Culture Shock and Acculturation: A Personal Account of Theories in Motion

An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)

by

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Abstract
Culture shock is a phenomenon that is experienced throughout all populations across the world. It is characterized by a roller coaster of emotions and behaviors as individuals seek to adapt to a new environment, culture, and set of social cues and expectations. While this is most commonly defined as an adjustment period between one country and another, culture shock can also be experienced in events such as starting a new job or shopping in a different grocery store. Due to the subjective nature of culture shock, it is a particularly difficult phenomenon to study. There are many theories that attempt to encapsulate overarching themes of culture shock by organizing common emotions and behaviors into stages. I analyze Pedersen's five-stage theory of culture shock and compare my personal experiences studying abroad in Spain to the claims of this theory in order to shed more light on this ambiguous yet inevitable experience. Using my first hand accounts, I discuss strengths and weaknesses of this theory while hoping that this information be useful for prospective study abroad students and the general public alike.

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