# DIFFERENT WAYS OF BELONGING:
# AMERICAN JET PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS
# OF JAPANESE MEMBERSHIP NORMS

ADAM M. KOMISAROF

Shobi University, Department of Management & Policy Studies, Kawagoe, Japan

Correspondence regarding this article may be addressed to:

2-203-1-107 Azumacho

Saitama-shi, Saitama 330-0841 Japan

Phone/Fax: 048-644-2508

email: KAkomisarof@aol.com

ABSTRACT


    A significant body of literature about American sojourners in Japan indicates that many Americans perceive that they are marginalized as outsiders in Japanese society.  Rather than support or refute this view, this study began with the assumption that U.S.-Japanese differences in norms for gaining and maintaining membership in social collectives may be at the root of such perceptions.  The Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) Program has invited thousands of Americans to teach English in Japan's schools since 1987.  As it provides a setting for sustained intercultural contact (one to three years), and approximately two-thirds of American participants terminate their contracts after one year, this program was chosen as a potentially revealing context for examining American perceptions of Japanese membership norms.  In order to improve U.S.-Japanese intercultural relations on the JET Program, this heuristic study attempted to understand: (a) common membership norms among Japanese public junior high and high school teachers, (b) the extent to which American JET Program participants perceive these norms being applied to them, and (c) patterns in how these norms tend to be perceived, i.e., as inclusive or exclusive, and why.  Twenty-eight membership norms were identified through a literature review, and a categorization scheme was created as a means of organizing, according to concomitant values, themes about such norms that pervade the literature.  The second and third inquiries were pursued through content analysis of semi-structured interviews.  The membership norms most often described by subjects as having affected their collegial relations included, for example, particularistic treatment based on status as a foreign guest in Japan, contextual self-disclosure patterns, and expectations for high Japanese linguistic proficiency.  Subjects' perceptions of the ten most commonly cited norms were identified and analyzed, revealing how JET participants thought that such norms positively or negatively influenced their senses of belonging among coworkers.

**DIFFERENT WAYS OF BELONGING:**

**AMERICAN JET PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS**

**OF JAPANESE MEMBERSHIP NORMS**


In reviewing literature that examines intercultural interactions between American residents of Japan and Japanese host nationals, a common theme emerges: many Americans perceive that the Japanese will not completely accept foreigners into their society, and they evaluate this tendency quite critically (Bell, 1973; Condon, 1986; Life, 1993; Kopp, 1994; Tanaka, et al., 1994; Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching [AJET], 1996; McConnell, 2000). Rather than arguing for or against this position, this study proposes that the roots of such perceptions may be found in intercultural differences between the United States and Japan regarding how people gain, maintain, and conceive of group membership.

Specifically, American perceptions of exclusion may result at least in part because the process through which people come to belong, as well as the perceptual cues through which they judge their membership status within a collective, are quite different in Japan and America. Thus, Americans may not be fulfilling key behavioral expectations that are critical if they hope to be accepted in Japanese groups. Furthermore, they may be misunderstanding the degree to which they do or do not belong because they hold a different set of criteria for measuring belonging than the Japanese. These sojourners may be interpreting Japanese behaviors as exclusive when they are not construed that way by the Japanese themselves. If Americans better understand the social norms through which the Japanese gain and maintain membership, as well as the values and cultural assumptions inherent in this process, then some of these misunderstandings may be rectified.

However, this paper is not arguing that American sojourners have exactly the same norms applied to them as their Japanese colleagues. Being non-Japanese and in many cases temporary sojourners, Americans are likely exempted from being treated exactly like Japanese; on the other hand, since they are living in a Japanese cultural context, they are expected to follow some norms to achieve partial acceptance and membership (Bachnik, 1994c). Therefore, the primary purposes of this article are to elucidate Japanese membership norms, as well as identify patterns in how Americans living in Japan tend to perceive these norms if and when they are applied to them. In other words, which norms are seen as hindering or facilitating closer relations, and how? If these perceptual patterns are better understood, they can be used as

a basis for better understanding the state of U.S.-Japanese intercultural relations in Japan and how to improve them.

This study focuses upon the process of belonging in the workplace, particularly for Americans teaching in Japanese public junior high and high schools, which is achieved through two means.  First, a literature review clarifies Japanese membership norms among professionals who work in public junior high and high schools, as well as companies with organizational cultures that approximate schools in terms of how membership among colleagues is gained, maintained, and conceived.  In other words, norms are included in the review that are common in organizations stable in size and employee composition—-typically, established corporations.  Afterwards, the results of interviews with Americans teaching in Japan are presented in order to identify if and how these membership norms are perceived as affecting their work experiences.

## Framing the Context for Inquiry: The JET Program

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program provides a fruitful context for exploring these intercultural issues.  Established by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1987, it brought over six thousand people for the 2000-2001 school year from thirty-nine countries to teach their native languages and/or promote international exchange in Japan's public junior high and high schools (JET members to meet in Kobe, 2000).  This program, the largest personnel exchange program in the world (JET members to meet in Kobe), constitutes a revolutionary social experiment and serves as a case study in intercultural relations when citizens who embrace profoundly different cultures attempt to work together on a long-term basis.

The JET Program has both succeeded and fallen short of its goal to foster positive international relations; although many JETs return home fond of Japan, others leave with negative impressions (JET participants foster international exchange, 1998).  Moreover, the retention rate among American JET participants remains rather low.  The program permits three years of residence in Japan, yet in 1998-99, only one out of three participants (33.4%) renewed their contacts for a second year and approximately one out of six (16.0%) stayed for a third (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture, 1998).  While improved collegial relations may not persuade everyone to stay longer, this study will attempt to identify common stumbling blocks in forming closer ties among coworkers, thus promoting the quality of cultural exchange that the program was originally designed to facilitate.

