

Introduction thus end  
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## **Introduction**

Over the past decades, there has been a mounting interest in the impact of culture on the psychological, mental and physical health of individuals, especially in circumstances where such individuals leave their internalized cultural orientation to embrace new culture.

This scenario, largely referred to as culture shock, is known to affect international students and sojourners who, although characteristically only temporary separated from their mother country, suffer from numerous stressors associated with moving into a different culture (Pantelidou & Craig 777). Due to overbearing variations between the internalized and foreign cultures, such individuals suffer from an allay of often negative experiences, including the strain and stress of adapting to the new culture, a profound sense of loss, apprehension and impotence arising from incapacity to cope with the new environment, confusion in self-identity, and a feeling of being rebuffed or abandoned by members of the new culture (Winkelman 121). This paper aims to compare and contrast different aspects of the U. S.

and South African cultures with a view to extrapolate how culture shock is experienced by South Africans coming to the U. S.

## **A Comparison of the Two Cultures**

The move to a new environment, hence to a new culture, is cited by anthropologists and other social researchers as one of the most traumatic events in a person's life.

Coming from South Africa to study or live in the U. S., most individuals will attest to the fact that culture shock is inevitable. More than anything else, "...the multicultural nature of society in the united states creates daily cross-cultural conflict and immersion, making cultural shock an important source of interpersonal stress and conflict for many" (Winkelman 121). Although South Africa is also known for its ethnic and cultural diversity, her identities are typically dominated by conceptions of race (Narunsky-Laden 5).

More importantly, student sojourners headed for the U. S. soon realize that multiculturalism implies totally divergent things in both countries, thus end up experiencing culture shock. In the home culture, multiculturalism often refers to a mosaic of diverse cultures living within a multihued nation, while in the U. S., sojourners come to realize multiculturalism intrinsically implies lots of people with different colored faces and traditions living together (Ulin 809). This conceptual variation is difficult enough when the sojourner is conscious of the differences beforehand, but even more difficult when the sojourner is unaware and fallaciously assumes that cultural diversity in the U. S. operates under the same tenets as it does in South Africa. Indeed, students and other sojourners who are ill prepared to face the multicultural nature of society in the U.

S. soon realize that culture is more often a source of variance than of synergy. Moving on, body language and non-verbal communication are yet other important aspects of culture that often leads to anxiety and distress when misinterpreted or generalized, not mentioning that scholars have singled them out as major contributors of culture shock among sojourners

(Pantelidou & Craig 779). In terms of spatial behavior – an integral part of body language – North Americans stand closer to each other and touch each other more in normal conversations than do the South Africans (Billikopf para. 13). Maintaining less personal space and touching each other more in normal conversations in the South African culture is not only considered impolite, but it is seen to border on inappropriate behavior.

In equal measure, Americans make more eye contact than South Africans do, hence a sojourner from the African country is more likely to be viewed as shy or introverted in conversations while in actual sense they are not. Through observation, it has been revealed that shaking hands and other gestures prevalent between the two cultures means totally different things, and scholars have argued that generalizing these cultural attributes across cultures may prove dangerous (Winkelman 123). Shaking hands in business negotiations in the U. S. is a cultural sign of the end of negotiations and the beginning of cooperation, while the same implies beginning of negotiations in South Africa and other African countries (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 56). There exists intense cultural relativism in customs of food between the two cultures. Indeed, the dietary habits, culinary patterns, and table habits in the American culture intrinsically differs from the South African culture.

Anthropologists have often posited that different people who reside in different countries across the world have different customs for eating food (People & Bailey 16), and migration researchers have pointed that food and eating habits may form formidable pressure points for international students and other sojourners going into foreign culture (Pantelidou & Craig 779). This is especially true when sojourners find out that whatever is served on the <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-thus-end-up-experiencing-culture-shock-in/>

table in the new culture can only be termed a taboo within their cultural context back at home. While many Americans delight in eating hamburgers, pizza and sandwiches (People & Bailey 16), it is not uncommon to hear of some oriental restaurants serving dog and snake meat, a delicacy that can only be termed a taboo in the South African culture. Such discrepancies in eating habits often cause distress since people are unable to eat the food they are accustomed to (Culture Shock para. 6). It is imperative, however, to note that some customs of food in the American culture, including eating foods by hand, serving food family-style, and remaining standing until invited to sit down, are intrinsically similar to most African cultures (Winkelman 124). Other customs of foods such as not resting your elbows on the dining table, putting a napkin in the laps before eating, and leaving a small amount of food on the plate after eating are inherently different.

It is important to understand these habits to curtail embarrassing experiences that could lead to, or enhance culture shock. Although a lot of silences and invisibilities continue to characterize the field of sex and sexuality, anthropologists and other social theorists have cited it as one of the critical areas that leads to culture shock (Parker 251). In comparing this critical subject across the two cultures, it is evidently clear that the U. S. culture views issues of sex and sexuality more liberally than the South African culture, more so in granting civil liberties to gays and lesbians.

These liberties, rarely found in the South African culture, highlights the "... cross-cultural diversity of sexual cultures, sexual identities and sexual communities" (Parker 251). In spite of the momentous conceptual and methodological advances that has taken place in South Africa relating to <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-thus-end-up-experiencing-culture-shock-in/>

issues of sex and sexuality, culture still dictates that the subject be discussed behind closed doors, unlike in America where issues of sex and sexuality are openly discussed over dinner, with minors. While an American may not feel embarrassed discussing such issues with minors due to the cultural construction and the moral relativism with which the subject is accorded (People & Bailey 16), a South African will most probably feel slighted and embarrassed when issues of sex and sexuality are discussed in the presence of minors. As such, it is important for international students and other sojourners going to America to prepare for such cultural variations to avoid stressful and embarrassing experiences that could aggravate culture shock. Lastly, it is important that the issue of values be discussed. American social, cultural, and religious values are intrinsically different from the South African values. Values are important in determining how an international student or sojourner adapts into the new culture, and the fact that an individual can experience significant distress and anxiety when living in a different culture with different values has been well documented (Culture Shock para.

7). Coming from Sub-Saharan Africa, South African sojourners soon find that some of their own treasured and deeply held cultural values and assumptions may not be equally held in high esteem by members of the American culture, a precedent that may trigger profound culture shock.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has, in detail, compared and contrasted different aspects of U. S. and South African cultures, and how these aspects often leads to culture shock.

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More, specifically, the paper has discussed experiences of multiculturalism, body language and non-verbal communication, customs of food, sex and sexuality, and values within the context of how they affect and influence international students and other sojourners as they get exposed to the new culture - the American culture. Of most importance is the fact that such students and sojourners need to deal with these cultural variations in a relaxed and non-judgmental manner (Culture Shock para 7). Adequate physical, mental and psychological preparation before embracing the new culture is also necessary to avoid generalizations which might prove dangerous (Pantelidou & Craig 777). Stressful experiences in new culture will undoubtedly be reduced when the above is taken into consideration.

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