

Understanding Reverse Culture Shock:

A Phenomenological Analysis of the Reentry Process for Study Abroad Students

by Chaia Schupack
Intercultural Communication

Significance of Study

- Over 50% of Linfield students study abroad
- Students experience reverse culture shock
 - Nationally, 85% of students returning home report some signs of reentry challenges
 - 55% of those students experience more serious symptoms

Background Concepts

- **Reverse Culture Shock**
 - The process of readjusting and re-assimilating into one's home culture after living abroad for a significant period of time
- **Reentry**
 - Unexpected and difficult experiences readjusting to life at home after studying abroad

Data Analysis

Three common themes:

- Feeling confined upon reentry
- Frustrations over perception gap
- Disclosure as a function of relational intimacy and expressed interest

Frustrations Over Perception Gap

- Students had a difficult time reconnecting with others
 - "I just wanted to connect from you since the last time you've been at [something] and you're not here."
- New Perceptions
 - "It's funny how something has changed when you don't give much effort. It is that you've been through an entire experience and you're changed, but everything is the same as the rest."

Conclusion/Implications

- There is a feeling that the current reentry program does not cover all issues related to reverse culture shock.
- Why is this useful information?
 - Help others understand
 - Friends
 - Family
 - Professors
 - Need for an improved reentry program

Research Questions

- What is it like for a college student to communicate about their study abroad and reentry experiences after returning to the United States?
 - What challenges do college students face while settling back into their home culture?
 - How does reverse culture shock affect students who have studied abroad?

Research Method

- Phenomenology
 - Qualitative research method
 - Seeks to understand and discover one's lived experience

Interviews

- Three students were randomly selected to answer open-ended questions that allowed them to reflect on their lived experience.
- Students studied for a semester in:
 - Hong Kong
 - Ireland
 - Mexico
- Initial question:
 - Tell me about your latest re-entry experience starting from the time you came back until now

Feeling Confined Upon Reentry

- Students felt stuck and end down.
 - "I remember during the time I was abroad, I felt like I was in a bubble. I was able to do things that I couldn't do at home. I was able to do things that I couldn't do at home. I was able to do things that I couldn't do at home."
- Lack of spontaneity:
 - "I remember during the time I was abroad, I felt like I was in a bubble. I was able to do things that I couldn't do at home. I was able to do things that I couldn't do at home. I was able to do things that I couldn't do at home."

Disclosure as a Function of Relational Intimacy and Expressed Interest

- Returnees disclosed more about their experiences to people they had a closer relationship with.
 - "I would be much more likely to talk about my experience with someone I know well than with someone I don't know well. I would be much more likely to talk about my experience with someone I know well than with someone I don't know well."

Bibliography

- [Bibliography entries]



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 - 15% of these students experience more serious symptoms

Important Terms

- **Reverse Culture Shock**

- The process of readjusting and re-assimilating into one's home culture after living abroad for a significant period of time

- **Reentry**

- Unexpected and difficult experiences readjusting to life at home after studying abroad

Research Questions

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Data Analysis

Three common themes:

- Feeling confined upon reentry
- Frustrations over perception gap
- Disclosure as a function of relational intimacy and expressed interest

Feeling Confined Upon Reentry

- Students felt stuck and tied down:

“Everyone is doing the exact same stuff that they were, and you’ve been off having all these experiences, and now you’re just back within that.”

- Lack of spontaneity:

“Sometimes at Linfield I find myself reading on my couch or in my room, but in Ireland I would read by the ocean, or by the bay. I would go there and bring some books and just sit there and read, watch people as they go by, and talk with people. But those moments away from everything that’s familiar to you, it just felt so enchanting because it’s not like a typical thing that you do. That life is just so exciting. Things don’t really feel enchanting here.”

Frustrations Over Perception Gap

- Students had a difficult time reconnecting with others
- New Perceptions

“It just seems so distant from you since the last time you’ve been at Linfield.”

“It’s not so much that everything has changed since you were gone that’s difficult. It is that you’ve been through all these experiences and you’ve changed, but everything back home is still the same.”

Disclosure as a Function of Relational Intimacy and Expressed Interest

Returnees disclosed more about their experiences to people they had a closer relationship with:

“As much as people want to hear about your experience, they’re not nearly as excited as you are about it. With my close friends, I’ll tell them more specific stories about what happened but at the same time try not to go on too long about it because they get bored. But with acquaintances, I would just keep things more general and I don’t want to get into too much depth unless they inquire more because I don’t know if its that they can’t relate to it or don’t want to. But clearly, because it’s our experience, we have a different perspective.”

Conclusion & Implications

- There is a feeling that the current reentry program does not cover all issues related to reverse culture shock.
- Why is this useful information?
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 - Professors
 - Need for an improved reentry program

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