The Dynamic Nature of Cultural Identity Throughout Cultural Transitions: Why Home Is Not So Sweet

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This article describes the social psychological process that underlies the cultural transition of sojourners. Herein the empirical and theoretical literature on cultural transitions (and in particular cultural repatriation and the relevant literature on self-concept and identity) is analyzed, critiqued, and synthesized in an attempt to understand the near ubiquitous distress experienced during repatriation. The relation among self-concept, cultural identity, and cultural transitions is explored, and in light of the paucity of comprehensive repatriation models, a new predictive model is proposed that explicates these relations. Shifts in cultural identity are classified as subtractive, additive, affirmative, or intercultural, and research directions are suggested.

And, now that life had so much human promise in it, they resolved to go back to their own land; because the years after all, have a kind of emptiness, when we spend too many of them on a foreign shore. We defer the reality of life, in such cases, until a future moment, when we shall again breathe our native air; but by-and-by, there are no future moments; or, if we do return, we find that the native air has lost its invigorating quality, and that life has shifted its reality to the spot where we have deemed ourselves only temporary residents. Thus, between two countries, we have none at all, or only that little space of either, in which we finally lay down our discontented bones. It is wise, therefore, to come back betimes, or never.


Historical accounts and contemporary events underscore that either as individuals or in groups, people are continually on the move. Individuals’ movements between countries may be voluntary or forced; sojourns may last 1 week or a lifetime; and rationale may be economic, political, evangelical, or pleasure seeking. The outcomes may influence present or future careers, marriage partners, relationships with extended families, and leisure pursuits. Regardless of outcome, all who participate in cultural transitions are subject to a dizzying array of experiences collectively labeled as culture shock, adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation, or acculturation. Although these concepts frequently are used interchangeably, they differ both structurally and temporally vis-à-vis the transition process. These concepts can be defined summarily as follows: (a) Culture shock is an intense, negative affective response, both psychological and physiological, experienced by new expatriates when faced with unfamiliar symbols, roles, relationships, social cognitions, and behavior; (b) Adjustment is the motivational process whereby sojourners attempt to modify both cognitions and behaviors to decrease negatively valenced interactions and experiences and increase positive ones; (c) Cross-cultural adaptation is the positive consequence of the adjustment process in which cognitions and behavioral modifications produce neutral or positive affect and successful social interactions; and (d) Acculturation is the process of long-term adaptation of indigenous groups within plural societies or immigrants to a new culture. These concepts are described more fully as this article unfolds. In addition, within this article, the terms culture and country are used interchangeably. Whereas many countries are culturally heterogeneous (e.g., the United States, the People’s Republic of China, India), a majority culture often exists that influences public behavior, discourse, and language choice. Thus, when I speak of entering a new country or a new culture, I refer to the majority culture of that country.

Substantial sociological and anthropological literature exists exploring the long-term adaptation of individuals to a new culture under the conceptual framework of immigration and migration. For hun-
dreds of years, movement to a new culture was more permanent than transitory. The long trek across borders seldom was followed by much contact or visits to the “old country.” The late 20th century, in contrast, has witnessed an explosion of shorter term cultural transitions of individuals for study, evangelism, business, government, economic and humanitarian aid, or temporary refuge. Investigations of adjustment to short-term cultural transitions, known as sojourner studies, have been viewed primarily through the lens of intercultural communication and anthropology.

A logical temporal extension of short-term cultural transition is the return to one’s country of origin, labeled reentry (Werkman, 1979), reaccluation (Martin, 1984), or repatriation (Howard, 1980a). I use the latter term herein; it is arguably more descriptive of the construct and carries with it fewer negative associations (e.g., the term reentry was borrowed from the early days of the space program in which entry into the earth’s atmosphere by hurtling rockets and satellites led to the disintegration of the vehicle).

A Social Psychological Perspective: Self, Self-Concept, and Cultural Identity

Social psychology, until recently, has added few insights to our understanding of the nature, process, and consequences of cultural transitions at any point along the permanency continuum from sojourn to migration. A discipline foundation does exist, however, through which to base explanatory and predictive theory and research on cultural transitions within a broader context of shifts of cultural frames.

Explorations into the role of culture on self and groups has historical roots in psychology, although research efforts were not sustained over time. Wilhelm Wundt, for example, devoted much of his professional life to developing volkenspsychologie, or cultural psychology. Yet, subsequent research programs, particularly in the United States, were devoid of cultural frameworks. Perhaps the century-long oversight by the U.S. psychological community of culture as a primary shaper of the self and behavior might be attributed to a U.S. predilection to focus on individual differences and a preoccupation with ethnic differences as opposed to overarching U.S. similarities (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). It is not surprising, in fact, that U.S. social psychology focuses on the self, whereas European and Asian psychological research focuses more on group and social membership.

Culture and Self

Despite the growing literature establishing the relation between cultural repatriation and psychological distress, we lack a broad psychosocial framework for understanding this phenomenon. Theoretical writings on self, self-concept, and in particular cultural identity may provide insight into the repatriation problem and contribute to an emerging social psychological analysis of cultural transitions.

One’s culture imperceptibly forms a mental framework through which individuals define their ontology, motivate and select their behaviors, and judge and evaluate the actions of others. Berry (1980) suggested that culture provides both a frame of reference for self-definition and a frame of reference for ordering social relationships.

In daily interactions with culturally similar others, cultural identity remains unformed or unrecognized. Nevertheless, cultural scripts regarding the self and interpersonal behavior are active and become the normative and expected standard. Formal education systems and diverse media reinforce these shared meanings, symbols, and values. One, for example, is outspoken and participative in a classroom not because one is American, the script dictates, but because that is how any good student should behave.

Triandis (1989) provided an insightful and integrative analysis of the link among the self, culture, and behavior. In a structural framework of the self, he proposed three aspects of the self that are differentiated by the types of cognitions held—either private (“I am athletic”), public (“People think that I am athletic”), or collective (“My family and friends think that I am athletic”). The probability of referencing each of these three self-aspects is mediated by cultural variation in three cultural dimensions: cultural complexity (e.g., reflected in the number of potential relationships and ingroups available to individuals), individualism and collectivism (reflected in the balance maintained between personal goals and the needs of the group), and tightness and looseness (reflecting the priority given to adherence to group norms). Thus, for example, within tight, individualistic cultures we find more elements of the private self and therefore more sampling of the private self and less of the public or collective self. Consequently, social behavior is activated through the differential sampling of the private, public, or collective selves that have been influenced by the cultural dimensions of complexity, individualism and collectivism, and tightness and looseness.

Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) comprehensive article, in exploring the role of the self in mediating and regulating behavior, focused on the primacy of culture in shaping self-construal—in particular, the role of culture in defining the relationship between the self and the other. Although additional self–other relationships no doubt can be found, Markus and Kitayama examined the independent self, that self which is distinctive and focused on self-needs, and they contrasted it with
everything to the interdependent self that is connected and focused on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. The self-schemata of those favoring independent as opposed to interdependent selves would result in differential self-relevant processes that in turn would influence cognitions, emotions, and motivation. In a recent article, Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999) moved beyond noting the existence of the relation between self and culture to an exploration of the psychological functions of culture and self-esteem. In a comprehensive review and comparison of the self-esteem literature in North America and Japan, they deduced that both self and self-regard are constructions that differ across cultures and concluded that positive self-regard is not a universal motivation.

The broadest and most comprehensive theory to explore the psychological functions of culture and evaluation of the self is that proffered by terror management (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). According to the theory, culture functions in part to assuage the terror associated with our uncontrollable demise by creating order and stability and by describing the parameters of the “good and valuable” self. Furthermore, terror management theory hypothesizes that threats to one’s cultural worldview, perhaps as a consequence of cultural sojourns, result in increased anxiety.

These and other theories of culture and self underscore the social construction of self and self-concept through the meaning system of culture (Rohner, 1984) and the psychological functions of cultural worldview. Recent social psychological thinking has broadened the scope of the investigation of the relationship between the self and group from one that focused on individual behavior within the group to one that examined the group within the self with the current assumption being that the study of the collective is a necessary companion to the study of the self (Miller & Prentice, 1994). In contrast to anthropology’s traditional search for distal antecedents and consequences of culture, social psychological investigations are searching for more proximal ones (Kashima, 1995).

**Self and Self-Concept**

The self and the ideas we have about ourselves (self-concept) are rich and complex (see Baumeister, 1998; Cross & Madson, 1997, for recent reviews) with wide-ranging implications for behavior. The self-concept performs important social and personal functions by providing goals to direct behavior and processing self-relevant information (Baumeister, 1986). A brief review of contemporary self theories provide helpful models that can be applied later in this article to the analysis of cultural identity and transitions. Current theories of self-concept have departed from unidimensional models of the self in which the self was measured primarily through self-esteem ratings to ones that embrace research paradigms that treat self-concept as a multifaceted construct (Markus & Wurf, 1987), broadly classified into two categories: content of self-concept and structure of self-concept and self-knowledge.

Content research investigates knowledge of self, self-beliefs, and the extent to which the contents of self-concepts are clearly defined, consistent, and stable. Campbell’s (1990) work exemplifies this approach. In particular, Campbell identified a strong relation between self-clarity and self-esteem and, in a discussion of the direction of the relation, postulates that self-concept uncertainty could lead to lower self-esteem. This, in turn, might increase one’s susceptibility to negative information in the social environment. Self-content theorists also are concerned with evaluation of the self-beliefs and studies on self-enhancement, self-deprecation, and self-esteem explore these themes. Kernis and colleagues (Kernis, Granneman, & Barclay, 1989, 1992; Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993), for example, focused on the stability or instability of self-esteem, defined as the magnitude of short-term fluctuations in global self-esteem. Inconsistent findings indicate that either stability and level of self-esteem are unrelated (Kernis et al., 1989) or moderately related (Kernis et al., 1992). Of relevance to the model proposed in this article, however, is the consistent finding that among high—self-esteem individuals, instability was related to substantially greater tendencies to experience anger and hostility (Kernis et al., 1989) and greater defensiveness and adverse reactions in response to negative events (Kernis et al., 1993). Kernis and his colleagues suggested that self-esteem instability might be an outcome of variations in perceived competence and variations in perceived social acceptance.

The companion dimension of self research focuses on the structure of self-concept. Several theories of self-knowledge structure are pertinent to current concepts of self-concept and cultural transitions. Among these are the extent of the integration of dimensions of self-knowledge (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993), self-complexity (Linville, 1985), and the compartmentalization of negative and positive selves (Showers, 1992). Of particular interest is the finding that self-concept complexity and flexibility were positively related to self-esteem such that high—self-esteem individuals claimed they were capable of a wide range of behaviors when required by the situation (Campbell, Chew, & Scratchley, 1991; Paulhus & Martin, 1988).

**Self-Concept and Cultural Identity**

Both content and structure theories of self reveal that people hold multiple beliefs about them-
selves—that is, many self-schemas. Those self-schemas include personal attributes about the self (e.g., traits, characteristics, dispositions) and thoughts about membership in social groups such as those formed around gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, and culture. Lewin (1948), in an early comment on the relationship between the self and the collective, indicated that individuals need a firm sense of group identification to develop a sense of well-being. Tajfel (1981, 1982) and colleagues later expanded this notion developing a theory of social identity in which identification with a social group adds to one’s positive self-concept. Tajfel (1981) defined the social or collective self as an “aspect of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 255). Thus, the content of our self-perceptions reflect not only our personal traits and characteristics, but also meaningful social groups to which we belong. One element of the collective self-concept is derived from membership in a cultural group defined as one’s cultural identity but possessing properties distinct from other collective identities.

Cultural identity, often conceptualized as coterminus with national identity (i.e., thinking of oneself as American or Japanese or Italian), more accurately can be considered the psychological counterpart to national identity—the identity that describes the cultural self in content, evaluation, and structure. Triandis’s (1989) definition of (subjective) culture, for example, includes geographic localization as a basic element as well as shared language and shared notions of the self. Segall, Dasen, Berry, and Poortinga (1999) suggested that although the nation-state is a relatively recent political phenomenon, national identity is a fundamental component of identity.

Although Hermans and Kempen (1998) highlighted the global trend toward cultural mixing and, by implication, the limitations of the concept of cultural identity, culture retains a convenient tendency to differ across geographic regions (Hofstede, 1980). Tweed, Conway, and Ryder (1999) argued that global mixing, although evident to some extent in the economically developed world, is less evident in most of the world where daily communication consists of interactions among those who have personal contact and shared beliefs and behaviors. More than 25 years ago, Brewer and Campbell (1976), in testing 30 East African societies, reported similar results. In response to interview queries about their own group and 13 other groups, high liking and familiarity were most likely to be assigned to groups who were similar in culture and language to the ingroup and who were geographically proximal; that is, groups had contact with others who were similar. Holdstock (1999), in underscoring the central role of cultural identity in people’s everyday lives, proposed a countertrend to the cultural globalization notion: that of the strengthening of cultural identity.

As Tajfel (1982) and Deaux (1993) described in a later formulation, social identity has one element that may not be essential to the operation of cultural identity: awareness of membership in this particular social group. Self-beliefs, evaluation, structure, and self-motivated social behavior all may be shaped by culture, yet culture’s consequences and thus the cultural identity itself may be unrecognized by its members, an idea I explore in detail later in this article. Although the identity is unrecognized, its effect is in play.

