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Intercultural Communication in the U.S. and Japan

Annelise Wilp

Honors Thesis

Western Michigan University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare two groups: Japanese students studying or who have studied at American universities, and Americans who are studying or have studied at Japanese universities. The inclusionary criteria were American students who had studied at a Japanese university and Japanese students who had studied at an American university. Exclusionary criteria were those who did not meet the criteria above. Prospective participants were invited to participate through Facebook and email. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face at the Bernhard Center at Western Michigan University, or by telephone. Prospective participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the risks and benefits of participating, and their confidentiality. After agreeing with these terms, the prospective participants signed the informed consent forms. Interviews were conducted in English with both American and Japanese participants with the same questions, and lasted between thirty to sixty minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Only the student researcher transcribed the interviews on a private computer and omitted the names of the participants. Once the transcriptions were complete, the recordings were erased. The student investigator searched for repetitiveness in the American and Japanese groups to see if there were common ideas that their group shared. This study focused specifically on American and Japanese students to compare responses of each group to provide helpful information to universities for future international students. This information will help American and Japanese universities understand the integration process of the international students from these groups and will be able to provide the resources to make future international students comfortable and successful during their experiences abroad.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As the student investigator was researching topics pertaining to Japanese students studying in the United States and American students studying in Japan, she began to notice two main themes surfacing throughout the publications. The stark differences of individualism and collectivism proved to be a reoccurring phenomenon between both groups. Both groups also experienced difficulties in language learning as well as intercultural communication. While these two themes seemed to be the most salient throughout the student investigator's research, more themes emerged during the interviews. These topics helped the student researcher format the interviews to find more information about these themes.

In a survey conducted by Evans and Imai (2011) at Aichi Shukutoku University in Japan, out of the 101 participants, there were 29 comments about superiority, 13 about attractiveness, and 23 about dynamism in relation to English in the U.S., 19 positive (correct, standard) and 10 negative (casual, slang) traits. U.S. English was also referred to as a default (i.e. English means the U.S., and Americans are native speakers of English). This reveals some stereotypes Japanese students may have had about the U.S., and these traits mold their thinking before they left Japan. Thus, these Japanese students interviewed have had pre-conceived notions about the U.S. in terms of superiority, attractiveness, and dynamism. Since there were 19 positive remarks about U.S. English, and only 10 negative, the Japanese students interviewed have an overall positive perception of American English.

Hamaguchi (1985) writes in *Communication in Japan and the United States* that Americans have self-images and autonomy that cannot be weakened by others' opinions. The Japanese, on the other hand, believe in what life gives them and the people they are dependent on. They believe that their self-worth is strongly based on what they are dependent on. They are

“mutually dependent” rather than independent. Since this research dates back to the late seventies and early eighties, the student investigator searched for these attitudes during the interviews to see if they persisted in 2017.

In a 2016 study conducted by Côté, Mizokami, Roberts, & Nakama, it was concluded that individualistic Americans experience a more difficult transition into adulthood compared to the collectivistic Japanese, who are eased into adulthood by their communities much earlier than Americans. Ego strength and purpose in life are more important to Japanese students. Japanese students do not value internal locus of control as much as American students do in a patriarchal society. Strong egos in Japan may be tied to the rising “individual collectivism” phenomenon.

Singelis (1995) defines horizontal collectivism as “a cultural pattern in which the individual views the self as part of an in-group...to the extent that the self is merged with others of the in-group, all of whom are very similar to each other” (p. 244) Vertical collectivism is identified by marked differences among members as well as following group norms and sacrificing oneself for the in-group. Inequality is acceptable among group members. In horizontal individualism, self-importance and independence are important, but one is in the same status as others. An example is the USA slamming celebrities to bring down their status (Feather, 1992; Duan, 1996). Distrust and distaste for hierarchies while still being exclusive is another trait of horizontal individualists. Horizontal individualists seek equality and freedom and avoid comparing themselves to others. Vertical Individualism is characterized by having your own autonomy and see yourself as an individual different from others. Differences in authority are based on status, low equality, high freedom, and a market democracy (Singelis et. al., 1995), while social relations are characterized by competition and achievement.

According to McCann, R. and Honeycutt, J. (2010), Americans equally valued horizontal individualism and horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism and vertical individualism were less preferable. The horizontal/vertical distinction was particularly salient for Americans, while individualism-collectivism distinction was salient among the Japanese. U.S. universities tend to be more competitive than Japanese universities. The Japanese student sample preferred horizontal collectivism the most, and vertical individualism the least. In some cases, the Japanese see themselves as horizontally oriented and vertically oriented while Americans had the most horizontal individualism.

U.S. students associate success with self-esteem more than failure, demonstrating self-enhancing tendencies, whereas the Japanese students did not show any signs of self-enhancement, but exhibited self-criticism (Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., Matsumoto, H., & Norasakkunkit, V., 1997). Rather than success, the Japanese associated failure more with their self-esteem. Japanese people are highly reflective on their actions and compare them to their society's standards, a self-improvement phenomenon called *hansei* (Lewis, 1995). Japanese students studying in the United States were less self-critical than those in studying in Japan, and Japanese students willing to study in the United States proved to be more independent, less interdependent, or both than those not willing to study in the United States. For the Japanese, self-esteem is not as associated with success as it is for Americans.

Since collectivism and individualism are practically polar opposites, coming from an individualistic culture and going to a collectivistic one, or vice versa, can prove to be a strong culture shock for the student. Students may struggle to adapt and understand their environments in this new cultural mindset, which may result in a negative exchange experience for the student.

With this prior knowledge, the student investigator was able to identify mentions of collectivism and individualism in the interviews, and frequently.

In a study conducted by Matsumoto, H. (2007), out of 138 American students studying Japanese surveyed, thirty-four reported living with a non-English speaking family in Japan proved most helpful in learning Japanese. Twenty-two reported communicating with native Japanese speakers as most beneficial to developing their Japanese. Twenty-eight students reported not making progress as a negative peak experience, twenty reported the memorization of Kanji was overwhelming, and eighteen reported not using Japanese enough outside the classroom. These numbers indicate that American students studying in Japan crave interaction with native speakers to improve their fluency, and strive to improve their language skills while in Japan.

Chiba, Matsuura, and Yamamoto (1995) concluded that in general, Japanese college students valued British and American English more than Japanese English. McKenzie (2008, 2010) found that Japanese students rated American and British English high for power and “heavily accented” Japanese English high for solidarity. This could mean that Japanese students are motivated to come to the United States so that their English is less accented, and therefore will be more respected.

A study comparing language learners in foreign-language housing and those in classroom-only environments concluded that students in foreign language housing in Japan spent an average of 3.5 hours daily speaking Japanese, compared to the classroom-only average of 1.88 hours daily. Foreign language housing allows the use of the target language not only in social interactions, but in other outlets such as the Internet. Students in foreign language housing

demonstrate more confidence in the target language than classroom-only students (Martinsen, R. A., Baker, W., Bown, J., & Johnson, C. 2011).

Language learning is one of the main factors for students choosing to study abroad. Since students want to improve their language, maybe even achieve fluency, they are very driven to practice and excel in the target language. Not speaking the language enough or not doing well in language classes can have a very negative effect on students, making them feel like they are failing in their exchange experience.

