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Coping with anxiety and rebuilding identity: A psychosynthesis approach to culture shock

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As the number of international students continues to increase worldwide, their experience of culture shock has been well-researched. Missing, however, from the culture shock literature is the perspective of psychosynthesis psychology and its methodology to deal with the affective, behavioral, and cognitive (ABC) aspects of shock and adaptation. This article illustrates two psychosynthesis techniques that student sojourners found helpful in their acculturation process. Firstly, the self-identification exercise eased anxiety, an affective aspect of culture shock. Secondly, the subpersonality model aided students in their ability to integrate a new social identity, the cornerstone of the cognitive aspect. With a new integrated identity, students changed their behavior (the second ABC component) and new creative energies were released. These qualitative findings are supported by the testimonies of nine international student sojourners in the Netherlands who received psychosynthesis counseling. In addition, a case study demonstrates subpersonality integration and its role in helping students to come into relationship with themselves as well as others. The self-identification exercise and subpersonality model are not only effective tools for aiding sojourners in their adaptation to a host country, but viable methodologies for anyone searching to synthesize a new personal and social identity.

Keywords: culture shock; identity; international students; psychosynthesis; subpersonality; meditation

Introduction

Today, international students are rapidly increasing worldwide in response to a number of factors, including a globalizing world; inexpensive, easily-accessible communication and transportation; and the demand for an international labor market (Suter & Jandl, 2008; Tremblay, 2008; Vincent-Lancrin, 2008). In addition, international students are being actively sought by universities, in particular Australia, the UK, New Zealand and the USA, as a valuable and growing source of revenue for universities (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005). Many students experience their move to a new environment as a profound life event (Kim, 2001), and Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) have pointed out that international students are probably the most intensely studied group in the culture shock literature.

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Culture shock is a well-known term used to define the initial experiences of immersion in an unfamiliar culture. Oberg (1960) first defined culture shock as involving two processes: (1) contact with or immersion in a different culture and (2) loss of the safety net of predictable social roles, cures, and practices. Since Oberg's identification of culture shock, there have been numerous contributions to its study, models, causes, and prevention. Besides finding oneself in a stressful situation, persons undergoing culture shock can experience adjustment strain (Crano & Crano, 1993), acculturative stress (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987), and even grief and bereavement for significant others left behind (Ward et al., 2001).

In addition to understanding its causes, many strategies have been proposed to successfully manage culture shock and its effects. Cross-cultural training techniques, for example include information-giving (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988) where travelers are passively presented with facts and figures about the host country either before or after departure. Besides cognitive training, experiential training includes the use of critical incidents, defined as brief social episodes where a misunderstanding or conflict arises due to cultural differences (Bennett, 1995). With the help of a facilitator, travelers are asked to explore critical incidents in order to increase their awareness of their own culturally determined attitudes and how these attitudes effect their interpretation of the host-citizens' behavior. Another cross-cultural technique is Shirts' (1973) BAFA BAFA stimulation game which aims to increase travelers' awareness of their ethnocentrism. Participants are divided into two hypothetical cultural groups with distinct core values. After learning their "new cultural identity" from written descriptions, the teams then exchange visitors in order to simulate the experience of culture shock. Befus (1988) designed another type of treatment model that integrated both cross-cultural training methods with psychotherapeutic techniques such as deep breathing and talking about negative experiences. Befus administered his integrated model to 64 North Americans alongside a control group who had recently arrived in Central America for language study. His statistical analysis clearly showed that the sojourners who received his 12-week treatment for culture shock manifested lower scores of psychological distress than those who received no treatment.

Contemporary theories and approaches to culture shock are currently based on its affective, behavioral, and cognitive components, referred to as the ABC framework of culture shock (Ward et al., 2001; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). The *affect* aspect of culture shock revolves around the significance of life changes during cross-cultural transitions, the appraisal of these changes, and the application of coping strategies to deal with inherently stressful situations that automatically arise when living in a foreign country. Researchers have largely adopted a broad-based perspective of stress and coping in their studies of culture shock (Ward et al., 2001). Variables affecting one's ability to manage the stress associated with transition and adjustment to living abroad include demographic factors, cultural-specific knowledge and skills, personality, social support, and cultural distance. For international students, the affect component of culture shock appears in studies that indicate acculturative life changes correlate with psychological distress (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993a, 1993b). Nearly all international students encounter an array of acculturative stressors, including the language barrier, educational environment, sociocultural situations, discrimination, loneliness, and practical or lifestyle stressors (Lin & Yi, 1997; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In addition, student sojourners may also have to cope with unpredictable life

events, such as serious illness or physical injury, illness or death of a family member, familial difficulties, and political strife or natural disasters back home. In fact, the seemingly high incidence of such trauma caused Brown (2009) to wonder "whether the sojourn was the trigger, or whether significant life events are universally experienced in life but highlighted during the sojourn and compounded by isolation" (p. 511). International students cope with acculturative stressors in a number of ways, including emotional suppression and dysfunctional coping such as denial, substance use, self-blame, and disengagement (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2007, 2008). Acculturative stress and lack of coping mechanisms can also lead international students to depression (Wei et al., 2007) and somatic complaints (Mori, 2000). Intervention methods for the affect component of culture shock include stress management skills to help the foreign visitor develop coping strategies and tactics (e.g. Zhou et al., 2008).

The *behavior* aspect of culture shock is based on the theory of cultural learning (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Researchers who adopt a cultural learning approach see intercultural contact as a skilled and mutually organized performance (Argyle, 1969). This model leads to practical guidelines for changing behavior in order to manage the "shock" which is seen as the stimulus for acquiring new culture-specific skills that are needed to engage in unfamiliar social situations. Cultural learning includes an understanding of the attitude and behavior in the host country with regard to social skills such as gift-giving, etiquette, conflict resolution, and non-verbal communication like bodily contact and mutual gaze (Ward et al., 2001). Examples of the behavioral aspect of culture shock as experienced by international students can be found in how they manage the cultural differences between educational methodologies in their home and host country (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). For example Liberman's (1994) qualitative research showed that students from Asia studying in the United States were often critical of the informality in the classroom, perceived lack of respect for professors, and insufficient focus in classroom interactions. On the other hand, McCargar (1993) found that many Asian students responded positively to a decreased emphasis on memory learning and an increased relationship with teaching staff. All these changes in the educational practices required behavioral adjustment on the part of the international student. Intervention methods include pre-trip preparation, especially behavioral-based social skills training (Zhou et al., 2008).

The *cognitive* aspect of culture shock is anchored in the theory of social identification where identity is the fundamental issue for cross-cultural travelers (Ward et al, 2001). During cross-cultural contact, people suddenly find themselves in a much broader context which can lead to anxiety-provoking change in how they perceive themselves and their identity (Zhou et al., 2008). For example, using in-depth interviews with Vietnamese university students studying in Australia, Pham and Saltmarsh (2013) explored how these students encountered and traversed cultural differences to define new perspectives of identity that enabled them to perform roles such as being academically successful. One student described his new ability to live independently while another student talked about her changed attitude towards gays and lesbians. Pham and Saltmarsh found that the students' construction of identity was an ongoing representation of ever-changing internalized viewpoints.

