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RE-ENTRY ADJUSTMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL EXCHANGE STUDENTS TO NEW ZEALAND.

Cross-cultural transition within a loss and grief framework.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Psychology at Turitea Campus, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Sonja Marieke Soeterik 1998
Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Arnold Chamove for helping me to develop an abstract idea into a workable thesis, as well as for his expert guidance throughout the year. It was a privilege to work with you Arnold and your constant encouragement, problem solving and prodding when it seemed like the end was so far away, was especially appreciated.

Thank you to Dr Nancy Pachana for your interest, enthusiasm, and practical help.

Thank you to the New Zealand American Field Service Administrators, sojourners and Feilding Agricultural High School and students who participated in the study.

Thanks also to my parents for the financial and emotional support which allowed me the experience of having a sojourn myself and through out my time at university.

A big thanks to all my friends, especially Mercedes who stuffed envelopes and helped with all the other time consuming tasks of production. Thanks to Duncan for your plain English stats lessons and proof reading skills. Finally, a special thanks to my flatmate Nat for your support, always making time to listen, coffee making skills and doing all the practical things so I could concentrate on producing this thesis.
Abstract

While it is generally assumed re-entry into a person's own culture after life abroad can be problematic, little attention has been given in the theory or research to the re-entry life of sojourners, and even less to adolescent sojourners. The aim of the present study was to examine a new conceptual framework for the readjustment process using existing loss and grief models. This study examined nine variables associated with the grieving process (Despair, Anger/Hostility, Guilt, Social Isolation, Loss of Control, Rumination, Depersonalization, Death Anxiety and Somatization) and applied them to the cross-cultural transition of American Field Service (AFS) high school exchange students back into New Zealand after one year abroad. 207 sojourners responded to mail-in questionnaires measuring grief (Grief Experience Inventory; GEI) and psychological adjustment (the short form of the Profile of Mood States; POMS-SF). Their responses on the POMS-SF were compared to that of a home based control of high school students while responses on the GEI were compared with three reference groups and a control group from the GEI manual. Results suggest sojourners are more similar to people grieving after a death than people experiencing loss by divorce. While sojourners were typically satisfied with their exchange, 61% noted re-entry was problematic. Further support for the results came from the unsolicited qualitative information participants provided. The theoretical basis of the present study proved useful and it is suggested that future research could develop this methodology further.
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