Japanese female workers in the U.S. workforce: Communication difficulties and challenges

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The University of Montana

1994

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Japanese female workers in the U.S. workforce:

Communication difficulties and challenges

By

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Abstract

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Japanese female workers in the U.S. workforce: Communication difficulties and challenges

This study analyses experienced hardships and observed difficulties of Japanese-born females employed in profit oriented organizations. Japanese-born females in U.S. corporations and American females who have worked with such Japanese females were interviewed (Japanese-born. N. = 20 American females. N. = 15).

The results show that both Japanese and American females perceive certain difficulties experienced by Japanese-born females because of their cultural background. The results also show that even an efficient and respected worker in their own country can be perceived as less efficient or even incapable when joining a workforce overseas due to their behavior which does not match local social or cultural communication behavior.

Japanese females' submissiveness to their supervisors and their tendency to work for local Japanese companies rather than pure American companies are perceived to be a barrier to their success. Many of interviewed Japanese females maintain that they have difficulties working for their Japanese male supervisors as these males focus on Japanese working styles when working with Japanese females while Japanese women try to adjust themselves to an American working norm.
Dedication

To mom, who let me choose the way I am now

To dad, the motivator of my craving for knowledge
Acknowledgment

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. James Polsin at the University of Montana for his understanding and acceptance of foreign cultures. His constructive criticism always encouraged me to further advance my research. I would also like to thank Dr. Steve Phillips who taught me the reason to learn. His lectures at the University of Montana were intriguing but also ever challenging. Without his lectures this thesis would not exist. I would also like to send special regard to Dr. Nadar Shooshtari. His constructive criticism and advise made the result of this thesis reliable. His advise was particularly helpful to strengthen the methodology. Finally, I would always be grateful to my best friend, Paul King who offered great encouragement and emotional support. Many times I was at loss and was about to give up my study, Paul was always there to support me and helped me complete my work at the University.
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Chapter I

Introduction

Japan and the United States maintain a close business relationship and mutually depend on each other. Yet, due to the diverse cultures of the two nations, they often misunderstand and maintain conflicts with each other. As a recent trend, the number of Japanese-born female workers in the U.S. has been increasing. Seeking individual freedom and equal job opportunities, many Japanese females are lured to the U.S. job market. Popular magazines describe their success, past hardships and glamorous work life, but they fail to analyze the Japanese females' communication difficulties at work which are attributed to their cultural and social norms. The present research also differentiates itself from the existing literature on Japanese females working in the States by involving Americans' perspectives. There are a number of difficulties and problems experienced by Japanese-born female workers when joining American companies. What the Japanese value is not always valued by Americans and vice versa. Due to such differences, Japanese female workers have difficulties adjusting to the American workplace. Capable Japanese women may be perceived to be failures in the U.S. because they behave and think differently than Americans do. This study is intended to examine both, subjective and objective
difficulties, and problems experienced by Japanese-born female workers in the U.S. work force in order to attain a sound cultural understanding and an improved working relationship in the U.S. multi-ethnic work environment.

Literature Review

As it is mentioned in the introduction, the research or literature on Japanese-born females working in the United States is relatively scarce. What literature exists on the topic is either based on interviews with Japanese female workers residing in the States or in biographies of such workers. The literature tends to focus on describing such an individual's life style in a narrative form (Fuke, 1990 and 1991). Yet, the literature lacks an intention to figure out types of difficulties or problems which are likely to be experienced by Japanese female workers in general because it does not analyze and compare all the studied individuals' interviews or stories. One of the purposes of the current research is to find out tendencies of experienced problems by Japanese female workers in the States in a cohesive manner.

In this section, extensive literature on interracial communication will be analyzed. The first half of the literature review will cover anticipated communication difficulties among people of different cultures due to their diverse behavioral norms in a new culture. The latter part will focus upon literature on anticipated communication problems and difficulties unique to Japanese females working in the United states.
Where social differences are found within a society or where contact between two previously separate groups leads to long-term interaction, one group may emerge as dominant. This group will tend to monopolize positions of wealth, status and power within the over-all society (Bowker, 1971).

