and P. Koch.

INTRODUCTION

Being able to effectively adjust to a new environment, while learning the rules and customs of a new cultural context, is one of the most important facets of the cultural adaptation. The process of cultural adaptation often is accompanied by experiences of culture shock Oberg (1954, 1960). Defined as a relatively short-term feeling of disorientation or discomfort due to the lack of familiar cues in one's environment (Martin and Nakayama, 2010), culture shock often is experienced by people who find themselves living in a radically different cultural environment (Ferraro, 2006). Such cues can include signs and symbols of social intercourse such as when to shake hands, what to say when meeting people, and whether to take statements seriously or not; such cues can be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs or norms (Oberg, 1960).

SIGNIFICANCE

The study of intercultural communication, which attempts to discover how people from distinctively diverse cultures endeavor to communicate, is mandated by:

- Issues of globalization, changing patterns of migration, and advances in internet technology that allow people worldwide to connect. Today's international marketplace demands inter-culturally competent communicators. The key to such competence is cultural intelligence.

The implications of culture shock are extensive; coming to know the areas that others consider to be shocking about U.S. American culture and what others identify as challenging in terms of cultural adaptation is revealing for all involved. This research - based on empirical data gathered from recent, real-life examples - provides such knowledge, which can:

- Heighten cultural intelligence of migrants, as well as members of host culture, resulting in increased effectiveness of intercultural interactions in business and social settings.
- Help migrants prepare and develop skills to reduce potential anxiety and uncertainty
- Lessen misunderstandings between persons engaged in cross-cultural relationships

LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORY & SCHOLARS

- Culture Shock
- Cultural Adjustment and Adaptation
- Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory
- Inductive (Grounded) Theory
- Cultural Values, e.g.
 - Individualism/Collectivism
 - Power Distance
 - Time
- Identity, e.g.
 - Ascription
 - Racism
- Language and Verbal Communication Styles
- Nonverbal Communication, e.g.
 - Haptics (Touch)
- Adler (1975)
- Chinese Culture Connection (1987)
- Ferraro (2010)
- Furnham (2010)
- Furnham & Bochner (1986)
- Gudykunst (1995, 1998, 2005)
- Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey (2003)
- Hall (1959, 1969, 1976, 1983)
- Hofstede (1980, 1984)
- Kim (2001, 2005)
- Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961)
- Martin & Nakayama (2010)
- Oberg (1954, 1960)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What, if any, culture shock did you experience when you arrived in the United States?
- What, if anything, has been the most difficult aspect of U.S. American or Midwestern culture to which you have had to adapt?
- What, if any, misunderstandings have you encountered in the U.S. (or in Eau Claire) as a result of a misinterpretation of some type of non-verbal communication behavior?

CULTURE SHOCK
 A RELATIVELY SHORT-TERM FEELING OF DISORIENTATION OR DISCOMFORT
 DUE TO THE UNFAMILIARITY OF SURROUNDINGS
 & THE LACK OF FAMILIAR CUES
 IN THE ENVIRONMENT
Martin & Nakayama 2010

SURVEY METHOD

Measurement Techniques and Operational Procedures

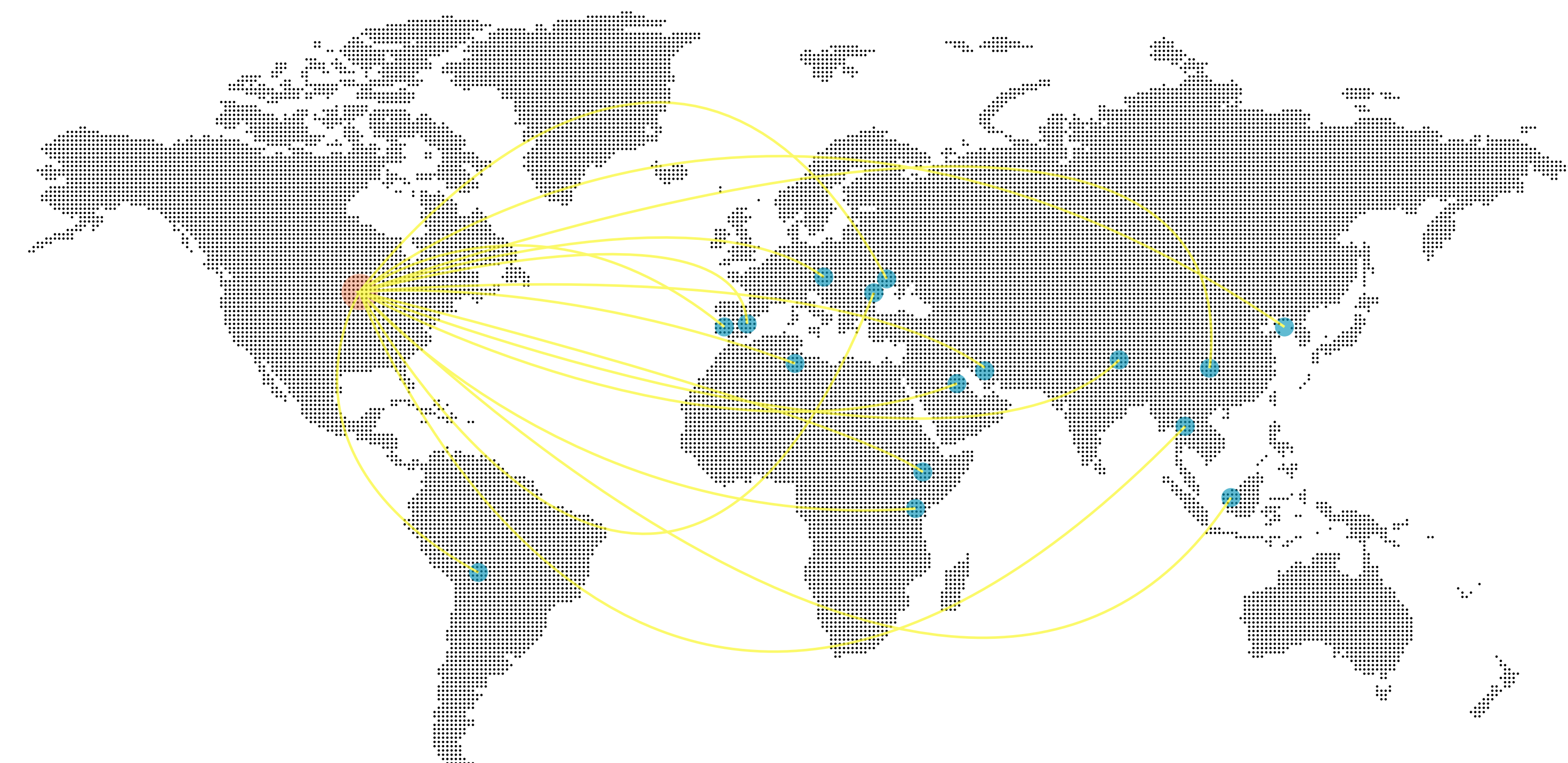
- Qualitative data gathered through 16 face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews
- Open-ended questions about culture shock, adaptation, and misunderstandings
- Self-report data used to measure culture shock