Similarly through interviews, Brown and Brown (2013) studied the identity conflict experienced by five international students at a university in the south of England for whom real and perceived challenges to national self-image were shown to be

unsettling. For example, after a Chinese student experienced three incidents of discrimination during her first month in the host town, her response to "the challenges to her identity involved a self-preservative retreat into a nationalist state of mind" (p. 404). In stark contrast, an Iranian student resigned herself and acquiesced to the negative perceptions she experienced, closely monitoring her behavior in public, as she felt revealing her national identity was full of risk.

Intervention guidelines for the cognitive component of culture shock include techniques for enhancing self-esteem, the establishment of inter-group harmony, and emphasizing inter-group similarities (Zhou et al., 2008). From the cognitive point of view, Ward et al. (2001) present four alternatives for people facing culture shock:

(1) Remain staunchly monocultural in their traditions of origin.
(2) Assimilate totally, and identify monoculturally with the host country.
(3) Synthesize the best elements of both cultures and become bicultural.
(4) Vacillate between cultures, identifying with neither (p. 272).

Anderson (1994) similarly states that the cross-cultural traveler has four ways of reacting to the new environment: "(1) change the environment, (2) change oneself, (3) do nothing, (4) walk away" (p. 305). A psychosynthesis approach to such decisions attempts to accept the challenge of Anderson's second choice in order to achieve the goal of Ward et al.'s third alternative.

A psychosynthesis approach to culture shock

Despite psychosynthesis having the possibility of providing an inclusive view of the skills, coping mechanisms, attitudes, and abilities required to intervene and manage culture shock, the psychosynthesis approach remains missing from the research literature. Psychosynthesis is an integrative transpersonal psychology that provides a universal framework for coping with the anxiety of life changes and understanding one's identity and will. Ultimately, the task is to integrate an understanding of one's body, feelings, attitudes, and behavior into a harmonious and synthesized whole which includes all the human dimensions – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual (Gerard, 1964). Psychosynthesis differs from psychoanalysis in that psychosynthesis emphasizes personal and spiritual synthesis, not analysis.

Psychosynthesis psychology was developed by Roberto Assagioli who was a medical doctor, linguist, teacher, contemporary of Freud and Jung, and the first psychoanalyst in Italy. In 1933, Assagioli published in English his model of the human psyche (Figure 1). According to Assagioli (2000), the Self is a transpersonal center, a "*unifying and controlling Principle of our life*" (p. 21, author's italics). The Self is represented in Figure 1 as a star, and appears as *6* at the top of the diagram. In relationship with the Self is the "I" (*5*) which is the "inner still point that we experience as truly ourselves" (Hardy, 1987, p. 28). The Self and the "I" are ideally aligned as indicated by the dotted line connecting them in Figure 1. One can think of the "I" as a pale reflection of the full potential of the Self, and the connection between them is referred to as the I–Self. Both the Self and the "I" have two central functions: consciousness and will. From a psychosynthesis point of view, our life's journey is to seek, reconnect, and synthesize the consciousness and will of the Self with the consciousness and will of the "I" – in
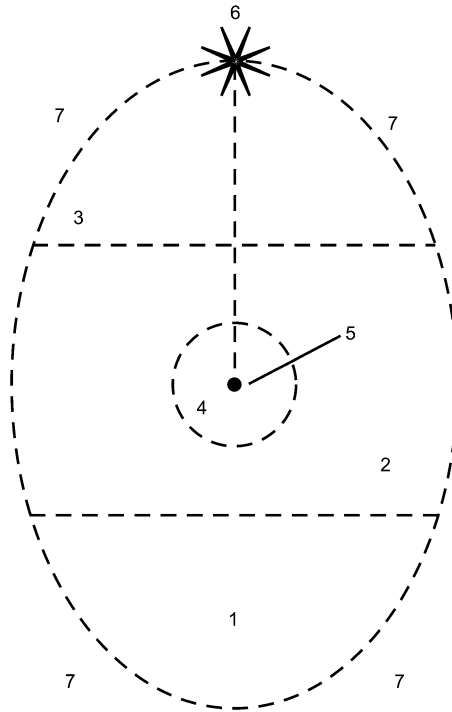
Figure 1. Assagioli's model of the structure of the psyche. (1) Lower unconscious. (2) Middle unconscious. (3) Higher unconscious or superconscious. (4) Field of consciousness. (5) Conscious self or "I." (6) Self. (7) Collective unconscious (Assagioli, 2000, p. 15)
Note: Dotted lines indicate permeable boundaries.

other words, to synthesize the transpersonal with the personal. What distinguishes psychosynthesis from most other psychologies is the understanding that the Self relates to the higher qualities within human beings that allow them to foster their I–Self connection and grow towards their authentic personality. One's authentic personality is an "expression of the natural, authentic sense of self, of who we truly are" which is more than the sum of one's social roles (Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 48).

Generally, we are only directly aware of thoughts, emotions, and sensations in an undefined way, which are acted out in the roles we play according to the relationships we have with other people and/or our surroundings. In psychosynthesis terms, these roles are called *subpersonalities* (Assagioli, 2000). We all have multiple subpersonalities that help us to function in the world, mostly without much reflection, such as mother, executive, teacher, and friend. We also have subpersonalities that might be operating without our conscious choice. Often these subpersonalities are polar in nature, acting contrarily with antagonistic traits. For example, we might be carefree and spontaneous in one situation and frozen in another. Subpersonalities have their weaknesses, but they also have their strengths. Perhaps most essential is the concept that a higher quality lies at the core of each subpersonality, no matter what its outer behavior might be. These higher qualities, like truth, strength, and courage, are considered to be transpersonal,

universal, and timeless. However, often these qualities which exist in the Self can be degraded or distorted when expressed through a subpersonality. For example, at the core of a hyperactive subpersonality might be the higher quality of energy. The challenge of psychosynthesis is not to repress or eliminate any subpersonality's behavior, but rather to recover its higher quality and express that gift in a more positive and holistic way. Psychosynthesis is about synthesizing all these subpersonalities into a unifying center of authenticity where the "I" becomes the director and observer of all subpersonalities, enabling them to function in a harmonious and balanced way. One technique for reaching synthesis is the subpersonality integration process, also referred to as the subpersonality model, which includes the following stages: recognition, acceptance, coordination, integration, and finally synthesis of one's numerous subpersonalities (Assagioli, 2000; Carter-Harr, 1975; Evans, 2003a; Ferrucci, 1982; Lombard, 2012; Vargiu, 1974). A full explanation of this model is described under "Techniques" in the "Research method" section.