## Research Questions

To gather useful data toward achieving this aim, the following research questions were asked: 1. As evidenced in the literature, how is membership gained and maintained within Japanese work collectives in public junior high and high schools (i.e., among full-time teachers), as well as organizations that resemble schools in applying these membership norms? 2. To what extent do American JET Program participants perceive different Japanese membership norms being applied to them? 3. How do American JET teachers perceive Japanese membership norms, i.e., as inclusive or exclusive? 4. Are there any patterns in the criteria that American JET participants utilize in forming judgments as to whether a membership norm is inclusive or exclusive?

## Japanese Membership Norms

In order to respond to the first research question, an inventory of norms for gaining and maintaining membership status in Japanese schools was compiled through a literature review. The categorization scheme was created by the author as a means of organizing, according to concomitant values, themes about membership norms that pervade the literature. In this section, norms (preceded by numbers in the inventory below) are divided according to underlying values related to Japanese membership (preceded by letters in the following inventory). For example, the norms of exchanging acts of kindness with one's colleagues (e.g., giving and receiving small gifts) and showing obedience toward superiors for their previous acts of benevolence are related to the value placed upon meeting social obligations (i.e., "Value G" below). Behavioral expectations were listed for Japanese workers in general, except when the literature clearly indicated that such expectations also apply specifically to teachers. According to the literature, in order to gain and maintain membership in Japanese work collectives, these values and norms exist:

## Value A: Contextual Dynamism in Japanese Social Relations

In building and maintaining human relationships, Japanese are expected to adapt their communicative mode (on a continuum from high formality/distance to casual/intimate) based not only on mutual liking, but also the roles in the relationship (Doi, 1973; Lebra, 1976; Bachnik, 1994a & 1994b; Rosenberger 1994); for

example, a new, young teacher would speak more formally to an elder teacher than one of the same age.  It is also common to shift between communicative modes in the same relationship, based on the socio-physical context.  Frequently, teachers go to bars or restaurants to engage in intimate, relaxed conversations, as more formal and restrained interactions predominantly characterize the workplace (Lebra; Bachnik, 1994b).  Based on these considerations, Japanese are expected to follow norms for:

1. Context-appropriate use of honorific or colloquial language.  Formality and informality comprise a continuum, with increasing formality resulting in the use of more polite linguistic structures and greater informality in the use of more colloquial forms (Lebra, 1976; Yum, 1988).

2.  Context-appropriate degree of self-disclosure.  The degree of self-disclosure is adjusted, based on the formality and social distance in a given situation or relationship.  Typically, the greater the formality and distance, the less in which disclosure is engaged (Barnlund, 1989; Bachnik, 1994a).

3. Context-appropriate display of self-restraint in expressing one's needs ("*enryo*") vs. relaxation, dependence ("*amae*"), and spontaneity (Lebra, 1976; Doi, 1985; Bachnik, 1994a & 1994b).  As Bachnik (1994b) summarized:

> [I]ntimacy and socially required discipline are inversely related so that the more discipline (or self-restraint) that is gauged as appropriate, the less intimacy that can be expressed.  To put this another way, one is constantly constraining or expressing "self," in relation to the degree of social constraint, or relaxation of constraint, that is perceived appropriate.  (p. 25)

Value B: Japanese Language Proficiency

1. As a Japanese, one must speak Japanese with native fluency (Muro, 1983; Kidder, 1992), and as a foreigner, in order to communicate successfully and achieve social integration, one must be proficient enough to function smoothly in interactions with group members where Japanese is expected to be spoken (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Kopp, 1994).

Value C: Japanese Collectivism: The Precedence of Group over Individual Goals and Expectations for Togetherness

In order to gain and maintain membership, Japanese teachers are expected to:
1.  Work far longer than the minimum, contracted forty-hour workweek (White,

1987; Sato & McLaughlin, 1998).

2.  Work far more than the minimum, contracted 240 school days per year in order to supervise student activities and attend administrative meetings during vacations (Sato & McLaughlin, 1998).

3.  Arrive at work punctually each day (White, 1987).

4.  Be present at social events after work hours and on weekends such as meals, parties, group trips, and professional enrichment activities (e.g., formal research and voluntary study groups) (Sato & McLaughlin, 1998).

5.  Avoiding protracted vacations and absences in general (White, 1988).

6.  Attend nonacademic events, such as student club meetings, sports festivals, culture festivals, and school excursions (Shimahara, 1991; Sato & McLaughlin, 1998).

## Value D: Lifelong Commitment

Japanese teachers should:

1.  Join the work force relatively soon after graduating from college (Shimahara, 1991).

2.  Make a lifetime commitment to their prefectural school system (White, 1987; Shimahara, 1991). Although corporate restructuring has occurred with increasing frequency since the bursting of the bubble economy, the lifetime employment status of teachers has not been similarly threatened.

The literature also indicated that Japanese workers need to:

3.  Undergo a long, incremental process of gaining trust and full membership within an organization (Kopp, 1994).

## Value E: The Importance of Shared Qualifications and Experience in Group Membership

In order to forge a group identity, Japanese workers must have common qualifications and build a repertoire of shared experiences (White, 1988; Bachnik, 1994c). Specifically, Japanese teachers are expected to:

1.  Graduate from a Japanese university (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1993, 1997).

2.  Earn a teacher's certificate and pass the prefectural entrance examination (White, 1987; Shimahara, 1991; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1993, 1994).

3.  Undergo both a formal (i.e., government-mandated program) and informal in-service orientation (i.e., guidance from seasoned colleagues in daily social interactions) (White, 1987; Shimahara, 1991; Ministry of Education, Science, and

Culture, 1993; Shimahara & Sakai, 1998).

    4.  Work in teams with colleagues where roles are diffuse and members contribute whatever is necessary for the timely, successful completion of assigned projects (White, 1987; LeTendre, 1998; Sato & McLaughlin, 1998).