Cultural identity has an additional element to be considered: An individual’s self-defined cultural identity may differ from the perception of others. Traditional social cognitive paradigms, attribution theory, or person perception models, for example, might be particularly useful in exploring the parameters of identity judgments applied by others. Immigrants to New York from the Philippines and Korea report they are now referred to collectively as Asian Americans. Both groups indicate that although they do not consider themselves “Asian American” and are unsure of the cultural attributes of such a category, they are labeled as such by the wider U.S. public. Interestingly, they have found adopting this nomenclature politically expedient.

Other-defined cultural identity also may be linked to evaluation of goals and behaviors. Albert Einstein (cited in Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999) said,

>If the theory of relativity is found to be correct, the Germans may claim that I am a German, the Swiss that I am a Swiss citizen, and the French that I am a great man of science. But, if the theory is found to be false, the French are likely to say that I am Swiss, the Swiss that I am German, and the Germans . . . that I am a Jew. (p. 274)


Culture Contact and Cultural Identity

As cultural groups come into contact, what are the consequences for the individual’s cultural self and cultural identity? Cross-cultural contact historically has resulted in a variety of identity responses that, at its ex-
treme, led to genocide, ethnic cleansing, or assimilation (Smith & Bond, 1998). Four theories either tangentially or directly address the link between culture contact and cultural identity but with differing predictions regarding identity change.

**Contact hypothesis.** This theory (Stephan, 1987) is aimed at understanding the conditions under which contact has improved intergroup relations—in particular, whether contact leads to prejudice reduction through attitude change, especially as it pertains to racism and anti-Semitism. Although cultural transitions are not generally addressed in the contact literature, transitions might lead to changes in cultural self-construals and behavior, all of which might facilitate effective interaction between groups. Amir (1976) reported that individuals in culture contact do rate each other as more similar to each other and more favorably evaluate the outgroup. However, it is an empirical leap from a demonstration that cultural contact results in decreased prejudice or increased effectiveness to indicating that cultural transitions lead to cultural identity shifts. Currently, the premise that cross-cultural contact alone—in particular, that which results from cultural transitions—will result in cultural identity change remains untested.

**Cultural hybridization.** As a result of ever-increasing cultural connections and recombinations of cultural practices and forms, Hermans and Kempen (1998) suggested the resulting phenomenon of cultural hybridization, and they speculated that hybridization would lead to the development of new forms of cultural identities.

Similarly, Oyserman (1993) and colleagues (Oyserman & Markus, 1993; Oyserman, Sakamoto, & Lauffer, 1998) examined the layering of opposing cultural dimensions within one culture. Their focus has been on the self, socialized into both individualist and collectivist worldviews, which then is conceived as a cultural hybrid or bicultural. To activate one cultural dimension rather than another, the social situation becomes the prime. Thus, cultural selves and identities may have permeable borders that respond to situational contexts.

**Acculturation theorists.** The acculturation theorists directly addressed the notion of change in cultural attitudes, behaviors, and cultural identity as a consequence of cultural contact (Berry, 1990; Graves, 1967). Note that Berry’s theory was developed primarily to explain effects of colonization on indigenous groups through cultural contact (e.g., aboriginal population in Australia, native populations in Canada) and later was expanded to predict acculturation strategies of immigrants, one category of permanent cultural transition (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Empirical support has been confined for the most part to these populations. Berry (1980) concluded that an identity shift away from the home (or native) cultural identity may occur when individuals have prolonged culture contact. These acculturative changes have been categorized as integrated or assimilated. Cultural transitions for the traditional immigrant, who has few or infrequent contacts with country of origin, transform one cultural identity (e.g., Irish) into a new one (e.g., Canadian or Irish Canadian). Alternatively, sustained contact with the new culture may result in strengthening home (or native) culture identity, resulting in a separated or marginal identity relative to the dominant culture. In turn, each of these psychological responses is linked to attitudinal and behavioral changes.

Although on initial reading of acculturation theory, it appears pertinent to the process of cultural transitions of sojourners, the premises on which the theory is based limit its explanatory and predictive value vis-à-vis the sojourner experience. For example, acculturation theory posits both an individual and collective response to permanent culture contact; sojourn transitions are temporary and primarily an individual encounter. Acculturation theory examines the interplay between dominant and nondominant groups within one society; sojourns juxtapose the individual’s journey into a different sociocultural environment with their reentry to the home culture. Motivation for the cultural transition is significantly different for the immigrant compared to the sojourner. Whereas immigrants or long-term transitors frequently are motivated by economic or political hardship, the cultural transition of sojourners reflect a more narrowly defined instrumental purpose such as work assignment or study. Empirically, outcomes differ as well. For example, women (compared to men) are more at risk during acculturation transitions (Beiser, Johnson, & Turner, 1993), whereas female sojourners appear to adapt as well as (Searle & Ward, 1990), or more successfully than, male sojourners (N. Adler, 1987).

**Social identity theorists.** Social identity theory speaks most directly to the cultural transition in which the individual physically moves between regions in that it suggests that becoming a member of an outgroup (e.g., an expatriate in new country) heightens the sense of salience of one’s identity vis-à-vis the out-group (e.g., home culture). Turner, Oakes, Haslam, and McGarty (1994) concluded that social identity tends to become more salient in intergroup contact (again, an expatriate living among host nationals, for instance), whereas personal identity is more salient in intragroup contexts (repatriate among compatriots, perhaps). Members’ group stereotypes (autostereotypes) also appear to be strengthened in intergroup relations. In a study of self-concept, Hogg and Turner (1987) found
that men and women described themselves in more gender-stereotypic terms under intergroup rather than ingroup situations.

However, social identity theory does not address the identity effects of sustained contact. What of the experience of temporary but close cultural contact, one in which the sojourner lives several years in another country? A 5-year sojourn in Japan or Chile might not shift an identity completely; that is, the sojourner may not consider themselves to be Japanese or Chilean. However, as Anderson (1994) pointed out, during cultural transitions,

All the familiar underpinnings of one’s sense of self are said to be torn away, depriving persons of most of the familiar reference points that provide the cues for their behavior as well as the substrate for their sense of identity. (p. 294)

The sense of self is altered and one seeks to understand the new self.

Cross-Cultural Transitions

Psychologists sporadically have studied the cultural transitions of sojourners (Brein & David, 1971) and suggested methods for minimizing the stress associated with it (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976), although constructs often have been vague and confusing. Since Oberg (1960) coined the term culture shock, researchers have grappled with using a concept that describes both the process of cross-cultural transition and its outcomes. Researchers have suggested that cultural adaptation or adjustment, as the outcome of cross-cultural transitions, be used as a descriptive term. Searle and Ward (1990) further suggested the distinction between two interrelated types of adjustment—that of psychological adjustment (feelings of well-being and satisfaction) or sociocultural competence (ability to fit in to the new culture and interact effectively). Similarly, Black (1988) proposed three distinctions: general adjustment, interaction with host nationals, and work adjustment.