In addition to integrating subpersonalities, fundamental to psychosynthesis counseling is the self-identification exercise, also referred to as the dis-identification exercise or the body–feeling–mind meditation. The goal of the self-identification exercise is to systematically connect and bring awareness and affirmation to the physical, emotional, and mental aspects of the personality, and then guide the client to dis-identify from each aspect and connect to the "I," the source of pure consciousness and will. The guiding psychological principle of this exercise is: "We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we dis-identify ourselves" (Assagioli, 2000, p. 98). For example, after acknowledging that we *have* a body, dis-identification occurs when we further understand that we *are not* our body, but, in fact, much more than this single component of ourselves. Even though we may derive our greatest sense of personal identity from, for example, our body (or parts of our body), specific feelings, and/or transitory thoughts and attitudes, in fact, that viewpoint is limited in scope and impossible to maintain given that life is transitory in nature. Physical sensations, our emotions, and thoughts are continually renewing and changing while we remain at our core "I" the same. By learning to dis-identify from these aspects of body, feelings, and mind, we can then begin to dominate, discipline, and deliberately use them by way of our authentic personality – the simple, unchanging, and self-conscious "I."

Other psychosynthesis counseling techniques include guided visualization, daily self-reflection, role-playing, drawing, and dream work. While psychosynthesis counseling sessions might look similar to other forms of counseling such as psychodynamic, person-centered, or gestalt, the unique aspect of psychosynthesis is the idea that there is a Self and all counseling is ultimately trying to achieve the recovery of the Self (Whitmore, 2004). In addition, psychosynthesis counseling explores issues beyond the behavior patterns and symptoms of the client's presenting issue. Such exploration includes examining the situations that trigger the problem, the interpersonal relationships involved, the physical sensations and emotions evoked, the attitudes and beliefs stimulated, and the values which may be hidden and implicit. Problems and obstacles are seen not as pathological states to be eliminated but rather as creative opportunities that "at their deepest level are inherently meaningful, evolutionary, coherent, and potentially transformative" (Whitmore, 2004, p. 11).

The aim of this study

Whether by chance, circumstance, or an unconscious or conscious act of will, all international students choose to leave what they outwardly think of as home to reinvent their lives on foreign soil. Giddens (1991) argues that away from the routines and rituals associated with home, individuals come face-to-face with disturbing existential questions and the threat of personal meaninglessness. Stripped of their familiar identity and way of life, student sojourners are often forced to face inner struggles that have previously remained buried. Feelings of loneliness and emptiness can emerge, questions about past relationships or work choices are raised, and even deeper, childhood traumas can suddenly appear in need of attention and healing. Psychosynthesis concepts and techniques have the potential to provide a comprehensive and integrative approach to managing the inner and outer struggles experienced by foreigners living in a host country. The aim of this study was to ascertain if the two psychosynthesis techniques of the self-identification exercise and subpersonality model might help international students in the Netherlands to intervene and manage the ABCs of culture shock.

Research method

The source of data is psychosynthesis counseling work conducted in the Netherlands from October 2008 to August 2013. The data gathered and analyzed in this study are qualitative. While quantitative methods are beneficial in determining outcome research, qualitative methods are particularly suited to counseling psychology research for a number of reasons, including the relevance of qualitative approaches to multicultural counseling and psychology, and the advantages of methodological diversification and expansion to psychology (Morrow, 2007). Since psychosynthesis counseling emphasizes open-ended questions by the counselor when exploring clients' issues, it is particular suited to the collection of detailed, information-rich narrative data through in-depth active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Open-ended questions permitted the students the freedom to not respond and, at the same time, enabled the counselor to probe beyond their answers (see also Berg, 1995).

Participants

Nine international student sojourners voluntarily sought counseling, with nationalities from the following countries: Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Italy, Portugal, and South Africa. One Dutch student was also included in this study as he related incidents regarding time spent in South Korea during his master's studies. Sojourners are defined as people who:

> … live voluntarily in a country for a longer period of time, with a specific and goal-oriented purpose, such as business or education, and are usually inclined to adjust to local cultural norms. (Gudykunst, 1998)

Although there are no fixed criteria for how long a sojourner might stay in the host country, six months to five years are commonly cited parameters (Ward et al., 2001).

Of the student psychosynthesis clients included in this study, two were male and eight female, and they ranged in age from 25 to 36 years old. Three were married and

the rest single. None had children. Except for the Dutch client, all student sojourners coming for psychosynthesis counseling had already lived for at least two years in the Netherlands. Except for two, all were mid-way through their doctorate degree. The two exceptions were a postdoctoral researcher and the spouse of a PhD student (she had, however, also recently completed her master's degree at a Dutch university). Clients' fields of research included philosophy, tissue engineering, nano-biology, physiochemistry, computer science, geoscience, and technology and sustainable development.

Data collection and analysis

Clients met the counselor 10–55 times, two-to-four times per month, with each session lasting one hour. In total, more than 270 h of counseling work occurred. Sessions were conducted in English as it was the shared language between the clients and counselor. In addition, clients were invited to self-reflect and write about any critical issues they faced or emotions they felt between sessions and to email their observations for further exploration during the next session. While the subject for self-reflection remained open at all times, the client would sometimes be directed to reflect and write on a specific topic pertaining to the current work and email that reflection before the next session. Of the nine international students, seven emailed reflections during the course of their meetings. The frequency of emails varied, with some clients only writing twice or thrice in total, and others two-to-five times per week at the start of their sessions to once a month. The length of the emails varied from 100 to more than 4300 words. In addition, for six of the clients, all meetings were recorded. All students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and permission from all students to quote them in this article has been obtained.

Data collected and analyzed from the counseling sessions included emailed reflections, drawings created by all clients during the sessions, verbal testimonies of the participants who were recorded, and the researcher's reflections carefully written and compiled immediately after a non-recorded session. Work on the data was an evolutionary process that included written observations, reflections, and detailed notes of all meetings immediately after each session. A core feature of this process was the noting of the following subpersonality features: subpersonality name, general description, physical description, wants, needs, higher qualities, and historical context. The researcher also tracked over time what triggered the subpersonality and the behavioral response to the trigger. During the integration stage of the subpersonality process, data was collected on the interaction between subpersonalities, and polar subpersonalities were identified. Emails were also carefully read to include data that could broaden the understanding of each subpersonality and their particular features, triggers and responses, as well as relationships with other subpersonalities. Similarly, students' drawings were reviewed in order to deepen the overall understanding of the subpersonality and its relationship to others.