Sample and Participants

- Non-random (convenience and purposive)
- N=16 cultures with 20 participants (13 women and 7 men)
 - International students and scholars studying at UW-Eau Claire

Austria	Kuwait	South Korea
Bolivia	Malaysia	Spain
China	Moldova	Tunisia
Ethiopia	Nepal	Ukraine
 - Community members who emigrated from other cultures

Kenya	Laos
Iran	Portugal
- Research approved by Institutional Review Board



DATA ANALYSIS

- Each interview was transcribed
- After transcription, researchers prepared the qualitative data by compiling the responses, quoted and/or paraphrased, as communicated by the interviewees
- Inductive ("grounded") approach used to connect responses to existing theory
- To gain a quantitative understanding of culture shock, common responses were grouped

SELECTED RESULTS

According to the results, culture shock is influenced and stimulated by a variety of factors. Participants experienced discomfort and/or disorientation due to direct challenges to their learned cultural values, verbal and non-verbal communication, etiquette, and identity.

70% Learned Cultural Values

- Chronemics (Time):** Bolivia, Spain
 - "In my culture, dinner and lunch are eaten at a much slower pace than in the States. Not only that, but once you are done, you hang out and chat for very long periods of time." *S. Lozano-Bolivia*
- Individualism/Collectivism:** Ethiopia, Iran, Kenya, Laos, Spain
 - "Africans in general tend to be very family and community oriented. So, I had an immediate sense of isolation in the U.S." *K. Wahome - Kenya*
- Past/Present/Future Values:** Moldova
 - "[U.S. Americans] all the time think about future, and I think this is kind of a disadvantage because people don't just stop for a moment and enjoy the present because the present will never come back." *T. Sanina - Moldova*
- Power Distance:** China, Iran, Laos
 - "One of the biggest culture shock I experienced as a child is seeing how my white friends talked back to their parents. There seemed to be a lack of respect for the parents' role as authority figures." *S. Vuelo - U.S. American-Hmong (Laos)*
- Uncertainty Avoidance:** Austria
 - "[U.S. Americans] apparently have much more rules, stricter rules than we have in Austria." *J. Schmed - Austria*

70% Verbal & Non-Verbal Communication

- Verbal:** Bolivia, China, Ethiopia, Laos, Moldova, Nepal, Spain, Ukraine
 - "[U.S.] American students in college are very open, they are very talkative ... I think for most Chinese students it's very difficult, because we think silence is more appropriate." *D. Tang - China*
- Non-Verbal:** Bolivia, Kuwait, Nepal, Portugal, Tunisia
 - "Moving your index finger in a circular motion next to your head ... [in U.S. American culture] tells you that something is crazy ... but in the Arab culture that means I'm thinking ... And I offended many because they thought that I was calling them crazy." *S. Al Benali - Kuwait*

15% Etiquette

- Social Communication:** Kuwait, Malaysia, South Korea
 - "For me it's really, really rude to touch others' food in their house. So I was waiting for my host mom to cook for me - but she didn't - because she already told me 'help yourself!'" *C. Ok - South Korea*

10% Identity

- Ascription:** Kenya, Laos
 - "There are still those who can not seem to accept an Asian face or a non-white person as 'American.' This is by far the most challenging thing to adjust to. Unfortunately, I still have to deal with it every day." *S. Vuelo - U.S. American-Hmong (Laos)*

RELIABILITY/VALIDITY

- Measurement Reliability:** (1) Measurement error reduced as interviewers were trained and instrument was pilot tested; (2) reliability assessed through internal consistency
- Internally Validity:** (1) Participants selected for research were valid members of population of interest; (2) each interview was conducted in the same type of environment (radio studio)
- Measurement Validity:** (1) interview schedule is strong in face validity; (2) interview schedule was pilot tested
- External Validity:** (1) Although sample is non-random, researchers were able to replicate previous findings for some questions; (2) study is strong in ecological validity as research (face-to-face interviews) mirrors real-life conditions

LIMITATIONS

- Non-random sample (purposive and convenience)
- Conclusions based on self-report data