In a study by Sato and Hodge (2015), eight Japanese exchange students studying in America reported academic frustration in ESL courses, envy of other students academically and socially, and academic transition challenges (Sato, T. & Hodge, S.R. 2015). This transition included feeling vulnerable in a new country, marginalized, and lonely. The U.S. is an individualistic culture, so this could have been a shock to these students from a collectivistic culture and may have triggered isolation. The pressure of the TOEFL for ESL students produced competition for Japanese students and jealousy of those who have passed. In Japan, there is immense pressure to pass standardized tests, so the Japanese have this ingrained before coming to the United States.

According to Sato and Hodge's research, Americans studying in Japan and Japanese people studying in the U.S. experience cultural differences in individualism and collectivism, as well as language learning processes and barriers. Language and culture are key components of the exchange student experience, and the student investigator utilized these themes in creating the interview protocol to delve deeper into these subjects.

METHODOLOGY

This study was approved by Western Michigan University's HSIRB on June 9, 2017 (Appendix C). The approval process consisted of submitting an application for initial review, a template for protocol outline, appendices, and a template for the informed consent form. One round of revisions were made before approval. Subjects were recruited on Facebook through a post published in a group titled "WMU Japan Club", a group consisting of approximately 400 American and Japanese students. Potential participants showed interest by privately messaging the student investigator through Facebook Messenger. The interviews were scheduled with the participants, and emailed them the informed consent forms. Eighteen subjects – ten American and eight Japanese - were recruited for this study. Prospective participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the risks and benefits of participating, and confidentiality of personal information. This information was sent through email and presented once again at the interview. After agreeing with these terms, the prospective participants signed the informed consent forms at the interview site. Participants received a copy to sign and a copy to keep. Participants met the student researcher at the Bernhard Center. Once the informed consent was signed, the interview began. The student investigator asked permission to audio record. The interview lasted approximately thirty to sixty minutes, and consisted of demographic and open-ended questions in English. The same protocol was used for each participant. Once the interview finished, the student investigator stopped recording and thanked the participant for taking the time to participate. Audio recordings were transcribed by the student investigator. Being saved as "American Male 1" or "Japanese Female 1", for example, on the student investigator's private computer differentiated American and Japanese students while keeping their confidentiality. After transcription, the recordings were erased, and the student investigator used abbreviations

such as “AM 1” for American Male 1 or “JF 2” for Japanese Female 2 to differentiate the responses. The student investigator then began looking for repetition between and among groups interviewed. The student investigator then began to form themes about the results.

RESULTS

There were several themes that persisted throughout this study. The student investigator was able to identify these themes by analyzing transcripts several times and finding reoccurring topics among the transcripts. As the reoccurrences developed into themes, the student investigator organized the themes and quotes into a document. Participants had been questioned about the stereotypes they had about the country they studied in, as well as stereotypes about their own cultures. The list on the next page presents the themes within the two groups as well as between the two groups.

Themes among American students in Japan	Themes between both groups	Themes among Japanese students in the U.S.
Sexism	College being in Japan	Difficulty speaking and listening
Indirectness	Classroom etiquette	Housing
Being stared at or avoided	Food	Discrimination
Difficulty of doing simple tasks	Transportation	Americans being social
Learning pace and Kanji	Meeting people with experience before departure	Meeting other foreigners in the U.S.
Not being able to express oneself	Self-teaching	
Student and professor relationships	Cultural acceptance	
Treatment of foreigners	Conformity	
Foreigner classes		
Fashion		

Stereotypes about Americans

One Japanese male and one American female reported Americans being seen as aggressive. In a survey conducted by Evans and Imai (2011) at Aichi Shukutoku University in Japan, out of the 101 participants, there were 29 comments about Americans regarding themselves as superior, which could also lead to aggressive attitudes.

Two American males in the current survey claimed that Americans are stereotyped to drink a lot in Japan. One Japanese male remembered an initial culture shock in America, which happened to be alcohol-related:

First culture shock is, driving car with alcohol. I went to a Japanese restaurant with an American, and we ate sushi and Japanese food. And he ordered beer. And he suggested, "What would you like to drink?" And he ordered beer. I was confused. He was driving, but he ordered.

Two American females and one American male reported Americans being seen as loud and mean in Japan. One American male reported a "rock star" stereotype and one American female reported "a Hollywood view of Americans". Three American males reported that the perception of America is heavily influenced by movies and music, and a Japanese female mentioned that she already knew about American culture through movies. This mass-media perspective stems from the economic imperative and the exporting of American culture, and is an example of low or popular culture, which is cultural experiences available to the common masses (Martin & Nakayama, 2013, p. 362).

Two Japanese females stereotyped America as big and multicultural. Some Americans were in Japan during election season, and were questioned about it during their time abroad. Three American females shared some interactions in Japan concerning the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election.

AF 1: They seemed like they thought we were kind of nice, at the time we were going through the election. There were a lot of concerns about that, like, "Oh, the American people wouldn't vote for Trump, would they?"

AF 2: Going during the presidential election, they thought Americans were stupid. And they all assumed that everyone liked Trump, which was surprising to me because obviously that's not true. I always got questions directed at me like, "So why do you support Trump?" And I'm like, "I never said that, why do you assume that?" And you'd have to say why you don't, but they still kind of look at you with this kind of look like, "I think you do."

AF 4: They're really interested in American culture, and now they don't like Trump, of course. I've only talked to one person that liked Trump in Japan, and he was from China, so...yeah, they don't like Trump. I think their ideas of Americans are that we're stupid now for voting. As soon as I told people I was from America, they were like, "Do you like Trump? Did you vote for Trump?" That's such an awkward thing to kind of ask me when you first meet me.

In 2017, President Trump dominated the world media coverage of the United States. It's no wonder that people in Japan automatically tie Americans to the Trump presidency and assume every American favors him.

Stereotypes about Japanese

One Japanese male, one Japanese female, and one American female reported that Americans see the Japanese as hardworking. One American female and two American males claimed that they thought that Japan was very strict. One American female and one Japanese male reported that politeness was a stereotype of Japan. One American female mentioned that Japan is stereotypically collectivist. One Japanese female said that Japanese people are seen as shy. Two Americans and one Japanese male reported that older people have a negative view of Japan due to history. One Japanese male, one Japanese female, and one American male reported

Americans associate technology with Japan. In fact, an American male and an American female were surprised by the technology in Japan:

AM 2: I thought there would be a bit more technology used in the home than there was, considering Japan's level of tech-savyness, I was surprised how in regular people's homes, they were stingy using it, or what they had was pretty outdated.

AF 5: First semester, all the registration was done by paper. So we had to write down every class we were taking and turn that in. Second semester they finally switched to an electronic system, but because we were there first semester we were still using paper. The new students got to use the electronic system. I don't know about the domestic students, but with the international students they were pretty behind tech-wise.

This American had the impression that Japan was more "tech-savvy" than it really was, most likely due to the media making Japan appear as a mass-manufacturer giant.

Cross-cultural experiences: Themes among Americans in Japan

Topics that persisted among the American students in Japan were sexism, indirectness, getting stared at or avoided, difficulty performing simple tasks, Kanji and learning pace, experiences with university offices in Japan, extracurricular clubs, trouble expressing oneself, student and professor relationships, and conformity.