To assess the effectiveness of the self-identification exercise, clients' reactions immediately afterwards were collected by always asking the open-ended question, "How was that mediation for you?" Students also played a central role in the process of data analysis in order to check for counter-indications of the emerging theses (Yin, 2003). At the end of the sixth session, the counselor and student held an evaluation of how the psychosynthesis process was working for the student, what techniques he or she found particularly useful, and whether to continue the meetings. During this

evaluation, both the subpersonality model and self-identification exercise were assessed and noted by the researcher. Similarly, students' emails that discussed these two techniques were also identified and noted by the researcher. Besides the six-week review, all clients held a self-evaluation with the counselor during their last session, and long-term clients self-evaluated their meetings every 6 to 9 months. Prior to these evaluation meetings, students were asked to reflect on the turning points of their inner process and what techniques they found particularly useful. Turning points were considered changes in behavior or attitude that led to the resolution of any presenting issues. Then, during the evaluation session, first the students presented what they believed each turning point to be, followed by the counselor's perceptions of the turning points. One-by-one, each turning point was discussed and analyzed by both the student and counselor and a consensus was reached. After such a session, the researcher carefully noted the agreed upon turning points. In this way, the students were able to correct, reshape, or contextualize the counselor's perceptions as they deemed appropriate, and their reflections and adjustments were integrated into the final data collection and analysis. For those clients whose sessions were recorded, tapes were listened to by the researcher and reviewed when they contained the following: introduction of a subpersonality, integration processes between subpersonalities, and turning points agreed upon by the client and counselor. Consequently, the narrative of each client was carefully held, reflected upon, observed, and analyzed with the aim of garnering themes or patterns in each student's psychological process. While half of the client work was supervised by the Institute of Psychosynthesis, London, affiliated with Middlesex University, London, the interpretations are the researcher's alone.

Techniques

Self-identification exercise

During initial sessions, students were led through the self-identification exercise. Unlike other meditation techniques such as mindfulness, the self-identification exercise is grounded in the theory of psychosynthesis and has the specific purpose of helping the individual become more of an observer and director of all the personality's aspects and activities. The self-identification exercise was easily executed by clients on their own, and to help them to do so, all the students were provided with a recording of the meditation. The text of this distributed meditation was essentially the same as what appears in the illustration below. During subsequent sessions, the counselor would encourage daily practice of the exercise by asking about the students' progress and discussing possible solutions to any obstacles that might be hindering them.

For a better understanding of how the self-identification exercise is executed, a brief illustration (assuming the client is male) follows. For a full explanation, please refer to Assagioli's description (2002, pp. 211–217). The exercise, which can last from 10 to 20 min, is first introduced to the client, who is then asked for his willing participation. Once the client has agreed, he is then told to sit comfortably in his chair, close his eyes, and take three deep breaths. The client is told that he can open his eyes or stop the exercise at any time. He is then asked to feel his feet on the floor. The counselor then asks the client to slowly and systematically move his awareness from his feet up

through his body and back down into his feet. This part of the exercise can take about 7 to 10 min. The client is then asked to say to himself:

> I have a body, but I am not my body. I treat it well, I seek to keep it in good health, but it is not myself. I have a body, but I am not my body.

After approximately two minutes of silence, the client is then asked to turn his attention away from his body towards his feelings. He is asked to allow his feelings to simply be, without judging or fixating on them. After a few minutes, the client is then asked to say to himself:

> I have emotions, but I am not my emotions. They may swing from love to hatred, from calm to anger, from joy to sorrow, but yet my essence, my true nature does not change. I have emotions, but I am not my emotions.

After approximately two minutes of silence, the client is then asked to turn his attention away from his feelings towards his thoughts. He is asked to allow the thoughts to simply flow through him "as water flows over and around a rock in a stream," without judging, fixating, or following them. After a few minutes, the client is then asked to say to himself:

> I have a mind, but I am not my mind. It is an organ of knowledge to both the outer and the inner worlds, but it is not myself. I have a mind, but I am not my mind.

After approximately two minutes of silence, the client is then asked to say to himself, "I am pure consciousness and will," which is followed by a few more minutes of silence. The client is then asked to "take three deep breaths and slowly bring his awareness back into the room." Once the client's eyes are open and eye contact is made, the counselor can then ask the client if he would like to explore verbally, in writing, or through artwork any images, impressions, feelings, or thoughts that arose during the exercise.

Subpersonality model

As previously stated, the subpersonality integration process includes the following stages: recognition, acceptance, coordination, integration, and synthesis. Students initially recognized their subpersonalities by assessing, alongside the counselor, what subpersonalities might be playing a dominant role in their presenting issue(s). These subpersonalities were revealed through the different roles students played in different situations with different people. In the context of culture shock, the first roles defined were those that were not successfully working in the foreign country, causing the student stress and anxiety. For example, one student identified a Mr Freeze subpersonality who wanted to connect to others but needed space and time to feel safe before doing so. This subpersonality was, for obvious reasons, particularly challenged in a foreign country. Another client strongly identified herself with a subpersonality called Stella who wanted no problems and needed perfection, control, and certainty. This subpersonality

was similarly challenged by the uncertainty and ambiguities as a consequence of living abroad.

Once the subpersonality was recognized, the next step was to give it a name – The Rebel, The Joker, Princess, Perfect Student, etc. Humor was used during this stage to facilitate dis-identification and allow the student to more playfully engage in relationship with that subpersonality. Once naming the subpersonality, the student then created its character sketch. An important question for international students was: What is the world view of this subpersonality? Once the subpersonality was identified, named, and described in detail, the student then made a drawing of it and was asked to further write about it in a personal journal.

After recognition, the next step for the student was to accept his or her subpersonality. The student was asked to observe what triggered each subpersonalities' appearance and to simply watch and allow that subpersonality to exist. This exercise of skillful will helped to strengthen the observer "I." Alongside acceptance was the complementary stage of coordination, which has the basic purpose of identifying and becoming more conscious of the subpersonality's wants and needs in order to find acceptable ways in which the needs can be fulfilled. Therefore, alongside learning to accept the subpersonality, students were asked to identify the wants and needs of each subpersonality and how these needs were typically fulfilled. Throughout the course of the sessions, students were then asked to contemplate and creatively imagine how they might fulfill their subpersonalities' needs in new, objective, and creative ways in order to transform inner conflicts. One technique used to initialize this discussion and playfully search for new solutions was to ask the student, "If you had a magic wand, what would you do?" Examples of how clients more consciously addressed their subpersonality's needs included the student who identified a Mr Freeze subpersonality who wanted to connect to others but needed space and time to feel safe. By accepting this subpersonality, the student was able to consciously choose not to attend large social gatherings that required quick and spontaneous connections and, consequently, triggered feelings of being unsafe. Instead, the student chose to frequent smaller more intimate functions, like student association evenings and even a dance class, where he could take his time to connect to others. In addition, he began to invite friends to also attend different functions with him in order to provide the social safety he felt he needed. Another example is the subpersonality Stella who wanted no problems and needed perfection, control, and certainty. By consciously choosing to practice acceptance more in her everyday life, this student was able to offset Stella's needs. In fact, acceptance was the need of Stella's polar subpersonality, The Dreamer, who was often dominated by Stella. Hence, by consciously developing an attitude of acceptance, this student was able to simultaneously offset the needs of one subpersonality while fulfilling the needs of its polar opposite and bring both more into balance in a new way.

In order to allow for further recognition of a subpersonality, the counselor expressed when the student's subpersonality seemed to surface during the sessions and how she experienced it. Since the therapeutic relationship was inherently multicultural, multinational, and multilingual, it often mirrored the complex environment in which the students found themselves. Therefore, the therapeutic alliance was highly regarded as an ideal setting through which the client could practice having the subpersonality fulfill its needs in a new and possibly more constructive way.