Bowker believes cooperation and competition are two forms of group behaviors. Whenever people in groups believe that their resources are scarce, intergroup conflict occurs. In the United States, due to the high unemployment rate, jobs are perceived as a scarce resource. Moreover, the U.S. is receiving massive numbers of immigrants and temporary workers every year. Thus conflict or rivalry over the scarce jobs between in-group (American born workers) and out-group (foreign-born workers) is expected. Newly arrived foreign workers are unaware of the social norms in the United States, thus their behaviors may be perceived to be odd or inefficient to the Americans. A study of in-group bias behavior by Taylor and Moriarty finds that in-group bias was greater when groups were competitive than when they were interdependent and when groups were racially dissimilar rather than racially similar. The two scientists believe that their findings validate the real-world phenomenon of racial bias (Taylor and Moriarty, 1987). It can be presupposed that when a racially dissimilar foreign worker joins a highly competitive corporation, the foreign worker might suffer from biased
evaluation from both supervisors and colleagues.

Stereotyping and ethnocentrism also play roles in creating communication disorders and misunderstandings between Americans and foreign workers. Stereotyping is a handy mold which gives people instant understanding toward someone from a different culture, yet, the understanding is shallow and inflexible. Submissiveness, politeness and diligence are typical stereotyping molds for Asians, yet, not all Asian individuals share these attributes. This inflexible attribution mold may work negatively on foreign workers. Thiderman (1991) describes an example where inflexible stereotyping by a human resource manager worked negatively in relation to a Japanese female employee.

When someone does not fit our stereotype, as in the case of Katsumi, the Japanese female employee, we ignore it; when the person conforms to our previous idea, we give this evidence far more weight than it deserves. (Thiderman, 1991).

Thiderman defines ethnocentrism as racial superiority, cultural elitism, and the insinuation that other cultures are exactly like ours or, if they are not, they ought to be. Campbell and LeVine (1961) notes that Sumner advocates the theory of universal ethnocentrism which is one of the major theories of ethnocentism. The theory considers hostility toward out-groups
to be the main element of ethnocentrism. Ascribable attributes of the out-group will be employed to justify the hostility, insofar as the attribution can be interpreted as evil. Further, any trait can be ascribed to the evil category.

Campbell and LeVine also maintain that certain attributions which are considered virtuous in one culture may be seen as a negative attribution in another culture. Americans perceive themselves as friendly, outgoing, extroverted and open handed, while British interpret the same characteristics as intrusive, forward and pushy. At the same time, Americans perceive British as snobbish, cold and unfriendly while British believe that they are reserved and they respect privacy of others. According to the theory of universal ethnocentrism, people in a culture believe that their way of doing things are the only acceptable ones. Thus, foreign workers from dissimilar cultural backgrounds are likely to be perceived negatively in the new culture.

Foreign workers' oddity is accentuated by the lack of ability to speak and understand the local language. For instance, foreign workers speaking their native languages in the U.S. widens emotional and physical segregation between Americans and the foreign workers. Solomon (1993) claims that when foreign workers gather and converse in their native tongues, speakers of English complain that the group is being exclusive and causes a feeling of distrust since the English speakers do not understand them. Solomon also notes that local people often forget that the foreign workers are bilingual and perceive them as uneducated or unintelligent because of their flawed English.
Cultures can be divided into low-context culture (LCC) and high-context cultures (HCC) (Ting-Toomey, 1985). The U.S. is considered in the LCC category, while most Asian cultures are in the HCC category. People in the LCC and the HCC maintain almost opposite interaction behaviors. As this research aims to analyze communication difficulties of Japanese female workers in the U.S., the literature which reveals anticipated communication disorders or misunderstandings between the Japanese (HCC nationals) and Americans (LCC nationals) needs to be reviewed.

When a communication problem or interpersonal conflict emerges, LCC people try to solve it by direct discussion and the approach is logical and issue-oriented. On the other hand, for HCC individuals, "to openly disagree with or to confront someone in public is a severe blow and extreme insult, causing both sides to lose face" (Ting-Toomey, 1985). It is often difficult for a Japanese person to say "no" to others because he or she is afraid that the direct rejection may hurt others. Thus, the Japanese tend to avoid direct confrontation and often wait until the conflict goes away with time. This passive Japanese attitude toward dispute may be seen as a sign of indifference or lack of appropriate problem solving skills by Americans because passiveness is not valued in the American culture.