Sexism in Japan

Two Americans reported cases of sexism in Japan. An American male discussed women being submissive and men taking control in Japan.

The other thing is that you can very clearly see that there's a lot of sexism in Japan. It's very evident anywhere. Women are not expected to say no for a lot of things. If what they mean is "no", they won't necessarily say "no". And sometimes things that they're

supposed to say no to, even if they mean yes they'll still say no, which is a really weird thing. It seems like in groups, guys would almost always insist on taking charge over the rest of the group, even if they were less knowledgeable about the topic or something.

An American female talked about experiencing sexism firsthand in Japan. She reported being ignored in the presence of a male.

Especially if I'm with a Japanese guy, and it's me and him, or if I'm with a Japanese person, we are obviously together, people would completely not stare at me. They'll avoid eye contact with me. On the bus, I'll be sitting there, and people will be staring at me, and immediately my friend will get on the bus, cause we were going to the same place but different stops, and he would be like "Hey, how are you?" and he would sit next to me, and everyone would immediately leave me alone. So that was kind of shocking, I wasn't expecting that. With my Japanese girlfriends, that didn't happen as much, it was way more apparent when I was with a male. People would ignore me to the max. I'd go to a restaurant with a guy friend or something, and then they would only talk to him. They would completely ignore me. They would take my order. It was ignored to be ignored, if that makes sense. That made me uncomfortable. I was like, excuse me, you obviously saw me speaking Japanese to this guy, you know I can talk. It just makes me feel like I'm in the 1950s, where everyone has to hold the door or hold my hand. This is my friend. There's nothing like that, there's no romance. It was super intense, the sexism.

From these accounts, it seems that sexism was most apparent in groups consisting of males and females. These students seemed to be in what Martin & Nakayama (2013) called the Resistance and Separatism stage of Minority Identity Development, which is usually triggered by negative events and results in blanket statements of a group's values and attitudes, and the

realization that not all dominant values are beneficial to minorities. Since these Americans had experienced sexism in Japan, they generalized Japanese society to be sexist as a whole.

Indirectness in Japan

The United States is a low context culture, which means that we express what we want to say in words most of the time (Martin & Nakayama, 2013, p. 233). Japan, on the other hand, is a high context culture, which heavily relies on gestures and subtle innuendos (Martin & Nakayama, 2013, p. 233). For this reason, two of the Americans expressed their struggle with this new type of culture. An American male expressed his difficulty with this by discussing an incident at his job in Japan as an English instructor.

Later on, I think the much bigger culture shock was maybe two things. The first was that people can be very indirect with you to a shocking degree. My first job that I went to, when I came in and I saw everybody was wearing jeans, and so I thought, “oh, okay, on my first day I should come in and wear jeans.” When I got there, my boss said in Japanese, “oh, those jeans really suit you.” And maybe this is something more region-specific, in Kansai where they tend to be more indirect. What that really means is, “you are not supposed to wear jeans, don't do that again tomorrow.” So I kept it up for three days, and by the third day he took me aside and was like, “What the hell? Why are you still coming here in jeans?”

Another American male recounted on the subtle rules of train etiquette:

I guess my biggest one was not passive-aggressiveness, but learning the unspoken things about society. Me, I was trying to do the opposite of what people normally do, but it made sense in my head so I didn't see it in their perspective. For example, if I'm hungry and I have a two-hour train ride, I'll just buy something even on the train and throw it

away when I get off. But I guess in Japan, there's more of an unspoken social rule that it's rude to do that. Just being different from America, I guess.

An American female recounted on wearing an inappropriate shirt to class.

I wore a shirt to class one day that was kind of low-cut, and my teacher was like, "aren't you cold?" They don't really call you out, they say little subtle things, they're not completely dissing you, but they're kind of dissing you. In Japan, everything is subtle, you don't just straight forward say something, you kind of beat around the bush and imply.

The lack of confrontation in Japan proved to be troublesome for these Americans coming from a low context culture.

Getting stared at or avoided in Japan

Three American females and three American males reported getting stared at or being avoided in Japan.

AM 1: One thing was that when you go to a smaller town, if you're a foreigner, people will really stare you out, which is absolutely true.

AF 3: Of course people stared at me all the time, I had blond hair, I'm white, I don't look Asian at all. They're going to stare at me, and I don't care.

AF 4: I was so embarrassed, because I already get stared at to begin with; I'm foreign, blond hair, blue eyes, and everybody's always like, "wow".

AM 4: There are definitely people who will just stare and talk about you, not necessarily bad things, but they will point out the fact that you're the only foreigner there.

One American female and one American male reported being avoided on trains specifically.

AF 1: In public, it just depends on the person, one of the things is on trains, just for some reason a lot of Japanese people just won't sit with you. You'll have a whole bench all to yourself. A whole row. Everyone else will just stand, and they'll see you're a foreigner and are just like, no... Of course, there's those annoyances every once and a while it gets irritating, people staring at you.

AM 5: I would be sitting on the train, and there would be two spots open next to me, and people would just refuse to sit next to me for the whole two-hour train ride. There are old women and old men who want to sit, but they won't sit next to me. Another time, there was a completely empty train and there was a guy sitting opposite of me, so when I got on the train and sat opposite of him, he got up and walked to a different car and sat down. Being a white male in America, I don't really see any of that, I'm like the norm. So that was really eye-opening, because now I understand what minorities here might feel like. They would avoid me in public too, at Keio the Japanese would avoid us like the plague. They have nothing to do with us because we're different. Not all, but the majority.

These American students were used to blending in in the United States, which is a very diverse country. Sticking out or being avoided for being foreigner was definitely a new and sometimes uncomfortable experience for these Americans in Japan.

Difficulty performing simple tasks

One American male and one American female reminisced on navigating government establishments, specifically the post office.

AM 1: There's a lot of comfort living in a society that speaks your native language, and so just to be able to do the simplest of tasks, like mailing a letter. Here, that's a two-

minute task. In Japan, that's an hour of research into the vocabulary. I have to find the right post office that can handle what I need.

AF 3: Maybe not the doctor's office, but the post office where I'm at, the ward office, and doing government stuff, insurance stuff. I get really nervous, because of course there's paperwork and other things, so that would make it really difficult for me. I would nerdily script out kind of what I wanted to say, make sure I knew what words and verbs to use, then I get there and stage fright.

These American students thought that something as simple as sending mail wouldn't be a problem in Japan. But like any other country, Japan has a different system that foreigners might struggle to understand.

Kanji and learning pace in Japan

In Matsumoto's 2007 study, 20 out of the 138 Americans surveyed reported the overwhelming memorization of Kanji as a negative peak experience in Japan (Matsumoto, 2007). Two American males and one American female in my particular study mentioned Kanji (Chinese characters) as a key part of their curriculum. One American male discussed the curriculum at two universities in Japan, and the effect it had on his learning.

AM 1: Depending on where you go and which university, it seems like the consensus is that they don't prepare you very well for Kanji. Where I went, we had class five days a week, and that meant that we would learn six to eight Kanji a week, which is not fast enough. Compared to JCMU, where we were required to know how to read and write fifty a week. That's an adequate pace if all you're doing is studying Japanese. If you don't keep up with it yourself, you won't probably ever learn it.

Two American females and one American male discussed being at a disadvantage to other students due to a slower learning pace in the U.S.

