

CULTURE SHOCK!

The phrase “culture shock,” coined by Cora DuBois in 1951, was first used in the cross-cultural literature of anthropologist Kalvero Oberg to describe problems of acculturation and adjustment among Americans who were working in a health project in Brazil. He viewed it as an “occupational disease of people who have suddenly been transported abroad and is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse.”

In the literature on culture shock there are three basic causal explanations: (1) the loss of familiar cues, (2) the breakdown of interpersonal communication, and (3) an identity crisis. All three disorienting states occur in adjustment to any social environment. However, in a cross-cultural situation they are greatly exaggerated and exacerbated by cultural differences. The severity of culture shock is generally much greater when the adjustment involves a completely different culture, because there is a greater loss of the familiar. Pages 137-139.

Education for the Intercultural Experience, edited by Michael Paige, Intercultural Press.

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The phenomenon may, and often does, occur during a major transitional experiences. Essentially, it is our psychological reaction to an unfamiliar or alien environment.

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: how to give orders, how to make purchases, when, and when not to respond. Now these cues may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture, as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we are not consciously aware.

Culture shock is neither good nor bad, necessary or unnecessary. It is a reality that many people face when in strange situations.

Pages 138-140. Managing Cultural Differences by Philip R. Harris and Robert T. Moran, Gulf Publishing.

PLEASE DISCUSS SIGNS OF CULTURE SHOCK THAT YOU HAVE OBSERVED IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND METHODS OF SUPPORT THAT FACULTY MAY OFFER.