The eloquent articulation of convictions is among the most valued virtues of its (American) citizens, and the arts of argument and debate are encouraged in the home,
Quite opposite to this American value system, the Japanese value the concept of "enryo"—"to say what one does not really mean" (Johnson and Johnson, 1975). "Enryo" behavior is characterized as to be polite rather than being honest in order to emphasize vertical relationships, or to make oneself humble. These different value systems may work negatively on Japanese workers in the U.S. as Johnson and Johnson predict,

While the Japanese are apt to retreat into silence or accommodation, the white (Americans) are likely to interpret reticence, modesty, or excessive agreeableness as aloofness, ineptitude, or insincerity (Jonson and Johnson, 1975).

Doi (1973) claims that the Japanese tend to have many short breaks in their conversations compared to Americans. He maintains that "Japanese verbal communication is something that accompanies non-verbal communication and not the other-way around". Doi suggests that because Americans tend not to like silence, there may be an uneasiness experienced by Americans when they communicate with the Japanese.

Moreover, it is known that Americans value individualism and the Japanese value group harmony or collectivism rather than individual satisfaction. Thus, Americans are more likely to present themselves in a self-
enhancing manner.

The American value of individualism encourages self-assertion and frank expression of opinions and shows up in the American propensity to argue back when challenged. In the homogeneous, vertical society of Japan, on the other hand, the dominant value is conformity to or identity with the group: The Japanese insist upon the insignificance of the individual (Okabe, 1983).

Thus, it is likely that the Japanese interpret the Americans' assertive and individualistic behavior as self-centered and pushy. On the other hand, when a Japanese joins an American company in the U.S., his or her modesty and concerns for what others think are perceived as helplessness, lack of confidence or lack of decision making skills. Moreover, the Japanese are more likely to ascribe negative outcomes to more internal and stable factors while Americans do not. Self-blame and self-effacing attitude were observed more among the Japanese than among Americans (Hymes and Akiyama, 1991). Self-blame and self-effacing behavior of the Japanese even when they really do not believe that they should be blamed may make them scapegoats in American societies because in American culture, there is always someone to be blamed or responsible for a misdeed. "when a mistake is made, usually someone is responsible or someone is to blame" (Kleinberg, 1989).
Both the U.S. and Japan see each other as a close business partner, yet, because of the diverse business practices in the two countries, grief among business men and women is abundant in both nations. Dissatisfaction in the workplace is often caused among Americans who work in a Japanese company in the States and the Japanese who work in an American company due in part to the different job perceptions. In the U.S. each worker has individual goals in the organization and his or her job is specifically described in the job description or in the contract. Thus, each worker has a specialized job. Conversely, in Japan, a worker is not hired for a specialized position, rather people are hired first and whenever the Japanese organization comes to realize that it needs a worker to do a certain job, it trains an already hired worker for the specific job description (Kleinberg, 1989). So the Japanese are more like generalists in terms of their work skills while most Americans hold highly specialized job skills. Thus, a Japanese worker may be perceived less skilled and less competitive in an American company.

Although, the literature which discusses interracial communication or cultural difference is abundant, literature which specifically discusses Japanese female workers is sparse. Some conclusions can be extrapolated from the literature which discusses Japan-U.S. cultural relations and the literature which discusses minority women's issues, specifically Asian female minorities.
Business management positions in Japan are still dominated by Japanese males and lifetime employment does not apply for Japanese females because they are considered temporary workers, willing to work for a certain period of years (Kamata, 1987). However, the traditional Japanese values of obedience and patience are beginning to be less important to Japanese females. They still consider their most important role to be a mother rather than a person/an individual. (Schooler and Smith, 1978). Jane Condon interviewed a number of Japanese women in her research. One of her interviewees also admitted that Japanese women are brought up to be a woman or a girl rather than an individual (Condon, 1992). Individualism is beginning to gain its place among Japanese females, yet, the direction of their individualism is different from their American counterparts.

It is likely that more Japanese women will chose "woman" than "person." In a sense, this is a risky trend for Japanese society because the connotations of "woman" lack sociality and responsibility. Individualism without this backing can easily turn into selfishness or self-indulgence (Suzuki, 1991).

It seems that the role of mother or woman is still important for Japanese females according to the studies implemented by Schooler, Smith and Suzuki (1978, 1991). Japanese-born female workers in the U.S. may try to maintain their belief in taking mother's and woman's roles prior to their role as an individual. Yet, in the U.S., especially at work, a female is often
required to be a person before she is a woman or a mother. She must perform her role equally with her male counterparts to be acknowledged as a professional. If a pregnant Japanese female worker decides to leave her work for good to play a mother's role, she may be perceived not totally professional by her American counterparts. Wu also (1992) claims that there is a tendency among Asian women to consider themselves subordinate to male counterparts. Wu maintains that:

An Asian woman's social identity is defined by her family relationships, in her supportive and subordinate role to her husband, and her nurturing and care taking role to her husband and children. The male identity, in contrast is one of authority and discipline. Thus, gender-based values are culturally fixed and ubiquitous.