I prefer the conceptually neutral term cultural adaptation to refer to the outcome in which individuals modify their cognitions, behaviors, and interpretations of behaviors to match the new cultural environment better. Adaptation emphasizes proactive attempts to be culturally flexible and resilient within the new cultural environment.

Sojourner Experience

Within the extensive and largely descriptive sojourner literature, researchers have focused on individ-
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Cross-cultural research with non-Americans indicated repatriation distress in at least some domains among returned foreign students at the high school (Ferguson, 1989, Japanese students returning home; Wilson, 1993, students from Australia, Ecuador, Norway, and Sweden returning home) and college level (Basu & Ames, 1970; Gama & Pedersen, 1977, returning to Brazil from the United States; Bochner, Lin, & McLeod, 1980, Asian students leaving the United States), among business employees (Black, 1994, Japanese repatriates; Gregersen & Black, 1996; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997, Finnish repatriates; Sussman, 1985; Tung, 1988), and among returned exiles (Sundquist & Johansson, 1996, Latin American repatriates from Sweden).

Researchers have suggested that repatriation does not result in uniformly negative responses. Several studies indicated positive changes among repatriates including being more aware of and accepting of cultural differences in general (Wilson, 1986), more appreciation of the host culture (Grove & Hansel, 1983), and for repatriated college students improved relationships with parents (Martin, 1986). Findings such as these, however, might serve more as an outcome of an intercultural experience that becomes salient on return to one’s home country rather than the consequence of repatriation itself. Differential outcomes also might reflect differences in cultural identity shifts as described in the section detailing the proposed paradigm.

Theoretical Models

Since 1963 (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), the social science community has recognized that psychological distress accompanies the return home, yet research remained largely descriptive. Those models that have been proffered might be categorized into three types. One school of thought, the reductionists, considers all transitions, adjustments, and adaptations as variants of the same process, so that the underlying mechanisms for overseas transitions, repatriation transitions, or domestic geographic transitions are equivalent. Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1992) suggested, for example, prevalence of this notion among investigations of corporate sojourners. A variation of the reductionist theme is one suggested by theorists who consider cultural transitions reflective of any stressful environment in which psychological adjustments and coping strategies emerge (Anderson, 1994; Bennett, 1977). This approach, for instance, might psychologically cluster cultural repatriates with 1st-year college students or newlyweds.

A second perspective allows for the distinctiveness of cultural transitions from all others but views overseas and repatriation as similar. The emphasis here is the response to changing environments and the sociocultural contexts. Storti’s (1997) work exemplifies this paradigm with his discussion of the changing nature and meaning of home. The repatriation experience, as with overseas transitions, becomes a response to an unfamiliar environment, the loss of social cues, new communication system, and different relational rules. Ample theoretical and empirical support is extant pertaining to overseas transitions and the stressful response to new cultural environments and the lack of social support (Harris & Moran, 1979), the importance of sociocultural learning (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Taft, 1977), or social-cognitive learning (Armes & Ward, 1989; Weissman & Furnham, 1987) as a way of facilitating adjustment.

No clear evidence is available for applying this cultural environment model to repatriation, however. Could the home environment have changed so radically as to plunge the repatriate into reverse culture shock? Perhaps for several narrowly defined repatriation populations, this model might predict their repatriation experience. In the case of lengthy sojourns (e.g., 20 years) or a return to a dramatically altered country (e.g., postapartheid South Africa), the changing home model might apply (see Weschler, 1998, for three case studies of repatriated exiles). Similarly with adolescent repatriates, for whom substantial segments of their social context change quickly, repatriation distress might be a response to a home that is now an unfamiliar sociocultural environment (Strangers at Home, 1996). However, for the hundreds of thousands of adult sojourners who move between countries for moderate periods of time, the unfamiliar cultural environment model that predicts overseas psychological and sociocultural adjustment might not be sufficiently explanatory when applied to the repatriation experience.

A third perspective recognizes the unique qualities of the repatriation process and three models represent the psychological distinctiveness of repatriation transitions. N. Adler (1981), for example, suggested a predictive model of repatriate coping styles but does not provide sufficient detail about the psychometric properties of the measures nor the theoretical underpinnings.

Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1992) proposed a broad theory of repatriation based on control theory (Bell & Straw, 1989; cited in Black, Gregersen, &
Mendenhall, 1992) in which repatriates make both anticipatory and in-country repatriation adjustments. However, anticipatory adjustments assume that expatriates are aware of and prepared for the repatriation process, an assumption not supported by the literature. In addition, although the four variables that they propose as informing anticipatory and in-country (home) adjustment cover several domains, none focus on psychological or sociocultural factors. Their theory does acknowledge the complexity of the repatriation and allows for multiple indices of repatriation adjustment, which include general, interpersonal, and work-related readjustments.

In another repatriation-unique model, Rogers and Ward (1993) proposed a social-cognitive framework in which the central variable is that the discrepancy between expectations of the reentry experience held by sojourners and their actual reentry experience affects the psychological adjustment. Their results indicated that experienced, but not expected, social difficulties were associated with reentry adjustment problems. Expectations contributed to predicting difficulties only when they were unrealistic—that is, when experiences were more difficult than originally anticipated.

In sum, repatriation, distinct from overseas adjustment, typically does not involve speaking a new language, finding new support networks, learning to move about in an unfamiliar environment, struggling to make culturally isomorphic attributions (interpreting a social situation in a way similar to those in the host culture; Triandis, 1975), or learning new cognitive schemas. Yet, in addition to the robust findings that repatriation is psychologically distressing, several studies indicated that repatriation adjustment is more difficult than initial overseas adjustment (N. Adler, 1981; Clague & Krupp, 1978; Howard, 1980b). Although the variables tested in the repatriation studies measure multiple domains of repatriation distress and accurately might predict severity of repatriation adjustment, they still do not further our understanding of the construct; that is, why is coming home so difficult?

The previous reviews of two disparate bodies of research, the social psychological and the intercultural, provided constructs on which to build an explanatory model of individual-level responses to cultural transitions and repatriation. With the self a product of and located within a culture, cultural identity emerges as critical element of the self-concept whose saliency increases with the unique situational context of sojourn-related intergroup contact. Both individual and cultural variability factors influence the extent of adaptation to the sojourn culture and ergo the range of stability, clarity, and complexity of the changing self. Subsequent cultural identity shifts inform the repatriate’s affective response.

A New Model: Cultural Identity and Cultural Transition

This paradigm seeks to provide a parsimonious explanation to several unanswered questions or contradictory findings: First, why is repatriation a distressing segment of cultural transitions? Second, why is culture learning not a theoretically satisfactory explanation in light of equivocal empirical findings? Third, how does active understanding of cultural identity changes mediate affective responses to those changes?