AF 1: We go at a lot quicker pace in Japan versus studying here. Here we have a month per chapter or something, in Japan it was a new thing every week. You go really, really quick. So, as far as learning in Japan, it was hard to keep up with the vocab sometimes, because you just get this lesson and you don't really get to utilize any of the vocabulary, so it doesn't really stick, and then you're onto the next. So, the pace could be a little difficult. The only real negative when it came to my studies was that my particular university didn't teach us Kanji as the curriculum, so that hindered me a bit in comparison to students from other schools.

AF 4: The Japanese program (here) is so slow. I've been studying it for four years now, but when I went there I was in the third level. This is ridiculous. I had two friends from Malaysia that were only studying it for a year, and they were already in regular Japanese classes as international students.

AM 4: What I came to find out is the 1000, 1010, 2000, and 2010, all of those classes were covered in one semester in Japan versus the 3000, 3010, and further on were covered in the next semester. So we literally did three years of Western's work in one year. So that's why I really felt like it was hard to keep up, because we learned at such a slower pace here than what they expected.

Another American male reported how Kanji in different regions affected his understanding, and an American female said she struggled navigating with Kanji.

AM 3: In Tokyo I got used to certain Kanji that I hadn't learned yet, but recognized in different parts of the city. So when you travel outside of that, you are completely lost.

AF 5: After a couple months I did pick up on a lot of it just from reading street signs, but it was still a constant struggle because most of the time I wouldn't know the reading of the Kanji. I can point at things and know what it means in English, and I know that's the way we're supposed to be going, but I have no idea where we are right now because I can't read the street signs.

It can be inferred that Kanji is an essential part of learning Japanese, and foreigners have to learn as many characters as possible in order to keep up with the language and communicate effectively in Japan. Japan has a more fast-paced curriculum, but is selective in what to put into that specific curriculum.

Experiences with university offices

One American male and one American female praised Rikkyo University for its helpfulness:

AM 3: Rikkyo was incredibly helpful. Any issue you had, you just walked in the office, asked them about it, and found out if they could help you. If they couldn't help you, they would find out who could. So was super easy.

AF 1: The international office, everyone there was really, really polite. And they knew all of us by name, which I thought was crazy, they're getting new students all the time.

Before you get there, they just memorized your picture and they already know who you are. So that was really cool and really welcoming. Every time they see you on campus they say, "oh hey, come to this office and do this." So that was really cool.

An American female and an American male, on the other hand, didn't have nice things to say about the services at their Japanese universities.

AF 4: In the beginning, I felt kind of iffy towards them because I got strep throat during my second week of classes. And Rikkyo has a list of sicknesses that qualify for missing school, and strep throat wasn't on there, because I guess strep throat is super uncommon in Japan. I didn't know what to do, so I had a lot of absences because of that.

AM 5: I disliked Keio overall, they weren't supportive of anything I did. They refused to advertise my fashion show that I had spent so much money on, and maybe three people from Keio showed up.

It seems that the experience with offices at different universities in Japan varied among American students. Certain experiences, such as staff being friendly or not getting the help they needed, seemed to form their perceptions of those offices as a whole.

Extracurricular clubs in Japan

One American female and one American male mentioned that joining a club helped them integrate into their Japanese university.

AF 4: They had these circles, which are pretty much like Japan club, when all the international students eat lunch with the Japanese students, and go on trips together. I did that sometimes, but it was with international students as well.

AM 3: When I joined the volleyball club, everyone was super friendly. It was a little bit of a barrier the first few weeks, just because of language, but I got used to certain more frequently used words and phrases.

Extracurricular activities seemed to be a rewarding experience for these two students in Japan.

Trouble expressing oneself in Japan

According to a 2007 study conducted by Matsumoto, out of 138 American college students studying Japanese surveyed at five different schools, 18 reported not using Japanese outside the classroom as a negative peak experience in Japan. Americans, being from a low context, expressive, and opinionated society, may find some difficulty in a high context society such as Japan. One American male and two American females expressed their desires to have deep and meaningful interactions with Japanese people, without success.

AM 1: Something I wish that I had more access to was when you have to speak a different language and you're not totally proficient with it, especially in a society where sarcasm doesn't go very well, it's hard to keep a flowing conversation sometimes. In English, obviously easier, and if you talk to someone whose native language is English then you talk to them in an easier way where it's easier to show your personality more. Where as you're restricted with the vocabulary that you know, grammar, it's much harder, and so you think you revert to a personality that's easier to express in another language. And so you have a separate way of speaking in one language and another.

AF 1: In terms of communicating, it was mostly just trying to have a detailed conversation, because my Japanese level I would consider to be elementary. So, if I wanted to have an in-depth, meaningful conversation, I couldn't do that. So, as far as communicating it would feel kind of shallow, you couldn't take a friendship to the next level aside from "Oh, your outfit looks nice" or "How are you today?" You couldn't really, really get to know someone. I got a lot closer to other students who were on exchange than I did with my Japanese student friends, especially with the language

barrier and the social differences. I had a lot of times where I was like, “would people actually care?” kind of feeling.

AF 4: My first few months I tried to integrate into a Japanese group, but I still felt like an outcast and awkward. I would try to use Japanese with them, and then I don’t understand one word, and then they switch to English again.

In these cases, these students felt more comfortable with those who spoke English, and were able to have stronger bonds with those students. These students were most likely in the conformity stage of Minority Identity Development, (Martin & Nakayama, 2013, p. 180), which involves a desire for assimilation and negative attitudes towards themselves and others until an experience makes them question the dominant culture’s attitudes. Language barriers as well as culture differences seemed to prevent these Americans from having close relationships with Japanese people.

The Similarity Principle suggests that individuals tend to be attracted to people they perceive to be similar to themselves (Martin & Nakayama, 2013, p. 398). This could explain why some of the Americans felt more comfortable with other English speakers in Japan. However, English speakers isolating themselves could prevent cultural immersion with Japanese people.

Student and professor relationships in Japan

One American female and one American male expressed the cultural differences of student and professor relationships in Japan, specifically professors drinking with their students.

AF 1: In Japan, you’re allowed to go drinking with your professors and hang out and be more adult, so outside of actually teaching, if you see your teacher out or on campus it feels a lot more relaxed than a professor here, per se. So that was nice.

AM 2: The lines are a little different there, in terms of ways you can spend time with professors. For example, one of my professors over there every year has a giant Halloween party for all of the students at the school. So, everyone's getting really drunk doing crazy things with the professors and the professor's kids are there. It was a little weird, but it's not frowned upon in the same way. It's similar how you get drunk with your boss.

In the United States, students find it inappropriate to participate in alcohol-related activities with their professors. It is for this reason that these American participants found this topic worth bringing up as a big culture difference.

Treatment of foreigners in Japan

Three American females and one American male reported being treated differently in Japan because they were foreigners. One American male discussed his personal experience of dating in Japan.

AM 1: I liked anywhere where you're an extreme minority where there's not a negative perception of that minority in that society, you can get away with a lot of stuff. You can do anything in Japan. You can wear anything, do anything to your hair, do just about anything. If it's weird, people will be like, "oh, it's just a foreigner thing." It's for a different reason than you would hope. There's a surprising amount of acceptance, but sort of at a cost. I think being a foreigner, it's not all bad but it's not all good. People will definitely treat you differently, again, it can be a good thing but also it's bad. Maybe on the bad side, it was kind of cool to have foreigner friends. People would drag me to places. There was one girl I dated who insisted on always hanging out with her friends, she would bring me along and it would be a different group of friends every time.