For a deeper exploration, all students were asked if they were willing to investigate their personal history to better understand the etiology of the subpersonality. Subpersonalities develop based upon individual tendencies, inner gifts and talents, and the environment in which an individual is born and raised. When a child is born, she looks towards her mother[1] for her core survival needs, both physical and psychological. In the ideal world, the child will be able to identify with "mother as a foundation for [his] sense of self" (Holliday, 2007, p. 39.) By empathically mirroring the child and coming into intense relationship, the mother not only gives the child a sense of being but also a connection to another, which is an outer expression of the inner world for the child's own I–Self connection (Firman & Gila, 1997).

Most of us, however, do not have an ideal experience as a child. Miller (1987) describes the greatest of wounds as "not having been loved just as one truly was as a child" (p. 110). Miller further explains that each newborn child needs a secure setting, family, and available mother, who is able to provide the child's need for "respect, echoing, understanding, sympathy, and mirroring" (p. 10). As this can never fully occur, even by the most astute and conscious mother, some degree of wounding inevitably takes place.

In order to survive, the child then makes a "promise" to behave falsely and become inauthentic as prescribed by the projections of her caregivers. As Holliday (2007) states, the promise made by the child to her caregivers, while it "ensures early psychological survival and belonging, is essentially Self-limiting" (p. 40). Thus, what Assagioli describes as a subpersonality is formed to help the child survive in the outer world, and at the same time express part of the child's identity and protect a higher quality. Through uncovering the childhood story behind each subpersonality, students could begin to more clearly identify with the observer "I" and choose to act out the behavioral pattern of the subpersonality or not. Note, however, that this step was not mandatory and depended entirely on the student's own will, psychological maturity, and what he or she considered desirable and helpful.

The final stages of the subpersonality process – integration and synthesis – are lifetime endeavors. While coordination deals with the development and understanding of specific subpersonalities, integration is concerned with the relationship between subpersonalities as well as each one's activity within the personality as a whole. Integration typically takes place with pairs of opposite subpersonalities since their wants and needs are usually in conflict, for example, the previously described subpersonalities of Stella and The Dreamer. Synthesis involves the culmination of individual growth that allows for balance and harmony of the entire personality as a whole and is essentially interpersonal and transpersonal. As a result of synthesis, the life of the individual and his or her interactions with others become "increasingly characterized by a sense of responsibility, caring, co-operation, altruistic love and transpersonal objectives" (Vargiu, 1974, p. 89). To initiate these final stages, students were first presented an opportunity for their subpersonalities to interact. Numerous techniques were used to allow for such interactions including: guided visualization, role play, imaginary meetings, conferences between different subpersonalities, letter writing from the observer to the subpersonality (and vice versa), and evening reviews. Throughout such interactions, students were encouraged to strengthen their role as the observer and, consequently, to consciously and more creatively fulfill any conflicting needs. In addition, the self-identification exercise was used to identify with and then dis-identify from a subpersonality being

explored. In this way, students could practice distancing themselves from the subperson-ality and strengthen their "I," the observer and director of all their subpersonalities. As stated by Assagioli (2000), "Although it seems paradoxical, … the less we are identi-fied with a particular role, the better we play it" (p. 67).

Students were ultimately guided to assess, appreciate, and come into relationship with the higher quality held by each of their subpersonalities. In the case of the previously mentioned Mr Freeze subpersonality, his higher quality was a deep and sincere commitment when in relationship. For the subpersonality Stella, the higher quality was a drive towards personal growth, and for The Dreamer, creativity and vulnerability. In order to work towards the ultimate stage of synthesis, once the need of the subpersonality was met in a new creative way, students were asked to reflect upon, practice, and observe their expression of the subpersonality's higher quality in the world. For example, once reflecting on the higher qualities of Mr Freeze, the student was better able to acknowledge, appreciate, and enjoy his deeper relationships with friends and family. And through the continual integration of the polar subpersonalities Stella and The Dreamer around the theme of acceptance, the student was able to express her strong will to achieve personal growth by spending a two-week retreat at a monastery. At the same time, The Dreamer's higher qualities of artistic expression were allowed to emerge through the pursuit of the student's long-held desire to take artistic photographs.

Similarities and differences with other approaches

While similar integrative models exist, the subpersonality model is different in various ways. For example, the subpersonality process constitutes various stages of integration much like the assimilation model (Stiles et al., 1990). However, the subpersonality model differs in that it is: (1) integral to and integrated in the psychosynthesis therapeutic approach, (2) mirrored by the relationship between the client and counselor, the client and others, and the client and Self, (3) ulti-mately (although not necessarily) seeks to account for the etiology of the subperson-ality, and (4) always seeks for the subpersonality's higher qualities. Unlike the Gestalt approach to assimilating experiences, the subpersonality model is not a "destructive" process that involves the sometimes painful breaking down of old gestalten in order to reform and recreate new gestalten (Perls, Hefferline, & Good-man, 1951). Instead the subpersonality model aims to constructively coordinate, integrate, and synthesize the various subpersonalities through identification and sub-sequent dis-identification from them. Through this distancing, clients can potentially recover a subpersonality's higher quality, such as vulnerability or trust, and more holistically and willfully express that gift, rather than unconsciously display it as a disconnected fragment of themselves. For a deeper understanding of the subpersonal-ity model, please refer to the psychosynthesis counseling literature (Assagioli, 2000; Caddy & Platts, 1993; Crampton, 1970; Evans, 2003a, 2003b; Ferrucci, 1982; Firman & Vargiu, 1974; Haronian, 1976; Ryan, 2011; Whitmore, 2004).

Results

This section shows how the psychosynthesis techniques of self-identification and the subpersonality model were effective interventions for the ABC components of culture shock. The results are presented through the case study of Maria[2]. Maria's narrative was chosen to demonstrate the findings because: (1) her process best represents the processes of the other student sojourners, (2) her inner and outer journey best illustrates the psychosynthesis process, and (3) she was most able to articulate her experience. The case study is also augmented with testimonies from other clients.

Easing the affect component of culture shock with the self-identification exercise

Maria's presenting issues were depression and feelings of being sad, lost, and unhappy. In addition, Maria was having a difficult time relating to her Dutch PhD supervisor. Midway through her PhD, she was considering returning home:

> I just don't identify with Dutch culture, its values, even its food. I've completed all the Dutch language courses, but still can't understand the morning news. After three years here, I just feel done with it. Especially the weather.

The counselor's initial task was to provide Maria a technique for managing and coping with stress. During the first sessions, Maria was led through the self-identification exercise. After six sessions, she sent the following email:

> I feel stronger now with all the things I discovered about myself and also calmer and safer.

Other student testimonies about the self-identification exercise

While some students like Maria decided they needed a counselor to help deal with depression along with communication problems with Dutch supervisors, others arrived with various traumatic issues that were compounded by their living away from home. One student faced isolation after the dissolution of an intimate relationship, another was trying to manage physical and medical challenges due to chronic vertigo, and still another had been diagnosed with melanoma cancer. Before seeking counseling, some students were soothing themselves with heavy alcohol consumption, binge eating, cigarette smoking, and physical exercise to the point of minor injury. Powerlessness and vulnerability, loss of self-esteem, depression, and the feeling of being lost were commonly expressed by all the clients during the initial stages of counseling. These feelings were particularly magnified by their physical distance from family and friends.