Value F: Recognition of and Veneration for the Organizational Hierarchy

    LeTendre (1998) as well as Shimahara and Sakai (1998) indicated that vertical relations are utilized to frame interactions between teachers in Japanese schools. Consequently, according to the literature, Japanese teachers are expected to:

    1.  Accept guidance from superiors in how to improve work performance, as well as other forms of benevolent care (e.g., favors, or efforts to act as an intermediary between new employees and the work collective) (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture, 1997; LeTendre, 1998; Shimahara & Sakai, 1998).

    2.  Offer guidance and benevolent care to subordinates (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture, 1997; LeTendre, 1998; Shimahara & Sakai, 1998).

    3a.  Accept differential treatment by colleagues based on hierarchical status, as defined by age, length of experience, and job title (LeTendre, 1998).  Americans are granted status as esteemed foreign guests; thus, nationality is a highly salient factor in motivating and shaping the differential treatment received from other teachers (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, 1990; McConnell, 2000).

    The literature also indicated that Japanese workers are expected to:

    3b.  Accept differential treatment by colleagues based on hierarchical status, as defined by gender (with men being generally higher in status than women) (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994).

    4.  Obey directives and grant requests of superiors (Lebra, 1976; Hendry, 1987; Roland, 1988; Bachnik, 1994c).

    5.  Use honorific linguistic forms when referring to superiors and humble ones when referring to oneself (Yum, 1988; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994).

Value G: Fulfilling Obligations ("*Giri*") and Duties ("*Gimu*")

    Workers are expected to:

    1.  Exchange acts of kindness (e.g., favors and gifts), thus building mutual obligations with colleagues to solidify and improve relations (Lebra, 1976; Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1991; Gercik, 1992).

    2.  Reciprocate acts of kindness from superiors with obedience and occasional

gifts (Lebra, 1976; Hendry, 1987; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994).

Moreover, Japanese teachers are expected to:

3. Participate in the academic and moral education of students, particularly through the ritual of guidance, both inside and outside of the classroom (White, 1987; Feiler, 1991; Shimahara, 1991; LeTendre, 1998; Sato & McLaughlin, 1998).

Value H: Maintaining Harmony

Japanese are expected to:

1. Adhere to a behavioral code ("*tatemae*") that protects the face of colleagues (Gercik, 1992; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994).

2. Employ a communication style that is non-confrontational, accommodating, and conflict-avoiding (Barnlund, 1989; Hofstede, 1991; Tezuka, 1992; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Goldman, 1994; McConnell, 2000).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Subject Characteristics

The subjects were generated from a network sample of American JET participants living in the Tokyo area. Although JET Program English teachers include six nationalities, in order to avoid confounding cultural variables, the subject population was narrowed to Americans. Thus, nationality and proximity were the only criteria used to determine subject eligibility. The sample size for this project was twelve people, all of whom were current JET Program participants. The network sample yielded eight females and four males, including ten European Americans, one Japanese American, and one Korean American.

Interview Technique

The data were gathered through interviews that lasted sixty to ninety minutes, and all questions were tested for reliability as well as face and content validity by conducting interviews in a pilot project. The questions were open-ended and the interviews were semi-structured. This elicitive method was preferred due to the heuristic, exploratory nature of this research.

Content Analysis

Interviews were fully transcribed (yielding over two hundred pages of text) and responses to research questions two through four regarding the awareness and perceptions of Japanese membership norms were formulated through informal content analysis.  In conducting content analysis, the membership norms noted by each subject were recorded, as well as whether those norms were perceived as inclusive, exclusive, a combination thereof, or neutral.

The terms "exclusive" and "inclusive" were kept purposefully broad to elicit a wide range of subject responses.  For example, different grades of intensity were not categorized, such as strong vs. moderate feelings of inclusion, nor were impressions of active vs. unintentional exclusion.  A third category was created for responses which indicated that subjects perceived the same membership criterion as either inclusive or exclusive, depending upon the context or situation.  For example, when considering the Japanese expectation for coworkers to attend social events after hours, a subject may have felt both included when invited in the past and excluded when not invited.   Finally, subject responses were categorized neutrally when they noted a particular membership criterion without feelings of inclusion or exclusion.

RESULTS

Explanation of Table One: Perceptions of Japanese Membership Criteria among American
JET Program Participants

Table 1 contains the membership norms discovered in the literature review and lists them in the same alphanumeric code.  In order to facilitate responding to research questions two, three, and four, this table includes the number of subjects who described each norm as making them feel included, excluded, both included and excluded (depending upon the context), or neutral in reference to their colleagues. Finally, the total number of subjects who noted each item is tallied.

TABLE 1

Perceptions of Japanese Membership Criteria among American JET Program Participants

| Membership Criterion | I | E | I/E | N | T |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1.  Use context-appropriate honorific or colloquial language | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A2. | Engage in context-appropriate self-disclosure | 4 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 11 |
| A3. | Engage in context-appropriate displays of hesitation or dependence and spontaneity | 2 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 10 |
| B1. | Attain high Japanese language proficiency | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 11 |
| C1. | Work 40+ hour weeks | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| C2. | Work 240+ days per year | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| C3. | Be punctual to work | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| C4. | Attend social events with colleagues outside of work hours | 3 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 12 |
| C5. | Attend work every day | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| C6. | Attend school-related nonacademic events | 0 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 11 |
| D1. | Join the work force soon after college | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| D2. | Make a lifetime commitment to teaching | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| D3. | Undergo a long, incremental process of gaining trust and full membership at work | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| E1. | Graduate from a Japanese university | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E2. | Earn a teaching certificate and pass the prefectural entrance examination | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| E3. | Undergo in-service orientation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E4. | Work collaboratively with colleagues | 1 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 12 |
| F1. | Accept benevolent care from superiors | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| F2. | Extend benevolent care to subordinates | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| F3. | Accept differential treatment based on hierarchical status: | | | | | |
| | Differential treatment based on nationality/guest status | 0 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 11 |
| | Differential treatment based on gender | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 12 |
| F4. | Obey directives and grant requests of superiors | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| F5. | Use appropriate speech forms with superiors | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| G1. | Exchange acts of kindness with colleagues | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 8 |
| G2. | Reciprocate acts of kindness from | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

```
          superiors
G3.  Participate in the academic and moral      0      0      2      4      6
          education of students
H1.  Adhere to a behavioral code that           2      4      1      0      7
          protects the face of colleagues
H2.  Employ a accommodating, conflict-          1      5      1      1      8
          avoiding communication style
```
_____