Three American females reported Japanese people being shy to them because they were foreigners.

AF 1: A lot of them would be kind of shy, just because they are self-conscious about their own English ability. Some of my friends would be like, "oh, I wanted to talk with you a long time ago, but you seemed really cool so I felt kind of standoffish." So really shy.

AF 2: The worst situation would be that they assume that you won't understand something, they might treat you more stupid than you want to be treated. Even then, that's not them trying to be mean, it's them trying to help you and make it easier for you.

AF 3: Sometimes people put on a face, and they treat you a certain way because you're a foreigner. But once they get comfortable with you and they realize you can speak with them and you're totally fine and capable of handling yourself, it feels like a new world, and they treat you like they treat their friends, and you see how they treat each other.

An American female reported an incident when the police approached her for speaking English.

AF 1: We had one situation where we were at a park just talking, and the police came and said, "You're using too much English, you're making people nervous. You have to leave."

An American male recounted on his experience as a black foreigner in Japan:

AM 4: Me being one of the few black people in my program and in Japan, it was very different to experience how people would react to me versus other foreigners. It wasn't bad, it was just interesting because I grew up in Detroit, so everyone is used to black people being around, so they aren't surprised when they meet me. But in Japan, there are a lot more people who said I was the first black person they ever met. So, they have a lot

of questions or stereotypes that they ask me about. Just speaking from that side of me was a new experience because I don't really do that in America. One thing I didn't want to get caught up on in Japan is that it's fun to be different, people admire you for being different, but I feel like some people maybe abuse that. I wanted to make sure that that wasn't me.

Another American male remembered being discriminated in Japan:

AM 5: I would get kicked out of bars because I was a foreigner. I would try to go into bars and they would say no, or charge me more than Japanese people. There's a lot of xenophobia in that country, I mean there's xenophobia here, but I feel like there they can get away with being prejudiced.

From discrimination to being treated differently in friend groups, these American students had to accommodate to being different in Japan, something they are not used to in their own country.

Kindness in Japan

Two American females reported that they received kind treatment in Japan.

AF 2: People are very kind, almost unfairly. I don't think foreigners necessarily deserve an innate kindness towards them, but people are more than kind.

AF 5: Overall, it's a pretty friendly society, they do tend to stay reserved and keep to themselves, but if you need help or need directions, they're more than willing to help with that.

Kindness went a long way for these American females in Japan and left them with a lasting impression of Japanese society.

Foreigner classes in Japan

Two American females and one American male reported their classes for foreigners and classes taught by foreigners were more difficult.

AF 1: My business teachers were all other foreigners, like America or Australia and stuff. Their teaching and classroom etiquette was a lot more comparable to how it would be here. They kind of make you participate in the language classes. Here, you can volunteer, but there's it's forced. You have to be more appropriate.

AF 2: The college experience I had in Japan was very different than the normal classes in the Japanese college. There were only foreigners in my classes I attended and the teachers changed their teaching methods based on that. The classes were difficult and strict compared to those in my American college.

AM 1: There were some international classes that, like I said, Doshisha had a reputation for being harder because they were taught by either European or American professors who had higher expectations of university students.

One American female reported a difference between her Japanese and English classes in Japan:

But the classroom etiquette was really westernized. In the Japanese classes, it was really formal like regular Japanese classes, where you had to ask to use the bathroom, or had a certain number of absences you couldn't miss. So it was really formal, as opposed to here where we're college students and adults, and we can get up and do what we want. It reminded me of high school because when we would ask our Japanese professors to use the bathroom, they would say, "Why didn't use it before/after class?" But, I need to go to the bathroom, it's not my fault.

These American students noticed the different classroom etiquette in foreigner classes compared to regular Japanese classes taught by Japanese professors in terms of rules and coursework.

Fashion in Japan

One American female reported getting stares for what she wearing in different parts of Japan:

I would get stared at occasionally if I wore tank tops or something. In touristy areas you would think they would be more used to that, but I would walk around in a tank top and short-shorts and everyone's like, "Who's that American girl? Why is she dressed like that?"

Another American female mentioned fashion differences in Japan, and experiencing reverse culture shock upon her return to the U.S.

For me mostly, it was how people dressed. Fashionable all the time, all day. Girls are in heels, perfect makeup, go to school and they're completely dressed up. It's a different kind of conservative, especially for women. Here, it's okay to show more shoulder and cleavage than it is legs. In Japan, you can wear really short sweater dresses and stuff like that, but they never show off their chests. So when I came back here, I showed more leg, and I got dirty looks. So the fashion was really different.

This student experienced an example of the W-curve model, which is when the phases of cultural adaptation – anticipation, culture shock, and adjustment – happens twice (Martin & Nakayama, 2013, p. 341). She was surprised by the fashion in Japan and learned what was acceptable and what was not. Since she was over there for a year, she became used to this

fashion, and wore it in the U.S., experiencing the culture shock once again. So, upon her return, she had to readjust her fashion in American society.

Cross-cultural experiences: Themes among Japanese students in the United States

Themes that persisted in the Japanese student interviews were difficulty speaking and listening in English, housing in the U.S., discrimination in the U.S., meeting other international students in the U.S.

Difficulty speaking and listening in English

All eight of the Japanese students interviewed expressed difficulty with speaking and listening in English. Three Japanese females reported not learning enough speaking and listening while learning English in Japan.

JF 1: Speaking. When I learned in Japan, I'm learning English in Japan, just grammar and reading, and a little listening. Not speaking, it was not important.

JF 2: Japanese English education has reading and writing. So I didn't have opportunity to talk with English speakers in Japan, so every day I can't say what I want to say.

JF 3: For me especially, speaking. There is such a big difference between American grammar and Japanese grammar, even pronunciation. So even when I came here, I was always trying to communicate with any American people. It was super hard for me because they didn't understand what I was saying. Because of my pronunciation, my English is not good. I just only learned about American culture, so even if I was learning English communication or something like that, it was still super difficult because the professor was Japanese. Their first language is Japanese, so how can I know the true language?

Another Japanese female described her experience with using formal English:

Since I've come here, I've spoken English with many people, they said that my English is sometimes too formal, because I studied English by using textbooks and reference books, so sometimes it's not usual. It's correct, but not suitable to the situation. They said it was like I was speaking to older people. So sometimes in I am confused. I need to learn more vocabulary, I am weak with vocabulary, many times I have to consult my dictionary; it is very frustrating.

The emphasis on reading and writing and lack of speaking and listening exercises made these students feel at a disadvantage in terms of speaking and listening to native English speakers.

Housing in the U.S.

One Japanese male and two Japanese females mentioned their housing situations in the U.S. The Japanese male reported an enjoyable experience with his host family.

JM 2: I stayed with a local family for one month. There was a program offered by my college in Japan. That was really fun, I stayed with a family, and there were some children, and they were really cute and nice. They were about eight years old, really fun. My host mother and host father were really nice too.

One Japanese female was living in the residence halls on campus, and had a less pleasant experience.