> Loneliness is the worst thing. And I'm not really like that. I was never like that. It's like I am a failure in this town. (Brazilian student)

> I feel lost and alone. I feel like I'm drowning. Nothing makes any sense anymore. I don't want to be here. I want to be home. I feel like I don't know what I'm doing anymore. (Canadian student)

Like Maria, immediately after the self-identification exercise, all students stated that they felt calmer and less anxious. Their testimonies below demonstrate how, after the initial six sessions, they were progressing towards learning how to cope and manage stress.

> I'm much better now. One thing I've noticed about my feelings: It feels and seems I was living all this time a big lie. As Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam sings: "Saw things clearer once you were in my rearview-mirror." Overall, I feel good about it. I'm also reading more about how to cope, keeping myself busy, and taking more care of myself. (Brazilian student)

> As I'm crying and laughing, I feel good. And I've been thinking about the idea of being happy and how I didn't think it was possible for me to be happy here in the Netherlands. I've been thinking about what it means to be happy for me. So I'm trying to make that happiness come from within me. And I feel like I'm getting a lot of strength from that. (Canadian student)

> I feel more calm. I feel like I have more inner power and integrity. I can more clearly see the reality of my family relationships and accept them. I am also more able to express my feelings. (Chinese student)

Subpersonalities and the cognitive component of culture shock

Once students started to feel less disorientated, more supported, and, hence, more grounded in their reality, they could then move towards the more challenging work of reconstructing their personal identities into a newer and more authentic way of being through the subpersonality process. Results showed that the more strongly a student was identified with a subpersonality, the longer the subpersonality had been functioning in the world and the more firmly established its pattern of behavior. The fact of living in a foreign country appeared to be the "shock" that such subpersonalities needed to become dislodged and less dominant in a student's life.

Students' subpersonalities tended to be polar in nature with conflicting wants. For example, one student recognized the Colonel, who knew how to fiercely set boundaries, and the Yeah-Sure Guy, who said "yes" to everyone's needs but his own. While the Colonel wanted control, the Yeah-Sure-Guy wanted a good time. Another example of conflicting polar subpersonalities included Proud Princess who wanted to be superior and Sweet Innocent Girl who wanted to be liked. The needs of all the subpersonalities, however, were more universal desires like love, safety, self-worth, or a deeper connection to others. Although challenging at times, all students were willing to more deeply explore their childhood histories in order to uncover the etiology of their subpersonalities.

Rebuilding a student sojourner's identity

During her second session, Maria identified two conflicting, polar subpersonalities: Miss Victorious and Miss Silent (Figure 2). Miss Victorious wanted to control all situations and to be the best. She needed recognition and could operate in the rational world with

Figure 2. Miss Victorious and Miss Silent. (Drawing by client).

great success. Miss Silent was sensitive, deeply emotional, and more creative. She wanted acceptance for who she was and needed safety, space, and time alone.

Miss Victorious, the more dominant subpersonality, was the one who propelled Maria through her scientific studies and managed her success in the outer world. But, by constantly wanting control, Miss Victorious left little space for Miss Silent. Part of Maria's unconscious reason for entering counseling was to give Miss Silent the space she was inwardly demanding. The reason Maria initially felt depressed, sad, lost, and unhappy was her not recognizing and accepting the needs of Miss Silent, compounded by the limitations of always operating as Miss Victorious.

Maria agreed to more closely explore the origin of these two subpersonalities and found that both had developed very early. Maria is the first born of three daughters to parents who, while attentive caregivers, also carried psychological wounds from their own childhood. As a young woman, Maria's mother attended university but did not finish her studies. As a result, Maria's mother emotionally related to Maria almost entirely around her education. In addition, when Maria was born, her father explicitly expressed disappointment that she was not a son. Parental love and acceptance, therefore, depended upon, for the most part, high academic achievement. Maria is gifted intellectually and strong willed, so she was able to excel in school. However, her deeper emotional life and sensitivity was forced underground as Miss Silent. Here, we clearly

see the promise that the infant Maria made to her parents: "I will be victorious in all that I do" and the promise made to herself: "I will hide the more emotional, sensitive side of myself from the world." When Maria made these promises in order to survive in her familial environment, she broke her connection with the Self – which is a synthesis of the higher qualities of the two subpersonalities (amongst others).

The higher qualities that each of the subpersonalities held were also explored. The higher qualities carried by Miss Victorious were trustworthiness, dependability, will, initiative, and persistence. And the higher qualities of Miss Silent were creativity, intuition, and wisdom. Living away from her home and country, facing scholastic challenges and difficult relationship issues with her supervisor only augmented and mirrored Maria's disconnection from Self. Through recognizing, accepting, and dis-identifying from her Miss Victorious and Miss Silent subpersonalities, Maria was eventually able to reconnect with each subpersonality's higher qualities. This process of integration was aided by a visualization in which the two subpersonalities dialoged with each other alongside Maria as an observer. During the dialog, both Miss Victorious and Miss Silent expressed their unique needs and by the end of the visualization, Miss Victorious had become more humble and vulnerable and Miss Silent more assertive. Afterwards, Maria drew the two subpersonalities in reconciliation, kneeling before each other, holding hands, and smiling (Figure 3).

Reflecting on her drawing, Maria said:

Miss Silent has hope now. She trusts Miss Victorious. Miss Victorious has to create space for Miss Silent. She has to be silent also. Patient. Not so anxious about things. They go good together. They should do this more often!
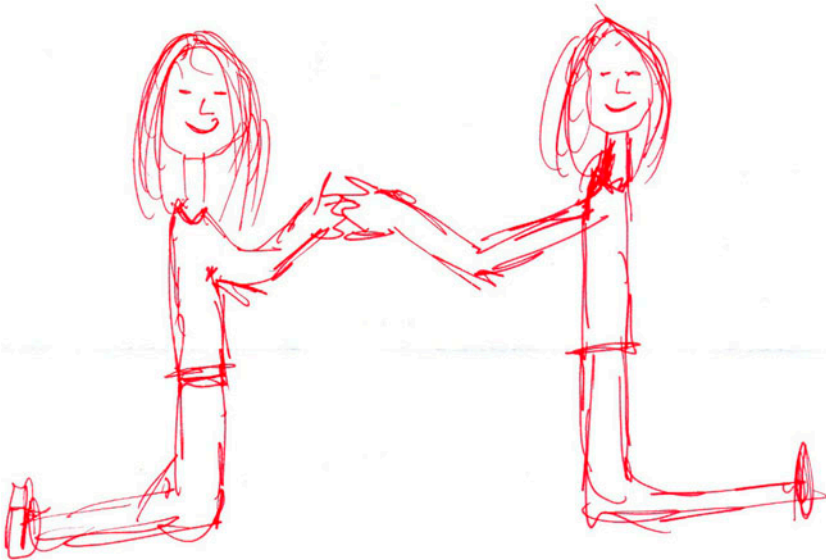

Figure 3. Reconciliation leading to synthesis of Miss Victorious and Miss Silent. (Drawing by client).