It is proposed here that self-concept disturbances and subsequent shifts in cultural identity throughout the cross-cultural transitions process are the critical mediating factors in explaining and predicting psychological responses to these transitions, whether conceptualized as psychological adjustment, cultural anxiety, sociocultural competence, or growthful development. This explanatory model argues for three fundamental elements: identity salience, sociocultural adaptation, and self-concept–cultural identity changes. These features interact within a larger cyclical framework of cultural transition to predict consequences for the transition process made evident during repatriation. Figure 1 illustrates the cyclical model.

Identity Salience

This model suggests that whereas self-construal, emotion, and motivation might be shaped by the cultural context, few individuals are cognizant of cul-

![Figure 1. Shifts in cultural identity throughout the cultural transition.](Image)
Culture might be part of the self, but cultural identity is not explicitly recognized. Like a fish in water, culture surrounds an individual, albeit its impact is seldom a salient feature of an individual’s self-concept; individuals rarely recognize the imprint of their own culture and its ubiquitous nature. In my social psychology classroom in New York, few students in describing themselves ever list “American” among their top 20 attributes in the classic Kuhn and McPartland (1954) self-description exercise.

Baumeister (1986) pointed out that not all beliefs about oneself are simultaneously part of our self-awareness. The lack of identity awareness may be explained conceptually through the phenomenal self or the working self concept (Markus & Kunda, 1986), which referred to a part of self-knowledge present or not present in our awareness at a particular time.

There are exceptions to the general lack of cultural identity awareness. For some groups, cultural identity is salient or explicit. McGuire, McGuire, Child, and Fujioka (1978), in a study of gender and racial identities, concluded that social distinctiveness increased saliency of one’s social identity; their minority status allowed for that identity to be more salient or more central to their working self-concept. This might be particularly noticeable when aspects of the dominant and minority cultures conflict. A Korean American child, for example, might be taught by parents and family to be respectful and obedient toward the elderly; this collectivist goal clashing with the individualistic and youth-centered lessons taught by mainstream U.S. culture. In such cases, one’s cultural identity is painfully evident. Groups whose cultural identity is externally threatened might also experience heightened salience such that in Kosovo or in the Basque region of Spain, individuals are willing to die to maintain their cultural identity and separateness.

Members of dominant groups within culturally heterogeneous entities, although not experiencing increased saliency of identity, might experience identity confusion. Triandis (1989) suggested that clarity of social identity and the type of self-cognitions are related. Both low sampling of the collective self and high cultural complexity could result in increased confusion of the social identity. Social identity, therefore, might focus on ethnic or racial identity differences rather than on cultural similarities.

The proposed model predicts that one situation in which one’s cultural identity will emerge and become salient is during the commencement of a cultural transition. Enveloped in a new social environment where behavior and thinking diverge from one’s familiar cultural context, awareness of the profound influence of our culture on behavior begins to grow. Dorothy noticed it immediately on stepping out of her fallen house into the Land of Oz, when she exclaimed, “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore” (LeRoy & Fleming, 1939). Embedded in the literature on cross-cultural training (Stewart, 1966) is the assumption that awareness of home cultural identity is important to psychologically positive cultural transitions.

Juxtaposed to the emerging cultural identity salience, a new social identity status emerges—that of outgroup member, an expatriate in a new cultural environment. These twin cognitions, that of cultural identity salience and outgroup membership, appear to strengthen, at least initially, our identification with our home culture. Although not designed as a test of the transition-identity model, a recent study (Kosmitzki, 1996) supported the model’s first premise. Home culture affirmations were reported by both German and U.S. expatriates as compared to same-culture individuals who had no expatriate experience. Germans living in the United States and Americans living in Germany described themselves as more similar to their compatriots than did German or U.S. monoculturals.

Similarly, in a study of European managers who worked within either a monocultural organization or a multinational one, Laurent (1983) found that those working within a multinational corporation with a wide range of other Europeans experienced a resurgence of values associated with their own country’s values. Stryker and Serpe (1982) also noted that identity salience leads to behavior consistent with that identity. Anecdotal evidence confirms as well the effects of cultural identity salience. A frequent U.S. sojourner reported to me that he jubilantly celebrates the 4th of July only when living in other countries. Thus, cultural identity salience coincides with the primary step in transition-induced self-concept disturbance.

Sociocultural Adaptation

Following the cultural reaffirmation phase, the model posits that sojourners recognize the discrepancy between their cultural selves (and the goals that direct behavior and thought) and the new cultural context. Higgins (1996) suggested that self-knowledge is pursued for practical reasons in part for the adaptive benefits of improving the person–environment fit. This is precisely the context in which cultural sojourners find themselves. Cultural readjustments, prompted by the lack of fit between one set of cultural cognitions and behavior no longer appropriate within the new cultural context, may lead individuals to modify behavior, cognitions, or both and, consequently, cultural identity.

Sojourners are faced with a continuum of accommodation choices that range from maintenance of the cultural self and its behavioral repertoire at one anchor to transposition to a new cultural self and a new behav-
ioral and cognitive repertoire at the other, the latter col-
loquially described as “going native.”

The process of selecting a cultural accommodation
mode is complex and dependent on several variables,
three of which are internal or self-variables. One such
factor is task centrality—the motivation to succeed at
the assigned overseas task. The proposed model makes
the assumption that sojourners are motivated to succeed
at their task—workers to conduct business, students to
learn, development workers to distribute aid, missionar-
ies to convert. For sojourners who have low motivation
to succeed, the sociocultural adaptation phase is sub-
verted at the stage of cultural identity salience.

The model suggested two other factors that influ-
ence the sociocultural adaptation process: cultural
identity centrality and cultural flexibility. Identity cen-
trality refers to the significance of cultural identity to
the sojourner. The more central the identity, the less
likely that extreme cultural accommodation will take
place and the more likely that the familiar cultural self,
newly reaffirmed in its identity, will be maintained.

If cultural identity centrality is low and intention to
succeed at the overseas task is high, the question re-
mains whether the sojourner has the ability to recog-
nize the culturally appropriate behaviors, to learn them
and to engage in them in appropriate situations—in
short, is the sojourner able to adapt? Cultural flexi-
bility refers to the sojourner’s ability to make the necessary
modifications in behavior and thought. Existing indi-
vidual difference constructs that measure awareness of
and adaptability to the social environment might be
used as a valid measure of cultural flexibility. Self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987), for example, has been
shown to have low but significant correlation with both
general cultural adjustment and interpersonal interac-
tion adjustment in that high self-monitors expressed
higher degrees of adjustment (Harrison, Chadwick, &
Scales, 1996). Sojourners low on cultural flexibility
might find they are unable to discern or emulate the
necessary cultural behaviors that would improve the
self–culture fit. They might also find the new culture
too difficult to understand, suffering from what
Shweder (1991) referred to as confusionism, a so-
journer’s honest assessment that cultures can be so di-
verse that even comprehending the framework of
another culture is impossible.