JF 2: They are not neat. When I live in the dorm, the bathroom is not clean and bad smell. And I hear loud sounds from the room. I live in the dorm by myself, so it's okay, but if I have a noisy roommate, it's not good. I have heard Japanese students change rooms at least once, because Japanese people are really sensitive, so they care about people.

Another Japanese female remembered a cultural difference with her roommate:

JF 5: I have a roommate, I put a carpet in my room. I never walk around on the carpet with my shoes, but she does. Whenever she comes into my room, she always walks around on my carpet with her shoes, I was so shocked. I think it's American culture, so I don't say anything to her.

Since many Japanese students change roommates or move into apartments, it's possible that their ideal housing option would be with host families, which would suit their sensitive personalities. Unfortunately, many Japanese students are assigned with culturally insensitive roommates.

Discrimination in the U.S.

Two Japanese males reported feeling no discrimination in the U.S., while one Japanese male did.

JM 3: I experienced a little bit of racism language-wise. My language skill is not good enough yet, so some people just don't understand, that's okay, but to kind of teasing about it and mocking about it. It's all right. Other Asians, I think they think they're better. I still feel that way, not all the time. I don't really care.

One bad experience with racism left a lasting impression with this Japanese student, while the other Japanese students didn't have an experience to relate to.

Americans being social

Two Japanese females expressed their surprise from strangers talking to them.

JF 2: People here are so kind to me. Japanese men are also kind, but they don't try to say "hello." American people say hello frankly, and sometimes when I live in dorm, when I get on elevator, someone is there, and they say hello and we start talking. They are so

friendly, so when I am talking with them, I have so nice time and they help you more, talking with them.

JF 4: In Japan, almost all people don't talk to strangers. But in the U.S., I walk the street, many people say, "how are you?" and "good morning!" So it was very surprising.

The custom of Americans greeting strangers seemed to leave a good impression on these Japanese students, especially since they had recently arrived. The greetings may have lead these Japanese students to think that people in the United States are friendly people in general.

Meeting students from other countries in the U.S.

Three Japanese females mentioned having the opportunity to meet students from other countries in the U.S.

JF 3: I enjoy cultural differences, there are so many people for example, I come from Japan, so I can't go to Saudi Arabia because of government issues or something like that, but I can communicate with students from Saudi Arabia, because that university's institution is so much better than Japan, I always appreciate that I can study here, because the professors are always kind to us. Even American students will help us.

JF 4: Compared to Japan, there are many cultures in the U.S. There are many foreigners and backgrounds, it's very diverse. Actually, in Japan, our university has many foreign students, but they apply for classes for foreign students. So we have less opportunities to talk with them. I'm a little sad, but in the U.S., foreign students take classes with Western students, so I can communicate with American people and students from other countries. So, I can learn more about other cultures and many precious ideas. So I like this university's environment.

JF 5: I really like to talk to other people who came from foreign countries.

Japanese students are separated from foreigners in Japan, and feel they are missing out on the intercultural experience.

Themes among both American and Japanese students

Topics that persisted in both American and Japanese student interviews were college being easy in Japan, differences in classroom etiquette, missing food from home, transportation, meeting people with experience before departure, self-teaching before departure, accepting another culture, conformity, and safety.

College being easy in Japan

Three American males, two Japanese males, and one American female expressed that they thought college was very easy in Japan. Each one of these students mentioned not attending and passing, the class material being simple, and not studying. One American female and one Japanese male mentioned taking more classes in Japan due to the low difficulty level. One American female and one Japanese female reported that university students in Japan are “guaranteed to graduate”. One Japanese male explains this process.

JM 2: In Japan, it’s extremely easy to pass classes. All you have to do is just attend a few classes, and they will give you a pass. You don’t have to study. I would say it’s a terrible system. It’s no good. The most difficult thing in Japan is entering the college. They give us kind of hard entrance exam, but once you pass and enter the university, you can automatically graduate, almost. It’s weird.

Two American males explain this phenomenon of college being so easy in Japan.

AM 2: The other thing was with the focus on moving up the corporate ladder and becoming a salary man, most people see college as just a stepping stone, and most companies don’t care what your grades were, they just care where you went. So, you’ll

see a lot of college-age students skipping class, working part-time jobs, get drunk every night because their grades don't matter if they get into a prestigious school. The other thing is, you can fail classes there and they just wipe it off your record. So, a failing grade means it just goes away. So, you're paying for no grade, but it's better than paying for an F. You can keep doing it until you get it right.

AM 5: In Japan, the way it's structured, as soon as the students enter university, they really don't care. Because the test is really hard to get into university, and once you get in, that's supposed to be the time of your life before you start working. So they literally do not take university seriously at all. People show up if they feel like it.

He continued that some Americans began to lose their purpose while studying in Japan. The classes were terrible, the first semester I was bored out of my mind, I was going crazy and I felt like I had no purpose. I wanted to go home. There were other restless students as well, and one of them did end up going home because of that feeling. I tried to talk him out of it, but he ended up going home early. The classes were stupid and he was not feeling it. So I ended up looking for master-level classes in English, and I ended up going to the fashion design program, which was at a completely different campus. I had to push and look into it and find classes that would actually help me. You have to make it work and make the best of it.

It seems that, in Japan, all what matters is what school people go to. In the U.S., companies look at experience and grades in college, not necessarily the university itself. Yes, attending an Ivy League school is impressive, but it won't automatically land someone a job. Since Americans are conditioned to get good grades in college, they felt little motivation in Japan, since grades apparently didn't matter and Japanese students didn't seem to care.

Differences in classroom etiquette

Two Japanese males and two Japanese females reported American classes being more conversational than Japanese classes.

JM 1: In American university, students express their opinion in class aggressively. But in Japan, we don't do that in most cases. Also, we have many classes at Japanese university. But in the US, we don't.

JM 2: There's conversation in American school. In Japan, the teacher just talk about their stuff, they don't talk to us. Almost no students ask questions, almost no conversation. It's kind of boring. Here, there's lots of interaction between teachers and students. And lots of homework here.

JF 3: I think here there is a lot of opportunity to describe what we feel and thought in the class. In Japan, we just have to stay and listen to what the professor is saying. Even if I want to say something, I just need to be quiet. After that, I can ask whatever I want, but here I feel like it's kind of opposite, because if I didn't have any questions in the class and if I didn't say something, the professors think "oh, this student is not good".

JF 4: In the U.S., almost all classes I've taken this semester have discussion. You have to say opinion, and I have to share my ideas. In Japan, in many classes the professor just talks, and we sit in the chair and listen to what he says. In U.S., I have to think about the theme in the class, and I have to choose what I say, so it's very tough, but it's very interesting.

Two Japanese females, one American female, and one American male mentioned Japanese teachers being stricter than American teachers and American teachers being funnier.

JF 1: American teacher is funny, Japanese is strict, have to do homework.

JF 2: Japanese teacher is strict, I think most Japanese people are not friendly, not close to students. But American teacher is so friendly, when they do class, sometimes they say funny things. Japanese teacher, after class they have a plan, so they try to follow the plan. My teacher followed the plan, but my friend's teacher was talking about something not related to class.