Condon's previously mentioned interviewee noted that Japanese women learn that men start dinner first and women should follow men when out on the street. In addition to this belief Japanese women are brought up with, there is another factor which escalates Japanese women's submissiveness to men. The Japanese language distinguishes women's speech from men's speech and the way women are required to speak is more polite and subservient than men (Fleming, Hollman and Takeuchi, 1992). This speech style can possibly accentuate Japanese women's submissiveness and of being secondary importance compared to men.
In business discussions women have a serious disadvantage with their speech. If women join a discussion among men, they must consciously choose the words and expressions before speaking. When a woman becomes a manager and must use masculine speech to achieve management goals, she and her male subordinates feel very uncomfortable until they familiarize themselves with her masculine speech (Fleming, Hollman and Takeuchi, 1992).

English speech is not differentiated depending on a speaker's gender. A Japanese female who is used to female speech style might experience some difficulties handling a direct, casual and sometimes assertive English speech style. Japanese females' submissiveness and their tender speech are likely to work negatively against Japanese females because Americans value egalitarianism and certain assertiveness from females, also.

It seems that extensive literature which discusses the U.S.-Japan relations and minority workers in the U.S. is available. Yet, the literature which discusses specifically Japanese-born female workers and their cultural adaptation in the workplace is not available. Japanese female workers represent unique attributes in the U.S. workforce. They are considered to be minorities because of their race and gender. Also, on top of it, the often conflicting business relationship of Japan and the U.S. may put them in a sensitive situation. These three conditions Japanese females workers possess
may work against them in the U.S. corporate life. Thus, the literature which discusses these three conditions needs to be studied to help understand communication difficulties and hardships which are particularly experienced by Japanese females working in the U.S.

Japanese-born female workers are likely to experience hardships in the workplace because of the four attributes they possess. Does a current movement of America's Japan bashing affect Japanese females working in the U.S? How does the Japanese virtue of submissiveness work in the U.S.? Are Japanese females taken seriously? How do they adapt to American employment norms? What internal change should be made by Japanese female workers to become effective in the U.S. workforce?
Chapter II

Methodology

The characteristics of the problems being investigated present validity and reliability concerns as well as ultimate generalizability of the results of the investigation. These concerns are categorized as interview construction, instrument construction, sample size and selection, and data coding.

Interview construction

Interviews are designed to allow both the interviewer, and the interviewee a chance to become accustomed to one another and "get comfortable" before gathering any information of a personal nature. This is attempted in four ways. First, interviewees are assured that they do not have to answer any questions if they do not wish to do so. Second, the questions are asked in an order of less personal to more personal ones. If an interviewee feels uncomfortable, more time is spent on less personal questions to create a sense of trust in the interviewee towards the researcher. Third, when appropriate, the researcher provides self-disclose information to an interviewee to feel more comfortable about the experience they have had. Finally, all participants are assured that pseudonyms are used in the paper in order to protect their privacy. Interviews are likely to last anywhere from twenty to ninety minutes. All interviews are recorded for later analysis.
Interview questions are originally written in English, yet, all interviews with Japanese subjects are carried out in Japanese to attain more accurate information. In order to increase the validity of questions translated to Japanese for Japanese subjects, the "back-translation" technique is used. The current research uses the back-translation technique which is suggested by Brislin (Brislin, 1970). Brislin presents the following seven step procedure which is likely to provide adequate translation from English to other languages. Step seven is omitted in this research because it refers to a comparison of translation errors but not to the actual technique.

1. Avoid detailed description.

2. Secure competent translators familiar with the content involved in the source language material.

3. Instruct one bilingual to translate from the source to the target language, and another to blindly translate back from the target to the source. Allow the translators some practice time.

4. Have several raters examine the original, target and the back-translated versions for errors that lead to differences in meaning (meaning errors).

5. When no-meaning errors are found, pretest the translated materials on target language-speaking people. Ask a bilingual to critically examine the translation.

6. To finally demonstrate translation adequately, administer the materials to bilingual subjects, some who see the English versions, some who see the translation, and some who see both.