The counseling work continued around balancing, coordinating, and integrating these two subpersonalities as well as other challenges during the year including the pain and sadness around Maria's "childhood promise" to herself and her parents. One example of Maria's continual integration of her subpersonalities occurred when she created a space in her home called her "temple" where she started to paint and meditate. Through this new endeavor, her subpersonality Miss Silent was allowed to fulfill her needs of safety, space, and time alone in a new way, and hence integrate more fully with Miss Victorious. This new approach also enabled Miss Silent's higher quality of creativity to be expressed in a more conscious and harmonious way.

Other student testimonies as to the benefits of subpersonality work

Maria is one example of how student sojourners easily adapted and worked with the subpersonality model. Figure 4 illustrates another example of how one student recognized and accepted her various subpersonalities which she had identified and explored in earlier sessions. As this client sketched her subpersonalities on a single sheet of paper, she was smiling and playful. The last thing she drew was the "ME" which is standing outside and acting as both observer and director, the authentic self or "I." Afterwards she said:

> They're here and they're me. And I'm them. It was funny to draw them. Some are so ridiculous! I'm smiling because I think I accept them now. I know that I still suffer them, but I am always able to see what triggers them and what belongs to them and what belongs to

Figure 4. Coordinating and integrating subpersonalities. (Drawing by client).
Note: All the subpersonalities appear in the drawing as the same size. This corresponds with the student's statement: "They aren't so big anymore in my life."

me. I'm less angry and I feel like I have more control. They aren't so big anymore in my life. Just recognizing this makes me feel much better.

In fact, all but one of the clients in this study readily grasped the concept of subpersonalities and quickly incorporated and applied various techniques to help them recognize, accept, coordinate, and integrate their subpersonalities in their daily life. As they began to establish a relationship with their different subpersonalities, all student sojourners found that they were more able to meet ongoing challenges, remained calmer in uncertain situations, felt freer to make decisions, and more positively related to others. Below are some of their testimonies:

The ongoing therapy is very helpful to my personal growth. I recognized my different subpersonalities, spent some time to "talk" to each one of them, and initiated cross-talk between them. By doing so, I understood myself better, and my interpersonal relationship with other people. I understood where the attraction and conflicts stem from. I can also control myself better in social situations by selecting the proper subpersonality and "talk" the undesired subpersonality into temporal retirement. Clear recognition of my subpersonalities also helped me understand relationships within my family. (Chinese postdoc)

Our meetings have equipped me with the tools, like my subpersonalities, to continue to deal with the (what feels like) never ending challenges that life presents me with: the stress of completing a PhD, the stress of finding new work, the stress of dealing with familial and other intimate relationships. (Canadian student)

By recognizing and working with my subpersonalities, I was able to not be stuck and to make clearer decisions. Coming into relationship with my subpersonalities and working with them, frees up space in my mind and gives me more time for my PhD and to even enjoy it more. (Dutch student)

Changing behavior and releasing creative energy

As Maria was more able to objectively recognize her subpersonalities, she could better direct them from a stronger center of her personal "I," choosing what role was most appropriate in any given situation. Consequently, her behavior changed as evidenced by her new ability to engage in relationship with others and even the pursuit of her PhD. By the time she finished her meetings, Maria had come into a working relationship with her supervisor, successfully finished her PhD, married, was better able to relate to her parents, and was offered a postdoctoral position within the university. Ultimately, by working through the subpersonality process, Maria, as well as the other students, were able to reconcile polarities that they faced in the outer world. As they identified and then dis-identified from the roles that they played during the day, they were more present and able to choose the most appropriate role at the most appropriate time, even in an unfamiliar cultural landscape. Consequently, all students were able to engage with others more effectively, assess and express their own needs and wants, and execute clearer decisions.

In addition to positive behavioral change and personal growth, students' stymied energies moved towards their full human potential. Maslow (1970) has also noted that "creativity … seemed to be an epiphenomenon of … greater wholeness and integration"

(p. 141). He writes that "the extent that creativeness is constructive, synthesizing, unifying, and integrative, … depends in part on the inner integration of the person" (p. 140). Maria was no exception, as shown in her following reflection:

> I feel like I was on hold for the past year. Waiting. Like my life was on hold. Not knowing for what. Just having faith. I was busy, but I was questioning why I was doing the PhD. And it felt like there was no clear path. Also in my personal life. Then things started to develop when I started to look for clarity. Things started to unblock. The data came, my personal life improved.

> It's incredible how much energy is consumed by doubts and feelings of sadness. How much energy is consumed by being someone else. I want to be seen for who I am, not just for who I'm expected to be. Now, I have more creative energy. It's more "green" to be myself! I see the post-doc that I want. And I have the energy to grab it. And it feels exciting and so much better.

Examples of other students' release of blocked creative energy include one student who had started psychosynthesis counseling after being placed on probation due to serious academic trouble. After finishing her meetings, she had become one of the department's high-flyers, organized an international conference, completed her PhD early, and was granted a postdoctoral position. Another student came to counseling depressed, lonely, and fearful of the town and his local environment. After 15 sessions, he was making new friends, had been elected president of a student association, and received two international awards for his presentations and papers. He said:

> My work is going so well. I am producing so much more than last year, and I have more concentration and energy. (Brazilian student)

Discussion

This study illustrates how two psychosynthesis techniques were applied to intervene, relieve, and transform the effects of the ABC components of culture shock experienced by student sojourners in the Netherlands. Students sought psychosynthesis counseling as a result of the stress and anxiety triggered by their living in a foreign environment. Through these stressful situations, their personal identity was challenged and forced to develop and transform. With a new, more authentic identity, the students were then able to direct their behavior and successfully meet the challenges presented by the ABC aspects of culture shock.

At the beginning of their counseling sessions, students were introduced to the psychosynthesis self-identification exercise. This meditation exercise helped students to identify and then dis-identify from their body sensations, feelings, and thoughts which were provoking their anxiety. By the end of six sessions, all students were better able to manage stress. During subsequent sessions, the psychosynthesis subpersonality model then allowed the students to explore their conflicted identity. By recognizing and becoming aware of the different roles the subpersonalities played, their individual and contrasting wants and needs, and their origin, students learned how to coordinate and integrate their subpersonalities into a new way of being. As observers of their

diverse subpersonalities, students learned how to direct and regulate their subpersonalities and express their most appropriate needs and goals. Through such practice, each student's new and more authentic identity was visibly expressed and hence the student's behavior changed. With the aid of psychosynthesis techniques, the student sojourners in this study learned how to cope with stress, accepted and worked with subpersonalities in more effective ways, came closer to healing childhood psychological wounds, and developed deeper relationships with themselves. As a result, all were able to make clearer decisions, become more creative, and successfully engage with others at home and in the host country.