AF 1: Here, in classes you can kind of have a sense of humor, but I noticed that if you were to do that in your Japanese classes with your Japanese instructors, it's be kind of like "mmm" ...it's a lot more serious. With my Japanese professors in my language classes, it was a lot more strict. If you were a minute or a couple seconds after the bell, if it was a quiz day, if you're late you don't get to take your quiz. They expect you to dress appropriate. Here, you can go to class in sweats or whatever you want, you can't wear hats there.

AM 4: The most interesting time I had over there was my birthday, and I decided to go travel. When I came back the next day, the teacher asked me why I didn't come to class, and I said that it was my birthday so I traveled and did some sightseeing. And the impression I got from him, especially the look on his face, he did not understand why I would take my birthday off to do something like that.

Japanese teachers are reportedly stricter than American teachers, in terms of humor in the classroom, punctuality, and even what students wear to class.

Missing food from home

Three Japanese males, two Japanese females, three American males, and two American females mentioned missing food from their home countries while abroad. All three Japanese males reported missing ramen, and two Japanese males reported missing sushi. Two American

females expressed missing pizza during their time in Japan. One American male explained his difficulty with finding lactose-free options in Japan. It seems that no matter where students are from, they have a soft spot for their home country's food.

Transportation

Two American males, two American females, and one Japanese male mentioned transportation. One Japanese male, two American females, and one American male talked about the convenience of cars in the U.S. and Japan.

JM 2: Well, I don't have a car, so sometimes it's difficult to go somewhere I want to go.

AF 2: I missed my car, driving for a cheaper price.

AF 3: I missed the transportation. It was so hard having to rely on the subway and the train and the time schedules. I was so stressed out about being on time, and I was really thankful that I had a couple friends with cars, that was my other saving grace. Versus here, I have a lot more transportation and independence.

AM 5: My car. Having the freedom to go wherever I wanted to go. Even though the train systems in Japan are amazing and so convenient, just being able to go wherever I wanted to go.

Two American males praised the public transportation system in Japan.

AM 1: The public transportation was a surprising highlight for me. I did three months of backpacking and it was never a problem to get anywhere I wanted.

AM 2: Travel. When you get there, get a rail pass. It's not expensive, and you can go for a week on any train anywhere, and it's just perfect. It allows you to see all the major islands. Except for Okinawa, because you can't take a train there.

Japan is known for its public transportation, while the United States is more reliant on cars. Students studying in the U.S., have trouble getting places without a car, while it is much easier to get around using the train system in Japan.

Meeting people with experience and self-teaching before departure

According to a study by Matsumoto (2007), out of 138 Americans surveyed, 22 reported communicating with native Japanese speakers as most beneficial to developing their Japanese. Two American males, two American females, and one Japanese female expressed that Japanese students and study abroad alumni helped them prepare for their experience. One Japanese male reported that his teacher helped him prepare for his experience abroad. One American male and one Japanese female reported that having a Japanese staff member in the study abroad office proved to be helpful during their preparation for their experiences abroad.

One American male, one Japanese male, one Japanese female, and one American female discussed teaching oneself the language in order to keep up.

AM 1: With anything you have to put in the effort, as far as learning the language before you go, at least a little bit. I only took two or three semesters before I went.

JM 2: It was somewhat helpful, but basically I studied English by myself. Well, they teach basic things, which is helpful, but if you want to be more advanced, I think it's better to do by ourselves, in my opinion.

AF 5: I think if they could offer a class that was more of what to expect, because no amount of language in a classroom setting is really going to prepare you to speak with natives. It's all about the effort you put in outside of class.

Martin & Nakayama (2013) p. 332 state that the uncertainty reduction theory is the process of lessening uncertainty in adapting to a new culture by seeking information. It can be

inferred that prospective study abroad students learn the most from people who have lived in the countries they plan to study in. Moreover, students reduced their anxiety by practicing the language and reading about the culture on their own time.

Accepting a different culture

One Japanese male, one Japanese female, and one American male reported attempting to accept the new culture they were in.

JM 1: Some differences from Japan, but it's study abroad. I came to different culture.

JF 2: If it is a bit different between America and Japan, I try to accept American culture.

AM 2: Other than that, there wasn't any issue, there wasn't anything I disliked, because I knew it wasn't my culture. I knew I wasn't going to live in the same way I lived here over there. Knowing that going in can be really helpful.

According to Chung and Ting-Toomey (2012), these students are on the right track to being flexible intercultural communicators, which integrates knowledge and an open-minded attitude and putting them into practice in daily communication. Flexible intercultural communication could eventually lead to conscious competence or even unconscious competence in another culture.

Conformity in Japan

One American female, one American male, and one Japanese male discussed patterns of conformity in Japan. One American female explained this in terms of fashion.

AF 1: Also, expression. I didn't realize how easy it is to express yourself in America. In Japan there were a lot of times that I felt like I had to conform more in order to make friends, not make people feel uncomfortable, things like that. Because the very little things from what you say to how you dress. One day I wore red pants to school, and my

girlfriends were like, “wow, I wish I could do that.” And I said, “What do you mean?” and they said, “That just stands out too much.” People would say, “Why are you so blunt? You’re so forward. You just tell everything how it is.” You can climb a tree here and it’s okay, but if you do it in Japan you’re crazy.

An American male expressed this phenomenon through writing papers in school.

AM 2: A lot of the classes I took in Japan were in English, but one of the biggest things I found is that here, a lot of the things you’re supposed to write about is supposed to be your opinion, whereas in Japan you’re supposed to be able to know the general opinion about something. So, that means that academics follow a whole different path over there sometimes. You can’t have your own opinion, but you have to know what everyone else thinks about the subject.

A Japanese male expressed how in Japan people are obligated to do things, and in America it is “free”.

JM 3: I would say when I was in Japan, as a Japanese, you were kind of forced to do something. But here, it’s all free. You can do whatever you want. That’s what I thought for the first time. It’s just free.

Coming from a country as individualistic as the U.S., it didn’t take long for the American students to realize the pattern of conformity in Japan and how it differed from through processes in the U.S. Vice versa, a Japanese male noticed the “free” thinking in the United States and compared it to the obligation to conform in Japan.

Safety in Japan vs. U.S.

Two American females and one Japanese female talked about safety in their interviews. An American female reported feeling at ease in Japan.

AF 3: Probably my favorite thing was just traveling and being able to travel by myself comfortably and feel safe.

One Japanese female reported fear of theft in America. One American female reported a fear she heard from Japanese students preparing to study in America.

AF 1: A lot of students that I met and got close to in Japan were trying to study abroad in America, so when I told them I was from there they became really interested and asked a lot of questions. Of course their perception is, "Oh, America is kind of dangerous." Two of the girls that studied here were from Rikkyo, so I met with them beforehand. I remember one of their concerns was, "Someone told us that we shouldn't wear skirts in America," and I said, "what do you mean?" they said they worried that if they wore a skirt, they would get raped.

Japan is rated one of the safest countries in the world, while news about violence in the United States overpowers the media and forms negative perceptions among people outside the U.S., which causes people to fear traveling there.

DISCUSSION

One of the biggest stereotypes about Americans in Japan had to do with President Trump. Many of the Americans interviewed were overwhelmed by the questions and assumptions Japanese people had about the U.S. election, such as the thought that all Americans voted for Trump. The U.S. is in the spotlight every day, so it was hard for the Americans to avoid these stereotypes, and they were frustrated by having to explain that they did not agree with Trump. However, traveling the world and language learning do not align with Trump's agenda, so the American students are defying this stereotype by just physically being in Japan.