The period of adjustment or accommodation is one
in which the sojourner makes the person–environment
fit. These modifications also mark the beginning of
self-knowledge pursuit (Higgins, 1996) and self-con-
cept disturbances. Triandis (1975) referred to the cog-
nitive attempts to think like the locals as the process of
learning to make isomorphic attributions. His model of
cross-cultural training, the culture assimilator, is based
on the assumption that thinking like the locals hastens
cultural adaptation. Suggested here is that much of the
transition-related psychological stress described ear-
lier occurs during the adjustment process.

Distinct from adjustment, however, adaptation is
conceptualized as the successful endpoint of the ac-
commodation process. Sojourners have adapted to the
host culture if they use to some extent the behavioral
repertoire, beliefs, and attributional conventions of the
host culture to smoothly engage in social relationships,
understand and utilize the cultural rules of social and
professional life to appropriately lead, motivate, nego-
tiate, decide, and plan.

At the juncture in the sojourn experience in which
sojourners define themselves as reasonably well
adapted, researchers have suggested that they will ex-
perience less stress, less ambiguity, and more psycho-
logical comfort. Ward (1998), in describing the
development and use of an index of acculturation
(Ward’s terminology) of sojourners, reported data sup-
portive of this explanation. For example, among
Singaporeans resident in the United States, length of
stay was positively related to identification with host
nationals. Furthermore, host culture identification was
clearly associated with better sociocultural adaptation
among four sojourner groups (multinational aid work-
ers in Nepal, Singaporeans in the United States, Amer-
icans in Singapore, and Chinese in Singapore).

Adaptation is not only a continuous variable, but
also multivariate. Sojourners discover some scripts
more resistant to change or some behaviors more pli-
ant. The extant literature on sojourner experiences pro-
vides little insight into what the critical threshold is of
behavioral and cognitive changes necessary for so-
journers to feel that they have adapted successfully.
Similarly, we have scant empirical guidance to deter-
mine at what point members of the host culture per-
ceive the sojourners as no longer dissimilar from
themselves but rather as someone with whom interper-
sonal encounters are predictable and comfortable; that
is, we lack reliable other-ratings of cultural adaptation.
In one study, Lee and Larwood (1983) found that the
more Americans working in Korea adopted behaviors
and attitudes similar to the Koreans, the more they
were accepted.

Repatriation

The sojourn experience ends at some point,
abruptly for some, deliberately for others, but the na-
ture of the sojourn is to return to the home culture. Sim-
ilar to the emergence or salience of home culture
identity at the commencement of the sojourn, the
model suggests that as a result of cultural accommoda-
tion and adaptation, the self-concept is disturbed and
consequent changes in cultural identity become salient
on commencement of repatriation.
In a process parallel to culture identity awareness when sojourning, although now against the backdrop of the home culture, repatriates evaluate their personal values, cognitive maps, and behavioral repertoires against the prevailing cultural norms at home. For many repatriates, they no longer find a fit between their newly formed cultural identity and that of their home culture environment. For most repatriates, the affective response is overwhelmingly negative. Cognitively, responses included errors of social cognition and misattributions as to the cause of one’s negative affect state (Sussman, in press). Affectively, repatriates report feelings of “not fitting in” with former colleagues, friends, and family. Behaviorally, actions that were functional in the host country are blocked or opposed. Home cultural identity no longer matches and the sojourner is now a member of a new outgroup within the home country, that of repatriate.

The Relation Between Self-Concept Disturbances and Cultural Identity Change

This model proposes that as sojourners successfully adapt to the new culture by modifying behaviors and social thought, cultural identity changed as well. New cultural scripts in which sojourners are now engaged and that enabled them to fit more appropriately the host environment are not appropriate in the home culture. Those trivial and profound aspects that in combination create home culture identity are no longer actively engaged at the point in which we have adapted to a host culture. Acting Thai while in Thailand feels comfortable; thinking like a Spaniard while in Spain results in productive encounters. Cultural adaptation is functional and psychologically effective. However, thinking like a Spaniard or acting like a Thai is distressing and uncomfortable when returning home to Denver, Paris, or Tokyo. It is on repatriation that the cultural identity shift emerges and becomes salient. Sojourners experience the most severe level of stress at any time during the cultural transition. Baumeister (1986) indicated that individuals experiencing identity confusion can encounter a variety of social, emotional, and motivational deficits.

Note that an opposite prediction is derived from culture-learning theory, suggesting that successful overseas adaptation signals a sojourner’s success in learning cultural coping skills. These skills, in turn, would be transferred to the repatriation context resulting in an affectively positive experience. Empirical studies, however, do not support this model because repatriation has been shown to be overwhelmingly linked to negative affect. Even for sojourners who have experienced multiple cultural transitions, subsequent repatriation occurrences remain difficult or occasion-ally more distressing than the first repatriation (Suda, 1999; Sussman, in press).

The cultural identity model proposed here suggests that as a consequence of the interaction of identity salience, the adjustment process, and adaptation outcome and self-concept changes, four distinct types of identity shift might occur, the shift latent until repatriation makes it salient to the sojourner. These cultural identity shifts have been labeled as subtractive, additive, affirmative, or intercultural. Each category of cultural identity shift reflects unique combinations of self-concept disturbances. Each combination of disturbances also predicts differential psychological responses to repatriation.

Subtractive and additive identity shifts (see Figure 2) commence the transition cycle identically with an obscured cultural identity (indicated as shaded in the first box of the figure), which becomes salient as the sojourner in another culture begins (now indicated as an unshaded box). Home-culture and sojourn culture discrepancies are recognized and the adjustment process is triggered.

The two identity shifts types diverge at this point, distinguished from each other primarily by the individual differences variables of identity centrality and cultural flexibility. Sojourners for whom home-culture identity centrality is low and cultural flexibility is low to moderate (indicated in striped shading in the figure), a track begins that leads to a subtractive identity shift. Sojourners for whom home-cultural identity centrality is moderate and cultural flexibility is high, additive cultural identity becomes the repatriate response.

Subtractive and additive identity shifts both are associated with high sociocultural adaptation, and researchers predicted that sojourners will experience a more difficult repatriation than those with low adaptation. Suda (1999) found that the more integrated the sojourner was into the host culture, the more distressing the reentry and the more long-lasting the distress. Empirical results on gender differences in cultural transitions provide some tangential support as well. Although no published longitudinal studies exist comparing male and female sojourners during the entire transition cycle, with caution one can compare observations collected at different points in transition cycle. N. Adler (1987), for example, indicated that female sojourners adapt more successfully than do male sojourners during initial cultural transitions; several authors (Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990; Gama & Pedersen, 1977) reported that women indicated more difficult repatriations.