DISCUSSION

<u>Recognition of Membership Norms</u>

Seventeen of the twenty-eight membership norms were recognized by at least four subjects (Table 1).  These results indicate that many of the norms initially discovered in the literature review were perceived by at least several JET participants. As Table 1 also indicates, eleven membership criteria were not widely noted by the subjects (i.e., zero to two responses).  Three possible scenarios can be identified to explain such omissions:

1.  Participants recognized that norms were applied by their colleagues but did not discuss them during the interviews.

2.  Participants were subject to certain norms yet unaware of this.

3.  Participants were free from some norms applied to Japanese ingroup members due to their statuses as nonpermanent workers, non-Japanese, and/or assistant (as opposed to regular) English teachers.  For example, none of the subjects reported that their coworkers expected them to undergo an inservice orientation with other Japanese teachers, probably because Japanese teachers only have such expectations for each other.  Such exemptions from Japanese norms could explain the low response rates for items in Table 1: as assistant teachers and foreigners, the subjects may have been spared from some of the norms for building and maintaining human relations (i.e., norms A1, F2, F4, F5, and G2), fulfilling the duty of full-time teachers (i.e.,

norm C2), and acquiring the qualifications necessary to be granted regular teacher status (i.e., norms D1, E1, and E3).  As a result, these norms would not have been perceived by the subjects as being applied to them.  However, to ascertain if and how JETs are exempted from these norms, further research is necessary.

## Relationship of Membership Norms and Inclusion/Exclusion

The ten membership norms most commonly described by JET participants are analyzed in this section.  Specifically, trends are identified in how JET participants' senses of belonging were affected by each norm, as well as patterns in the criteria that JETs used in making judgments as to whether these norms were inclusive or exclusive.

### Context-Appropriate Degree of Self-Disclosure (Norm A2)

Eleven subjects reported that Japanese self-disclosure norms affected their perceived sense of belonging among coworkers.  Some subjects felt included by these norms (4 people) and others excluded (3), or either depending upon the context (4). All subjects described self-disclosure as a sign of inclusion, which corroborates research indicating that Americans value self-disclosure as a means of developing relationships (Nakanishi & Johnson, 1993).  Therefore, when JET participants felt satisfied with the amount of self-disclosure engaged in at work, they felt included; when dissatisfied, they felt excluded.

Only one subject veered from this pattern, who is a second generation Japanese American.  She found receiving *"on,"* or acts of kindness from colleagues, to be a satisfying substitute for self-disclosure.

> I think there's less of an open friendliness among Japanese.  The surface is not as friendly, like that open friendliness of Americans.  But when it came down to it, they might be more willing to give you something or do something for you than Americans would. . . .  In the beginning, maybe the lack of open friendliness made me feel excluded and felt cold. . . .  But at the same time, before I came they had donated so many things to me. . . .  In that way I felt included because they've taken care of me.

Regarding self-disclosure, another pattern was evident: subjects who frequently interacted with coworkers outside of school (e.g., at restaurants,

teachers' homes, and faculty trips) tended to perceive Japanese self-disclosure as inclusive.  Conversely, those who interacted with colleagues almost exclusively at work reported that levels of self-disclosure were unsatisfying and caused them to feel distant.  This dichotomy likely resulted from the tendency for Japanese to engage in highly limited self-disclosure in the official atmosphere of the workplace when compared to outside social activities (Lebra, 1976).  The divergent perceptions among subjects suggest that JET participants who socialize with colleagues away from work place themselves in a socio-physical context in which self-disclosure becomes more socially acceptable, and that such events play an important role in enriching collegial relations.

## Context-Appropriate Display of Hesitation Vs. Dependence and Spontaneity (A3)

Although participants reported variant responses in Table 1, their opinions about hesitation ("*enryo*") and the criterion that they applied in reaching such conclusions were quite consistent: subjects felt that communication with colleagues characterized by informality and relaxation was comfortable and desirable, while communication characterized by hesitation felt restrained and at times rejecting. Therefore, JETs who felt satisfied with the frequency of relaxed interactions felt included among their colleagues, and those who were dissatisfied felt excluded.

These findings are supported by Stewart and Bennett (1991), who described informality as a sign of social acceptance among Americans.  When deprived of this sign, JETs may have interpreted *enryo* as indicating greater distance than their Japanese colleagues.  In formal socio-physical contexts (including the workplace), rather than being intended as signs of exclusion among the Japanese, *enryo* engenders courtesy and respect (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992).  This polite, positive meaning of hesitation in Japan was not verbalized by any of the interviewees.

## Linguistic Proficiency (B1)

According to Table 1, eleven of the subjects reported that their language ability affected their degree of belonging at work, either negatively (if they were not able to communicate in Japanese) or positively (if they could).  Furthermore, many believed that their degree of belonging had increased in the past along with their Japanese language ability.  Those who were conversational in Japanese stated that they could communicate about a greater variety of topics in more depth, and they could speak comfortably with more colleagues, i.e., non-English speakers.  The subjects who were not conversational felt limited to communicating almost exclusively

with coworkers who spoke English well, i.e., predominantly English teachers. Moreover, such JETs felt that they could have enjoyed more pleasurable collegial interactions if they could have used Japanese as a communicative tool in tandem with English.