The biggest stereotype Americans had about Japan was that Japan had highly advanced technology. This is also a result of the media and the mass production of videogames, cars, and appliances from Japan. The student investigator was surprised to hear that this was not the case in Japan, and that some homes and university offices had very outdated technology. It can be inferred that the media is one of the main producers of stereotypes among the American and Japanese students in this study.

Most of the American students in this study reported being treated differently as a foreigner in Japan, whether it be being avoided on the train, whispered about, denied entry to a club, or not being able to connect with Japanese people on a deeper level. For many of the American students, this was their first time outside of the U.S. and their first time traveling to a homogenous society such as Japan. They were not used to being foreign, and some of the participants were disappointed because they felt trapped in this glass ceiling of being a foreigner. One of the participants noted that this was an eye-opening experience and made him realize how minorities feel in the U.S. Perhaps these American students are informed that they will stick out in Japan, but it doesn't actually hit them until it is in practice.

The U.S. is an individualistic society, while Japan is generally a collectivist society. Because of this, many of the American students noticed a trend of conformity in Japan, whether it was fashion, writing papers, or being in social groups. Conformity in social groups could also be tied to the theme of sexism that the American students reported in Japan, since many women were reportedly submissive to men during social outings.

Japanese students reported wanting to speak English with their roommates in the residence halls, but their roommates wouldn't talk to them. Other Japanese students reported living with a host family was a positive experience. Japanese students enjoyed integrating with

American students and other international students at Western and at their universities in Japan. However, the Japanese students felt that their English speaking skills were not sufficient when they arrived in the U.S., so this could make it challenging to interact with English-speaking students.

Both American and Japanese students reported differences in classroom etiquette in the U.S. and Japan. In the U.S., classes are more discussion-based and the teachers are more personable, but that is not the case in Japan. Students in Japanese classes are expected to absorb the information and have nothing to say about it. This could also tie into the conformity theme, since students hold back their opinions in Japanese classrooms. Moreover, the American students noted that foreigner classes taught by Westerners were more relaxed than Japanese classes, thus were more comfortable in them.

Based on the results of this study, the student investigator would suggest that U.S. universities offer Japanese classes with similar learning paces as Japan. Since many of the American students struggled with Kanji and daily tasks such as the post office, this class's curriculum should consist of intense Kanji memorization as well as lessons on how to perform daily tasks in Japan. This will help American students ease into the intense curriculum in Japan and will help them experience less culture shock. Also, many Japanese students deal with culturally insensitive roommates, so if an American is going to have an exchange student as a roommate, perhaps the residence hall could educate them on intercultural communication through workshops or modules. American students, coming from a low context culture, seemed to struggle the most with the high context culture of Japan. Perhaps a nonverbal communication course or workshop would prove to be most beneficial in this case. That way, the Americans will

feel more prepared to handle these situations and be more aware of the communication styles in Japan.

For Japanese universities, the student investigator would encourage the English courses to have more speaking exercises. Since many Japanese students have reported difficulty in this area, and American classes include a lot of discussion, this would prove to be beneficial and would enhance their exchange experience in United States. Discussion-style classes may also prove to be beneficial to Japanese students planning to study abroad in the U.S. so that they will be more comfortable in this type of setting before departing Japan. Many of the Americans expressed their desire to interact with Japanese students in Japan, but felt isolated in classes with only foreigners. Japanese universities should close the gap and allow the foreigners to have class with Japanese students to allow for a more integrative experience.

Most of the participants expressed that meeting people with experience before departure proved to be the most helpful in preparing to study abroad. Universities in the U.S. and Japan should have study abroad alumni from country of study do panels or be mentors to prospective study abroad students. This will not only give the students vital information, but will help ease their anxiety before departure.

CONCLUSION

There are many shortcomings in this study, the biggest being the sample size. The student investigator did not have the financial incentive or means to recruit more than 18 participants. There are two less Japanese students than American students. The participants were self-selected and not randomly selected from a pool, since they had to meet the inclusionary criteria. Moreover, since the student investigator is American, she automatically had an internal bias towards the American participants and was able to relate to them more. The American interviews

were longer, as they were able to express themselves in ways the Japanese participants couldn't in English. It's also possible the Japanese participants withheld their opinions, afraid that the student investigator wouldn't understand or would be offended.

This study proved to be much more personal than the student investigator anticipated. The study aimed towards how the institutions helped the students, but really, their experiences were based on their interactions outside the classroom, and in the culture as a whole. The student investigator wishes she asked more questions about their friend groups and whether they spent time with people who spoke their language, or the target language. This study, with its small sample size and limitation to one university, should not be used to generalize study abroad in Japan and the United States. However, the testimonials of the students would prove to be helpful to students on a more personal level. After all, it's what happens outside the classroom that students remember.

RESOURCES

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APPENDICES

See Appendices A, B, and C

Appendix A

Thank you for your interest in this study. This interview will take approximately thirty to sixty minutes. If you don't understand a question, please let me know and I will rephrase it for you. I will start out with some basic demographic questions, then I will move on to more in-depth, cultural questions about your experience in America/Japan. Please answer the questions honestly and the best you can. Remember that your name will not be used in my research, so you can answer the questions freely.

Demographics

- 1.) How old are you?
- 2.) What are you studying?
- 3.) Have you traveled outside your country before?

Questionnaire

- 1.) What were some stereotypes you had about the country you studied in before your arrival?
- 2.) What do you think people in this country thought of people from your country? About your culture?
- 3.) What was your biggest culture shock?
- 4.) What was the hardest part of the language for you?
- 5.) Compare college in your country to college in the country you studied in. Were there differences in classroom etiquette and expectations?
- 6.) How were you treated by students, professors, or any other people while abroad?
- 7.) Do you feel that your home university prepared you well for your experience abroad?
- 8.) Did your university abroad provide you with the resources you needed in order to be successful?
- 9.) What do you like and dislike about the country you studied in?
- 10.) Other than people, what did you miss the most about home?
- 11.) Anything else you would like to add?

That is all I have. Again, I really appreciate your time and honesty in answering my questions. Your insight will be helpful for universities to help international students in the future.

Appendix B

Facebook post

Hello, I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Annelise Wilp and I am entering my final year of undergrad at Western Michigan University. My majors are Organizational Communication and Spanish, and my minors are Japanese and Global and International Studies.

For my honors thesis, I will be studying international students in the U.S. and Japan. In order for my research to be successful, I need two groups of participants: Japanese students who are studying or have studied at an American university, and American students who are studying or have studied at a Japanese university. We will only meet once at the Bernhard Center for the interview, and it won't take longer than an hour. If you are not in Kalamazoo (or the U.S.) but are interested in participating in this study, we can do a phone interview through Whatsapp. All data collected will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in learning more about being a research participant in this study, please message me on Facebook or email me at annelise.g.wilp@wmich.edu. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Appendix C – See attached HSIRB approval



Date: June 9, 2017

To: Annette Hamel, Principal Investigator
Annelise Wilp, Student Investigator for honors thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 17-06-01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “International Student Immersion in the U.S. and Japan” has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.”*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination:

June 8, 2018