The model predicts further that as a consequence of high adaptation, both subtractive and additive identity shifters are associated with lower stability and clarity of the self-concept, which is conceptualized as greater fragmentation of the self-concept. These disturbances
of the self-concept (Campbell, 1990; Donahue et al., 1993) resulted in lower self-esteem, negative affective responses, and higher repatriation distress. For sojourners with initially high self-esteem, the unstable self-esteem would be associated with a tendency to experience anger, hostility, and adverse reactions (Kernis et al., 1989, 1992). With regard to gender differences, the model predicts that female sojourners will experience more self-concept disturbances and more subtractive and additive identity shifts than will men.

The subtractive identity shift (in the striped shaded box) results in repatriates feeling less comfortable with their home culture’s values and norms and less similar to their compatriots. Sussman (in press) noted that among a sample of U.S. business sojourners, repatriates who reported feeling less American (subtractive identity shift) experienced higher repatriation distress than those who reported little identity change. Japanese women repatriates who accompanied their husbands on an overseas assignment reported “difficulty in fitting into Japanese society” due to feeling “less Japanese” as the most difficult repatriation adjustment (Suda, 1999). Ward’s (1998) corroborative findings supported the subtractive shift as well: For U.S. sojourners in Singapore, American identification weakened over time.

An additive cultural identity shift would result in repatriates feeling more similar to their host culture, such that the repatriates’ cultural identity more closely resembles the host cultures values, norms, and behaviors. One outcome of an extreme form of this shift category found repatriates seeking opportunities to return to the host culture as soon and as often as possible. A milder variant of the additive shift was something I experienced on returning to New York following a yearlong sojourn in Japan, as I began insisting that visitors remove their shoes when entering my apartment, ate primarily in Japanese restaurants, and aided Japanese tourists in New York to practice the Japanese language.

Although both subtractive and additive identity shifters will experience similar negative affect, their behavioral consequences will vary. For the subtractive repatriate, response to the home collective might include seeking new ingroup members (in this situation, other repatriates), whereas perceiving other compatriots as less similar in culturally shaped values and behavior. At the extreme, the subtractive repatriates feel devoid of cultural identity. Park (1928) introduced the concept of the marginal man, which might describe the subtractive repatriate. In contrast, additive repatriates might seek opportunities to interact with members of the former host culture; participate or attend entertainment, sports, or culinary representations of the host culture; or continue study of the host culture language.

The model allows repatriates to adopt both types of identity shifts—subtractive and additive. Alatas (1972) described this psychological state as the “captive mind syndrome,” whereby a sojourner rejects the home culture identity and uncritically adopts the host identity. In both identity shift categories, interaction with the home-culture collective is minimized, exaggerating the isolation from the home culture and the perception of not fitting with conationals.

The third identity category of identity (see Figure 3), affirmative, can be described as one in which the home-culture identity is maintained and strengthened throughout the transition cycle. These sojourners also begin with an obscured cultural identity (indicated by
the shaded box in the figure) that becomes salient during the early stages of the cultural transition. In contrast to the subtractive and additive experience, affirmative shifters largely ignore the cultural discrepancies. This reaction, coupled with the two critical internal variables, high cultural centrality and low cultural flexibility, result in low adaptation to the host culture environment. Cultural self-concept consequentially will be highly stable and unambiguous, which in turn will result in a repatriation experience that is low in repatriation distress. For affirmative sojourners who neither adapted successfully overseas nor experienced an identity change, researchers predicted that repatriation comes as a welcome relief. Rather than feeling uncomfortable with a newly salient but changed identity, the model predicts that these sojourners, who might have been found congregating at the host country American club, would find on repatriation a heightened identification with home country nationals and positive affect: the grateful repatriate, in other words.

The intercultural or global identity shift (see Figure 4), a less common identity modification, enables repatriates to hold multiple cultural scripts simultaneously and draw on each as the working self-concept requires. The transition cycle commences for the sojourners with an awareness of cultural identity (unshaded box in

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**Figure 3.** Affirmative identity shift. Low adaptation does not disturb self-concept.

**Figure 4.** Intercultural identity shift. Initial awareness of cultural identity, high adaptation, and high self-concept complexity are associated with intercultural identity shift.
within the working self is determined by the core identity in thought and memory. The cultural identity which contains cultural self-conceptions currently changeable working self-concepts (Cinnirella, 1996), movement between countries and provide individuals with real-world setting in which to verify the intercultural groups and Web sites. Participating in international electronic discussion and reading material (e.g., books, newspapers), and activities (e.g., movies, sports, television programming) features, selecting a wide range of international entertainments. Important to note, as well, is that multiple cultural transition experiences are not sufficient to result in an intercultural identity. As indicated in the previous review, often multiple repatriation occurrences result in more distress rather than less. The model suggests that self-concept complexity and subsequent positive response to the return home is dependent on two features. First, prior to the commencement of the transition, the sojourner is actively aware of his or her cultural identity and its consequences; that is, they understand themselves as cultural beings. Second, during the adaptation and repatriation phases, the sojourner also is actively cognitively processing cultural aspects of the self-concept and is aware of changes in cultural identity. Physical movement home, then, is not coupled with an unexplained negative affect, as is the situation with additive and subtractive shifters. Rather, the intercultural identity shift evokes a positive affective response.

For sojourners who experience subtractive or additive identity shifts, negative affect experienced during both the sociocultural adaptation period and the repatriation period can be modulated through thoughtful preparation prior to transition. N. Adler (1981) and Sussman (1986) suggested that a critical mediating variable that acts to intensify repatriation distress, and one that distinguishes the affective response from those that are experienced during overseas transitions, is its unexpectedness. Repatriates appear to be unprepared for the abrupt salience of their self-concept changes, identity shifts, and the accompanying psychological distress.

In measuring cross-cultural adjustment, researchers have examined both the absolute discrepancy between expectation and experience (Hawes & Kealey, 1981; Searle & Ward, 1990; Weissman & Furnham, 1987) and the direction of the discrepancy (undermet, met, or overmet expectations and evaluation of the expectation–experience discrepancy; Black & Gregersen, 1990). Unexpectedness might account for a greater portion of the variance in explaining repatriation outcomes because it does not seem immediately obvious to sojourners that returning to one’s home country should be accompanied by cognitive or behavioral discomfort. Supporting this notion, Black (1992), in a sample of U.S. business repatriates, found that high levels of repatriate adjustment and job performance were predicated on accurate repatriation expectations. Rogers and Ward (1993) found among secondary students returning to New Zealand that when experiences were more difficult than expected, larger discrepancies were associated with psychological distress. However, results also revealed that realistic expectations were unrelated to psychological adjustment.

In a recent study using two author-designed assessment instruments (the Repatriation Preparedness Scale and the Repatriation Experience Assessment Scale), Sussman (in press) found that among U.S. business employees, repatriation preparedness (or the degree to which individuals expected repatriation to the United States to be psychologically distressful) predicted less severity of psychological and work adjustment.