The responses of some subjects also suggest a relationship between subjects' feelings of inclusion and their *perceived* Japanese linguistic ability rather than their actual proficiency. Although one subject had studied Japanese for three years at Harvard, he still perceived his Japanese ability as inadequate for forging better collegial relations. Other subjects learned Japanese only after arriving in Japan, yet they believed that speaking Japanese, even with limited linguistic repertoires, had a highly positive impact on coworker relationships. While the Harvard graduate's perception may have been related to a real lack of ability, a more plausible explanation is that his proficiency was far greater than that of the other subjects, but his low self-confidence adversely affected his perceptions about his collegial relations.

Another participant felt that despite his conversational fluency in Japanese, his identity as a native speaker of English often precluded his acceptance by colleagues. In other words, coworkers sometimes avoided him or appeared quite nervous since they incorrectly assumed that he could speak only English. This subject recalled, "I once sat down next to a teacher at my desk for the first time and he nervously said to the teacher next to him, 'I don't speak any English.' I thought, 'Oh no, not again.'" Therefore, teachers transferred their discomfort with speaking English to a discomfort with speaking to the subject, despite his ability to converse in Japanese.


Attendance at Social Activities Outside of Work (C4)

This expectation was noted by all subjects, with three finding this norm inclusive and nine finding it either inclusive or exclusive, depending upon the context. The JETs interviewed recollected attending after-hours social events that were either official (e.g., English department parties), or voluntary and selective (e.g., meals among friends). Although some scholars (Condon, 1986; White, 1988; Trompenaars, 1993 & 1994) have indicated that Americans compartmentalize their work and personal lives, most of the subjects in this study expected to engage in social activities with colleagues and enjoyed doing so.

The subjects agreed that invitations to social gatherings made them feel included, while the perceived lack thereof had the opposite effect. Although invitations were important in making subjects feel included, several other criteria

were utilized in reaching such judgments: relaxed, informal communication with colleagues (i.e., with little *enryo*), as well as the opportunity to actively engage in activities, rather than merely act as bystanders, were necessary.  One subject recounted an official all-staff party where she felt uninvolved and hence excluded:

> I don't think the teachers expected me to come. . . .  They had their skits and songs, and I didn't feel like part of it. . . .  All of the skits and entertainment were going on at the front of the room, and our table was at the back. . . .  I was not invited to the front of the room, and few people spoke to me where I was sitting.

### Mandatory Attendance at Nonacademic School Events (C6)

Eleven of the subjects reported that participation in nonacademic, official school events was an important means of becoming involved in school communal life and feeling included.  Generally, in order to feel included, subjects needed an invitation to attend, as well as encouragement to participate actively in the event once present.  On the other hand, they felt excluded when they were either not informed about an event, prohibited from attending (e.g., school trips that were chaperoned only by full-time Japanese faculty members), or perceived themselves as passive bystanders once in attendance.  To the extent that their limited Japanese ability would permit, most of the JETs wanted to enact similar roles as other teachers present. One subject described such a situation, i.e., when she was given the same responsibility as the other teachers in monitoring student behavior on a school trip, and why it was satisfying:

> I had duty where I had to make sure the kids weren't being rambunctious.  I was assigned a position just like all of the other teachers and the students had to check in with me, just like they did with all of their regular homeroom teachers.  So that made me feel a part of the group, instead of having to deal with the attitude, "You're the JET, so you don't have to do this."

Participants also desired the same rights and privileges as teachers that were extended to their colleagues.  For example, one subject felt included when she sat separately from the students with the other teachers on a school trip, while another subject felt excluded because she was expected to sit with the students.

The Importance of Cooperative, Collaborative Work (E4)

All of the subjects recognized the importance of working in collaborative teams in forming collegial relationships, for example, in planning team-taught lessons, participating in English department meetings, and making departmental English tests. However, their perceptions about how this norm shaped their experiences varied (Table 1). Despite this range, two underlying patterns in subject responses emerged. The two neutral subjects desired minimal involvement in collaborative tasks. However, the other ten subjects wanted to engage in such work with colleagues and felt included when they could contribute to projects at the levels of planning, decision-making, and execution. One enthusiastic participant described such work relations, "We both have our own responsibilities, and then we put them together. Also, we discuss, plan together, and have cooperative decision-making." Conversely, these ten non-neutral JETs felt excluded when they lacked opportunities to participate in collaborative projects despite their desire to do so. One struggling teacher commented, "I don't plan lessons with my colleagues. I do them all alone. That makes me feel very disconnected. I want to be more collaborative." Most people in this group perceived themselves being prevented from doing work that they wanted to do, and many attributed these restrictions to being foreign. As one JET reflected, "I am definitely the foreigner limited in my roles."

The source of these perceptions likely lies in the divergence between American and Japanese membership concepts and the consequent eligibility to perform tasks within an organization. Status in collectivistic cultures tends to be ascribed (Trompenaars, 1993 and 1994), and membership in Japanese collectives is based, according to White (1988), on the "active presence and participation in the social network" (p. 105). With the ascribed job title of "Assistant English Teacher" (AET) and impermanent residency in Japan, the subjects lacked the long-term presence at work, government-sanctioned teacher accreditation, and the official job title which are prerequisites for standard, full-time teacher status and complete access to the responsibilities shared by group members in collaborative projects.

Conversely, literature suggested that gaining and maintaining membership in American organizations is based upon competently performing tasks for which each member is uniquely skilled (Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Brislin, 1993). With this competence-based membership concept, the subjects expected to be granted roles in projects for which they possessed enabling skills, and they felt alienated from the group when not permitted to engage in such membership-confirming tasks. For example, when the staff was grading entrance examinations to her high school, one participant

recounted the following:

> I was only allowed to do one small pocket of work. After that, they were tallying the scores, and I said, "I can add this stack." And they were really adamant that I couldn't. . . . I felt like it was a task I could do but the rules didn't let me. . . . All of the teachers at that table were doing it. . . . So I'm always included but not really.