The findings in this research correspond to a major theme reported by Brown (2009). She asserts that international students who participated in an intensive one-year master's program reported a discovery of a new self that influenced both personal and professional relationships and hence impacted on their everyday life. Whether the decision to move overseas was consciously executed to achieve personal growth, all students in this study eventually longed to find meaning in the experience. Similarly, Brown (2009) concluded that all student sojourners' in her study "underwent fundamental personal change [as] sojourners are faced with the … existential question about what constitutes the self" (p. 518). Psychosynthesis techniques, such as the self-identification exercise and subpersonality model, can aid student sojourners to not only manage the ABCs of culture shock, but also to more easily and effectively discover new values, identities, and behaviors as well as express them into life-enhancing and positive change both abroad and at home.

Limitations

One limitation to this study is that the findings rest on the presumption that changes seen in the clients' ability to manage and intervene the ABCs of culture shock are the direct effect of two psychosynthesis techniques. In addition, this small client sample with its limited representation makes it difficult to move towards any general conclusions. Similarly, the number of sessions (10–55) varied widely for each client, which might have influenced the subpersonality integration and psychosynthesis process. Finally, these interpretations warrant a second researcher's analysis to ensure the rigor and validity of the findings. However, the qualitative methodology as a psychosynthesis counselor did allow for intimate conversations over many months which provided depth and breadth to these findings and analysis.

Implications

This research indicates that the psychosynthesis self-identification exercise and subpersonality model might provide an effective intervention for the ABCs of culture shock for international students. As such, these tools could be offered as part of the larger multicultural training program for both international students and university counselors and staff. Establishing an acculturation program for student sojourners does not only entail constructing a website that can instruct student sojourners on the academic protocol, social conventions, and local services in their host country. As Brown and Holloway (2008b) point out, we have a moral and educational duty to take international students' specific circumstances into account and provide them with long-term solutions.

In their ethnographic study (2008a), they also conclude that, while it may be appropriate at times for international students to focus on the acquisition of appropriate behavior and skills, university counselors, and pastoral staff also need to better understand the complexity of the adjustment process. With a more comprehensive perspective, support personnel could then better consider each student's individual needs and circumstances when deciding how he or she might best be supported.

Psychosynthesis counseling and training focuses on such challenges by aiding students' with their individual needs, helping them to acquire appropriate behavior and skills, and dealing with the complexity of the adjustment process through various techniques and models. Psychosynthesis can also enable student sojourners to come closer to their own personal consciousness and will and, consequently, more easily in touch with their own wants, needs, emotions, intuitions, and imagination. Gradually, student sojourners can become directors of their diverse subpersonalities and more freely and consciously choose and execute their daily actions. This is the real goal of any acculturation project – to learn how to maintain one's identity, self-esteem, and psychological well-being while at the same time interacting in a constructive way within a society that maintains a world view different from one's own.

Future research

With only a handful of published papers on psychosynthesis methodology and techniques, there remains no doubt that more research is needed. To better understand the effectiveness of the self-identification exercise in helping student sojourners deal with stress, more empirical data need to be collected. A small number of researchers have attempted to develop standardized measures of adjustment strain on international students (Crano & Crano, 1993; Pedersen, Neighbors, Larimer & Lee, 2011). One possible project would involve comparing Sojourner Adjustment Measures before and after the administration of the self-identification exercise to empirically determine how much and for how long such a meditation might reduce anxiety and facilitate coping in the foreign country.

Future research might also investigate the effectiveness of the subpersonality model in rebuilding identity – not just for clients experiencing culture shock, but for anyone suffering from identity conflict. Life narrative theory and methodology are approaches that might be aptly suited to explore sojourners' experience of culture shock and acculturation through the subpersonality model (Kenyon, Bohlmeijer & Randall, 2011). Life narrative theory compliments and augments psychosynthesis techniques which employ daily self-reflection and the identification and dis-identification of body, feelings, mind, and subpersonalities. Nevertheless, despite its potential, life narrative has rarely been applied as a strategy for acculturation stress. Taloyan, Johansson, Saleh-Stattin, and Al-Windi (2011) have approached migration stress among ten Kurdish men in Sweden based on narrative methodology. Their findings showed that the narrative process enabled participants to begin to re-story and reconstruct their lives and critically reflect on the conditions that constrained their actions and created difficulties. Sears' (2011) study of young students in an international school has suggested that narrative serves to integrate the multiple aspects of participants' identities.

Finally, of particular interest in this study is the fact that all the international students who sought psychosynthesis counseling were experiencing culture shock after

living abroad for two or more years. Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) also state that "cross-cultural transitions unfold over time, and student issues may fluctuate as new demands are perceived and others are managed" (p. 131). These findings point to Ward et al.'s (2001) assertion that the frequently cited U-curve of adjustment (i.e. the honeymoon period, followed by crisis, recovery, and adjustment) during cross-cultural adaptation may "offer a convenient, common sense heuristic … but not an altogether accurate one" (p. 82). This study supports their call for further longitudinal research into culture shock in order to produce a critical and credible mass of findings that consistently support an alternative theory to the U-curve hypothesis.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to ascertain if two psychosynthesis techniques – the self-identification exercise and the subpersonality model – might help international students in the Netherlands to intervene and manage the ABCs of culture shock. The self-identification exercise allowed students to deal with the affect component of culture shock, namely stress and anxiety. During subsequent sessions, students were then guided to integrate their subpersonalities and hence manage identity conflicts (the cognitive component of ABC). As students were able to feel calmer and grow in awareness with regard to their subpersonalities, in psychosynthesis terms, each student began to synthesize into a more authentic personality. As a result of this personal synthesis, their behavior (the second ABC component) changed and new creative energies were released.

Ultimately, this study illustrates the effective results of psychosynthesis and, in particular, the self-identification exercise and subpersonality process when applied to student sojourners and their experience of culture shock. Most international students have particularly intense emotional experiences at the start of their studies as they must adapt, not only to a new environment, but also to unfamiliar academic protocol and procedures (Brown, 2009). But at the same time, these young students also have a powerful opportunity for transformation, a chance to glimpse and grasp their full potential, and search for deeper meaning in their lives (Anderson, 1994; Lombard, 2012). Those who have accepted, integrated, and ultimately synthesized the challenges posed by adapting to a foreign culture inevitably deepen and broaden their relationship with themselves and, consequently, are more able to engage fruitfully with others who hold different world views. Psychosynthesis concepts and techniques are not only potentially effective and inclusive tools for adapting to a host country, but also viable methodologies for anyone searching to synthesize a new personal and social identity.

Notes

1. In this study, *mother* refers to anyone acting as the infant/child's primary caretaker.
2. This client's name is a pseudonym.

Notes on contributor

Catherine Ann Lombard is a psychosynthesis psychologist and counselor in private practice, primarily working with expatriates living in the Netherlands. She is an independent scholar currently working in collaboration with the University of Twente researching how psychosynthesis and narrative methodologies can help sojourners manage culture shock and transform their experience into personal and spiritual growth. She is passionate about guiding international students to their higher creative potential. She has published a dozen articles and conference presentations in the psychosynthesis literature.

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