In summary, the transition-identity theory suggests a model in which identity salience, cultural adaptation, and self-concept disturbances combine in unique ways to produce four types of cultural identity shifts:
sojourners’ return home. Furthermore, each shift predicts affective, behavioral, and cognitive personal functioning during the repatriation phase of the cultural transition cycle. Both the subtractive and additive identity shifts, either singly or in combination, will be accompanied by high repatriation distress. Sojourners will experience high levels of discomfort with the home culture, the high identification with the sojourn culture, or both. Sojourners who undergo affirmative identity shifts, by contrast, will experience low repatriation distress and a heightened home-culture identification. Behaviorally, affirmative repatriates will avoid or not seek intercultural situations. For those experiencing intercultural identity shifts, the accompanying affect will similarly be positive—that is, low repatriation distress. However, intercultural shifters will be drawn to situations and interpersonal experiences with significant intercultural or global content.

**Directions for Future Research**

Social psychology must attend not only to culture as it moves and mixes but to individuals, as cultural beings, as they move and mix between cultures; to the content, evaluation, and structure of the cultural self; and to the awareness of identity in a cultural collective. The proposed model suggests cultural identity as the prime mediator of personal functioning during cultural transitions and provides many opportunities for empirical verification at each point in the schemata. Chief among the research needs is psychometric that focus on the design and validation of measures of cultural identity. Although we find a preponderance of measures on ethnic identity, few scales are available that measure the dominant cultural identity of sojourners. An additional psychometric need is the design of more ecologically based methods to identify and measure behavioral correlates of cultural adaptation and identity change.

A second category of variables that needs closer attention relative to the model are those internal factors that affect cultural adaptation and self-concept disturbances. Individual difference variables might clarify our understanding of why some sojourners experience profound changes in cultural identity and others return from an overseas sojourn with little change in their cultural self-concept. Within the construct of cultural flexibility, measures of worldview, tolerance, and cultural sensitivity might prove to be relevant. Differences in independent and interdependent self-construal might yield some predictive value relative to cross-cultural adjustment. Cross (1995), for example, indicated a complex relationship regarding self-construal and adjustment. Among East Asian students, independent self-construal was positively related to direct coping strategies that predicted reduced stress levels; for U.S. students, self-construal was not predictive of stress. Clearly, additional research is indicated for this and other internal factors that might affect cultural transitions.

A third set of factors, more external in origin, might also influence the degree of cultural adaptation. For example, cultural accommodation and self-concept change might be affected by the perceived cultural distance between home and host culture. One might argue that the greater the cultural distance, the lower the adaptation and the more likely the sojourner will make an affirmative identity shift; conversely, the smaller the cultural distance between the home and host culture, the more likely sojourners will adapt and experience a subtractive or additive identity change.

A fourth set of research issues focuses on the intersection of lifespan changes and cultural transitions. The creation and maintenance of cultural identity are of increasing interest as the number of children temporarily living in other cultures is increasing (Lublin, 1999). Do the cultural transition patterns of adolescents and children differ from adults? One might speculate that the longer individuals are immersed in their home culture, the more pervasive and less malleable is the cultural identity. One would predict, therefore, that children and adolescents, due to their less well-formed cultural identity, experience greater cultural identity shifts during cultural transitions. This trend would be amplified in those countries in which adolescent home subcultures change more rapidly than adult home culture. Teenage repatriates would then be exposed to shifts both in cultural identity and in home culture.

A fifth set of research factors that requires additional investigations are those in which ecological-level cultural variation might affect adaptation levels. For example, cultures vary in their prescription of adherence to cultural scripts. Some cultures confer nationals with substantial latitude in following norms, values, and behaviors. Other cultures value strict observance of normative behaviors; deviance is punished. Pelto (1968) and Triandis (1994) referred to these cultures as loose or tight, respectively. Homogeneous, self-contained cultures are very tight and place high value on uncertainty avoidance through adherence to many cultural rules and societal laws (Hofstede, 1980). Examples of tight cultures are those of Japan, Iran, and traditional Greece. Heterogeneous cultures, conversely, have fewer rules, have more flexible normative standards, and are typically more tolerant of deviations from cultural norms. They often are located at the geographic intersection of major cultures (e.g., Thailand between India and China), are pluralistic (e.g., United States), or are sparsely populated.
Loose and tight cultures also might differ on clarity of cultural identity and expected level of adherence to identity and self-concept elements. For members of loose cultures, cultural identity might be neither clearly prescribed nor, as previously suggested, salient. The expectations of how members of the culture must act are vague. The cultural identity model proposed herein reflects loose cultures such as that in the United States where, among repatriates, little awareness exists of cultural identity and relatively low value is placed on maintaining an American identity.

For members of tight cultures, cultural identity and its elements are salient and clear. One would not expect cultural identity discovery on the part of tight culture sojourners, but rather a sustained cultural identity affirmation in the early phases of a cultural transition. Furthermore, as the expectations by the home culture are clear and deviation from the home culture identity and behaviors is not tolerated, the model would predict that repatriates to tight cultures would experience either affirmative or intercultural identity shifts rather than subtractive or additive shifts. Japan, for example, scores high on Hofstede’s (1980) uncertainty avoidance index and is prototypical of a tight cultural response to cultural transitions. To ensure less uncertainty and unpredictability in interpersonal relations, the transit home signals to sojourners the necessity to reshift one’s cultural focus and arrive home apparently unchanged vis-à-vis cultural identity (e.g., Japanese repatriates again behaving as Japanese). Sussman (1985) reported, in fact, that few Japanese corporate repatriates experienced repatriation distress. The occasional sojourners who did admit to additive shifts were covert in their behavioral display. One research participant described hiding his copy of *Newsweek* magazine within the covers of a Japanese magazine. Kidder (1992), likewise, examined returning Japanese students and described the cultural scripts or markers for being “real Japanese,” the standard against which repatriates would be judged.

Cultural variations also might account for patterns in the centrality of cultural identity within one’s self-concept. Researchers suggest that some cultures better prepare their members for the experience of being both an expatriate or a repatriate.

A third ecological variable to be considered is the openness of the host culture to sojourners. Despite low cultural identity and high cultural flexibility, a sojourner might find adaptation stymied without the cooperation, encouragement, or at a minimum, the lack of hostility communicated by host individuals.

A sixth and final domain in which more extensive research is required is that of preparation for cultural transitions. Cognitive and behavioral training in the area of cultural transitions can assist the hundreds of thousands of sojourners who experience a range of psychological distress, from minor annoyances to significant individual and family breakdowns. Perhaps the negative effects of cultural salience, adjustment, adaptation, identity shift, and repatriation could be attenuated and the intercultural resilience of possessing an intercultural identity be encouraged through cultural education and training.

**References**