Differential Treatment from Colleagues Based on Hierarchical Status (F3)

Subjects frequently noted differential treatment from colleagues based on hierarchical status. Eleven JETs described nationality as a cause of such behavior and twelve discussed gender.

Differential treatment based on nationality/guest status. Regarding this norm, five subjects felt excluded, five felt either included or excluded (depending upon the situation), and one reported the trend neutrally. All of the European American subjects described receiving extra attention as a foreigner and status within the school hierarchy as a foreign guest. The two Asian American participants reported similar treatment but added that compared to their European American JET colleagues, they "blended in" more and received comparatively less special care.

Such special treatment was viewed both positively and negatively by the subjects depending upon the context. In general, JETs felt included by differential treatment when they felt overwhelmed by cultural or linguistic factors and could not get their needs met otherwise (e.g., having school rules translated into English when unable to read Japanese or receiving assistance in buying a train ticket when unaware of the necessary procedures to do so). Furthermore, participants felt included when they received benefits which fulfilled highly-valued needs, such as desires for positive social contact and attention (e.g., being invited to teachers' homes regularly, which is an infrequent practice in Japan) or exemption from duties perceived as superfluous (e.g., faculty meetings that covered topics unrelated to their daily work).

Subjects typically reported that their needs for such special accommodation and assistance were inversely proportional to their time spent in Japan. As these needs decreased, the participants usually felt excluded by unusual treatment, whether positive or negative, that was based solely upon their nationality/guest status. Instead, they preferred consistent, uniform, and egalitarian treatment among their colleagues. This proclivity likely stems from the American value of universalism

(i.e., the norm of dealing with people alike across relationships and contexts), which serves as an indicator of respect and social acceptance (Yum, 1988; Hofstede, 1991; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Similarly, one subject explained why she felt excluded by having her foreign status marked, "Because you're being singled out. You know you're not being treated just as a person for who you are but more just because of the place that you come from." She elaborated upon this preference for universalistic interactions:

> Basically, when teachers treat me like anybody else, I feel included--when I'm treated neither specially or negatively--because I think both kind of make you feel like an outsider. When people are extra nice to you because you're a foreigner, it feels almost as bad as when they're being extra bad to you because you're a foreigner. So the times that they just took me as another teacher . . . were the times that seemed to be the best. . . . People don't act special if they think you're normal.

This preference stands in stark contrast to Japanese tendencies toward particularism, in which special treatment toward foreign guests is an indicator of respect, care, and kindness (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, 1990). Due to the divergent meanings of particularism in Japanese and American cultures, the subjects employed a different criterion for assessing positive relations (i.e., universalistic treatment) and negatively construed Japanese particularism when it may not have been intended this way.

Specifically, subjects felt excluded in three types of situations. First, when they were bestowed honors as a result of their nationality rather than individual characteristics, they felt uncomfortable and desired universalistic treatment. Common examples included making keynote speeches at ceremonies or being seated as guests of honor at staff parties.

Furthermore, subjects often felt distant from their colleagues when offered help with matters in which they perceived themselves as self-sufficient, i.e., linguistically and culturally competent. A commonly cited case occurred when colleagues spoke English to JET participants in contexts where Japanese was the linguistic norm and the JET was communicating competently in Japanese. One subject described when she was conversing in Japanese with a group of teachers and suddenly was joined by an English teacher:

> Someone told me in Japanese, "It's still raining out." And the English teacher
> said in English, "It's still raining out." I think that's offensive because
> I was actively engaging with another Japanese teacher in Japanese, so I was
> obviously understanding, but she still made a point of translating.

Therefore, in contexts where Japanese was typically spoken, if the subjects had enough linguistic proficiency to understand the conversation, then they felt included when spoken to in Japanese and excluded if addressed in English.

Finally, when subjects received compliments, unless they were perceived as acknowledgements of tangible, valued accomplishments, then they tended to assume that such comments were undeserved, insincere, and markers of outsider status. For example, one JET participant appreciated compliments about his Japanese ability if he believed that he had demonstrated his competence to the listener. However, if he received a compliment after uttering only a few words, such as "Good morning," then he perceived the compliment as disingenuous, as well as a reference to his status as a non-native Japanese speaker and hence as an outsider in Japanese society.

Compliments which elicited similar reactions were commonly about subjects' abilities to perform everyday functions in Japan, such as sitting in the traditional Japanese position of *"seiza"* (i.e., on one's knees with hands folded) and using chopsticks. One participant summarized why such compliments bothered her, "With these comments, even though they're small, they never let me forget that I'm a foreigner and that their expectations for me are different." In other words, since Japanese would not compliment each other on their ability to use chopsticks, sit *seiza*, or speak Japanese, many subjects interpreted these utterances negatively since they violated expectations for universalistic treatment.

The rejection of particularism among more seasoned JETs was never categorical, however, but rather a matter of degree, since their ability to navigate cultural and linguistic challenges was always developing, and therefore incomplete. Consequently, many subjects held paradoxical expectations for help and universalistic treatment in situations when they felt both partially challenged and competent. This created an ambivalent desire to have both needs fulfilled simultaneously--a paradox of which none of the subjects expressed awareness. As one JET explained:

> The teachers always ask me to play on the staff softball team. . . . Yesterday
> they asked me if I wanted to buy a T-shirt for the team. So I feel like a
> member of the softball team. . . . I don't feel like they treat me different

so much, except sometimes they bring an English teacher to translate for me, but that's OK.

Differential treatment based on gender.  In reference to this norm, five subjects felt included (four males and one female), four felt excluded (all female), one felt either depending upon the context (one female), and two made neutral comments (both female).  The male subjects who described inclusion all reported being treated more positively than female JET participants or Japanese female teachers at their school due to gender.  Interestingly, the females who felt included perceived that they received positive treatment (e.g., invitations to social events by groups of male colleagues) because they were women.

The subjects who felt excluded were all women.  Although their specific reasons for feeling this way varied, they all desired to be treated equally and uniformly with their male colleagues.  In general, they reported three types of problematic situations.  Several perceived that their male Japanese colleagues were hesitant to initiate communication and felt awkward interacting with female JETs because of gender differences.  Other participants felt ostracized when standards derived from Japanese gender roles, which conflicted with their personal values or practices, were applied toward them.  For example, one woman was teased by her colleagues when they discovered that her husband cooked lunch for her.  Finally, two subjects described male JET participants receiving preferential treatment from Japanese JET Program administrators, such as invitations to bars that excluded female JETs.

Exchanging Acts of Kindness (G1)

Eight subjects discussed the norms among Japanese teachers of exchanging favors and gifts ("on") in order to maintain and build insider relationships (Table 1).  JET participants benefited from various acts of kindness, such as invitations to after school clubs, gifts, and documents translated for them.  The subjects described giving on by practicing English conversation with colleagues, voluntarily assisting teachers in various tasks, and buying souvenirs for coworkers while traveling.

The perceptions of these JETs can be categorized according to two basic patterns.  Five participants felt included whenever they received acts of kindness and excluded when they expected benevolence which they did not receive.  The other three subjects distinguished between voluntary and obligatory reciprocity norms in determining whether or not colleagues' acts of kindness made them feel included.  In other words, these subjects felt included by voluntary reciprocity, i.e., when they perceived their

colleagues acting benevolent out of their free will and due to personal liking for the JET.  These participants also felt excluded by obligatory reciprocity, such as when Japanese coworkers seemed motivated primarily by a sense of duty to their roles as colleagues or hosts, or if the Japanese were trying to pay back *on* that they had previously received from the subjects.  In these instances, JET participants felt uncomfortable for having received a favor or gift, and often preferred not to be given to at all in such situations.

Harmony-Based Communication Style (H2)

The norm of employing an accommodating and conflict-avoiding communication style was perceived as inclusive (1), exclusive (5), either depending on the context (1), and neutral (1) by the subjects.  The JET who consistently perceived this norm inclusively respected and often utilized this communication style.  He also cited his non-confrontational manner as important in gaining trust among colleagues.

The other five subjects felt exclusion at least some of the time from Japanese indirectness and conflict avoidance, and all reported that the depth of their coworker relationships was limited at least somewhat by these different approaches to communication.  Several participants reported negative sanctioning by colleagues when they expressed controversial opinions, and others felt that Japanese confrontation avoidance obscured deeper issues that needed to be resolved through open and direct dialogue.

Other JET participants perceived that daily communication was ineffective and frustrating due to their colleagues' indirect, non-confrontational communication style.  As one subject described:

I tell people, "If you don't like my idea, please tell me, it's really OK," but they won't tell me if they don't like it.  Or I'm always asking them questions and always second guessing what they're thinking. . . .  It's really tiring.

Limitations of this Study and Recommendations for Further Research

In order to better understand JET perceptions of membership norms among their colleagues, in future studies, a larger population should be interviewed to generate broader generalizations.  Populations should be representative of American JETs' diversity, as the effects of race and gender need to be better understood.  Furthermore,

future studies could address intercultural differences among JETs, as participants represent many nations.  It might also be useful to compare the effects on JETs' perceptions of membership norms for those who change schools regularly and those who work in one base school year round.  Finally, data could be categorized according to first, second, and third-year JET participants' responses, in order to grasp how acculturation affects perceptions of norms.

CONCLUSION

By identifying trends in how American JETs perceive Japanese membership norms, insight has been gained into which norms are being positively adapted to as well as which are not.  Presumably, the next step in improving intercultural relations is to utilize intercultural training of JETs to facilitate positive adaptation to these norms.  Concurrently, if Japanese teachers are trained to better understand American perceptions of Japanese membership norms, then they can work to include JETs more thoroughly in the school community (e.g., by inviting JETs to relaxed social events where self-disclosure commonly occurs, establishing collaborative work projects, etc.).  With both sides attempting to understand each other and build inclusive relationships, intercultural communication between American JETs and Japanese teachers should only become stronger and more successful.

REFERENCES

The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET), Mie Prefecture.  (1996).
     Welcome to Mie: Predeparture packet.  Unpublished.

Bachnik, J. M.  (1994a).  Indexing self and society in Japanese family organization.
     In J. M. Bachnik & C. J. Quinn, Jr. (Eds.), <u>Situated meaning: Inside and outside
     in Japanese self, society, and language</u> (pp.  3-37).  Princeton, NJ: Princeton
     University Press.

Bachnik, J. M.  (1994b).  Introduction: *Uchi/soto:* Challenging our
     conceptualizations  of self, social order, and language.  In J. M. Bachnik
     & C. J. Quinn, Jr. (Eds.),  <u>Situated meaning: Inside and outside in Japanese
     self, society, and language</u>  (pp.  143-166).  Princeton, NJ: Princeton
     University Press.

Bachnik, J. M.  (1994c).  *Uchi/soto:* Authority and intimacy, hierarchy and solidarity
     in  Japan.  In  J. M. Bachnik & C. J. Quinn, Jr. (Eds.),  <u>Situated meaning:
     Inside and outside in Japanese self, society, and language</u> (pp.  223-243).
     Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Barnlund, D.  (1989).  <u>Communicative styles of Japanese and Americans</u>.  Belmont,
     CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Bell, R.  (1973).  <u>The Japan experience</u>.  New York: John Westerhille, Inc.

Brislin, R.  (1993).  <u>Understanding culture's influence on behavior</u>.  Fort Worth, TX:
     Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Condon, J.  (1986).  <u>With respect to the Japanese</u>.  Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR).  (1990).  <u>General
     information handbook: The Japan exchange and teaching program</u>.  Tokyo.

Doi, T.  (1973).  <u>The anatomy of dependence</u>.  Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Doi, T. (1985). <u>The anatomy of self: The individual versus society</u>. New York: Kodansha International Ltd.

Feiler, B. S. (1991). <u>Learning to bow: An American in a Japanese school</u>. New York: Ticknor & Fields.

Gercik, P. (1992). <u>On track with the Japanese: A case-by-case approach to building successful relationships</u>. New York: Kodansha International.

Goldman, A. (1994). The centrality of "ningensei" to Japanese negotiating and interpersonal relationships: Implications for U.S.-Japanese communication. <u>International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 18,</u> 29-54.

Gudykunst, W. B. & Kim, Y. Y. (1992). <u>Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication</u>. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Gudykunst, W. B. & Nishida, T. (1994). <u>Bridging Japanese/North American differences</u>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hendry, J. (1987). <u>Understanding Japanese society</u>. New York: Croom Helm.

Hofstede, G. (1991). <u>Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind</u>. London: McGraw-Hill.

JET members to meet in Kobe. (2000, May 30). <u>Asahi Evening News</u>, p. 2.

JET participants foster international exchange. (1998, July 22). <u>The Japan Times</u>, p. 6.

Kidder, L. H. (1992). Requirements for being "Japanese." <u>International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 16,</u> 383-394.

Kopp, R. (1994). <u>The rice-paper ceiling: Breaking through Japanese corporate culture</u>. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press.

Lebra, T. S. (1976). <u>Japanese patterns of behavior</u>. Honolulu, HI: University Press

of Hawaii.

LeTendre, G.  (1998).  Guiding them on: Teaching, hierarchy, and social organization in Japanese middle schools.  In T. P. Rohlen & C. Bjork (Eds.), <u>Education and training in Japan: Volume two</u> (pp.  1-45).  New York: Routledge.

Life, R.  (Producer).  (1993).  <u>Struggle and success: The African American experience in Japan</u> [Videotape].  East Chatham, NY: Regge Life.

McConnell, D.  (2000).  <u>Importing diversity: Inside Japan's JET program</u>.  Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture.  (1993).  <u>Education in Japan: A graphic presentation</u> (12th ed).  Tokyo.

Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture.  (1994).  <u>Handbook for team-teaching</u>.  Tokyo.

Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture.  (1997).  <u>Monbusho</u>.  Tokyo.

Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture.  (1998).  Heisei juu nendo: Gogaku shidou tou o okonau gaikoku seinen shouchi jigyou (JET puroguramu) shinki shouchisha no kettei ni tsuite [Information regarding newly-selected participants for the 1998 Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET Program)]. Unpublished mimeo.

Morisaki, S. & Gudykunst, W. B.  (1994).  Face in Japan and the United States.  In S. Ting-Toomey (Ed.), <u>The challenge of facework: Cross-cultural and interpersonal issues</u> (pp.  47-93).  Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Muro, Yoko.  (1983, March 27).  How it feels to be 'not quite' Japanese.  <u>The Japan Times</u>, p.  14.

Nakanishi, M. & Johnson, K. M.  (1993).  Implications of self-disclosure on conversational logic, perceived communication competence, and social

attraction: A comparison of Japanese and American cultures.  In R. L. Wiseman
& J. Koester (Eds.), <u>Intercultural communication competence</u> (pp.  204-221).
Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Roland, A.  (1988).  <u>In search of self in India and Japan: Toward a cross-cultural
psychology</u>.  Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rosenberger, N. R.  (1994).  Indexing hierarchy through Japanese gender relations.
In J. M. Bachnik & C. J. Quinn, Jr. (Eds.), <u>Situated meaning: Inside and outside
in Japanese self, society, and language</u> (pp.  88-112).  Princeton, NJ:
Princeton University Press.

Sato, N. & McLaughlin, M. W.  (1998).  Context matters: Teaching in Japan and in the
United States.  In T. P. Rohlen & C. Bjork (Eds.), <u>Education and training in
Japan: Volume two</u> (pp.  150-164).  New York: Routledge.

Shimahara, N. K.  (1991).  Teacher education in Japan.  In E. R. Beauchamp (Ed.),
<u>Windows on Japanese education</u> (pp.  259-280).  New York: Greenwood Press.

Shimahara N. K. & Sakai, A.  (1998).  Teacher internship and the culture of teaching
in Japan.  In T. P. Rohlen & C. Bjork (Eds.), <u>Education and training in Japan:
Volume one</u> (pp.  365-382).  New York: Routledge.

Stewart, E. & Bennett, M.  (1991).  <u>American cultural patterns</u>.  Yarmouth, ME:
Intercultural Press.

Tanaka, T., Takai, J., Kohyama, T., Fujihara, T., & Goldman, A.  (1994).  Adjustment
patterns of international students in Japan.  <u>International Journal of
Intercultural Relations, 18,</u> 55-75.

Tezuka, C.  (1992).  *Awase* and *sunao* in Japanese communication and their
implications for cross-cultural communication.  <u>KEIO Communication Review,
14,</u> 37-50.

Triandis, H. C., Brislin, R., & Hui, C. H.  (1991).  Cross-cultural training across
the individualism-collectivism divide.  In L. A. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.),

Intercultural communication: A reader, sixth edition (pp. 370-411). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Trompenaars, F. (1993 and 1994). Riding the waves of culture. London: The Economist Books.

White, M. (1987). The Japanese educational challenge: A commitment to children. New York: The Free Press.

White, M. (1988). The Japanese overseas: Can they go home again? New York: The Free Press.

Yum, J. O. (1988). The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in East Asia. Communication Monographs, 55, 374-388.