(Brislin, p 214-15).

The original interview questions are written in simple English. Usage of colloquial terms is also avoided. The original English interview questions
are translated by the researcher, then two bilingual (of English and Japanese) who are not familiar with the content of present research back-translate the Japanese questions to English. Two bilingual translators are purposely chosen for back-translation of the interview questions to meet Brislin's criterion number 3. Translator A is a Japanese master's student in communication studies and translator B is a Japanese master's student in linguistics. Then, when there is a discrepancy in meanings between English and Japanese questions, they will be revised to increase translation accuracy.

**Sample size and selection**

In a defence of qualitative sampling methods Michael Q. Patton claims that:

...random sampling is the appropriate strategy when one wants to generalize from the sample studied to some larger population... Purposeful sampling is used as a strategy when one wants to learn something about certain select cases without needing to generalize to all such cases (Patton, 1980).

The present research does not seek to draw a generalization about experienced hardships experienced by Japanese-born female workers in the United States. This research rather intends to increase an understanding why the selected Japanese females experience difficulties when joining U.S. corporations. Thus, purposeful sampling or nonprobability sampling is appropriate in this research.
Moreover, the problem presented in this research does not lend itself to a “single site case study” approach, but rather matches a “field study” approach more appropriate for multiple sites. The “universe” total number of possible participants is unknown: a review of the literature provides little help in narrowing the parameters of the participant pool: the stability of the participants chosen can change. As the snowball sampling technique is not a probability sampling, it inherits the problem of gathering biased samples.

Thomas Lindlof argues that:

This problem can be avoided to some extent by asking the informants for lists of further persons to be interviewed, and comparing the patterns of nominees. Depending on what the problem demands, one can then select some of the most frequently nominated persons, or others who appear less often on the lists.

Press (1991) contacted several people to start off snowball sampling. This was done in order to avoid the bias problem inherent in the snowball technique. In the current research, the researcher also contacts several people in different regions to start off snowballs. For instance, some participants were introduced to the researcher by acquaintances. Also, an opportunity of starting another snowball was brought in by meeting Japanese females at various public places like a movie theater or an exhibition related to Japanese culture. By having several different sources of participants, a bias which maybe caused by the fact that all participants are somewhat connected is
avoided.

For more details, refer to Research Methods in Mass Communication by Guido H. Stempel and Bruce H. Westley. Miles and Huberman in Qualitative Data and Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods discuss these same conditions and outline an approach for dealing with this type of research, popularly named the Snow Ball Technique. (Matthew B. Miles, and A. Michael Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods.

Sample Selection

Sample size is projected at twenty Japanese females and fifteen to twenty Americans. Selection of the participants, in keeping with the Snowball Technique, can be labeled as a ‘Non-probability convenience sample.” This participant selection allows for a more purposive data source and yet allows for the control of bias as suggested by Stempel and Westly (p. 160). As operationalized for this study, each Japanese participant is interviewed either by telephone or in a face-to-face setting in Japanese. Part of the interview includes a request for others who might be potential participants. These others in turn will be interviewed, and the process goes on. The interview further considers open ended responses that have the potential for developing further categories for consideration in future interviews. Initial categories can be deducted from a review of the interview
questions.

Selection of participants is intended to be diverse as well as purposive to maximize representativeness under conditions of small sample size.

By attempting to increase the diversity or variation in the sample, the evaluator will have more confidence in those patterns that emerge as common among sites (Patton, 1980).

Criteria for Japanese participants include:

1. Female
2. Native language and culture are Japanese
3. Work in the United States with Americans in a “for profit” organization.
4. Diverse level and field of job is sought.

Selection of American participants will include the following criteria:

1. Female
2. U.S. citizen who has grown up in American mainstream culture.
4. Diverse level and field of job is sought.

Coding of the research outcome

Both inductive and deductive methods are used to create categories of content analysis. As an inductive approach, the recorded transcriptions are
read repeatedly until major themes and ideas emerge. Types of communication difficulties, hardships described and statements made by the participants in interviews are divided into categories after an extensive analysis of research responses. In order to avoid biased interpretations of responses, the "follow-up" technique is exercised. In this attempt, the researcher goes back to subjects who were interviewed for the research to assess the validity of interpretation of their responses. As a deductive approach, theories which are presented in the referent literature are examined to induct further categories. In an attempt at coding the research responses, both manifest and latent analysis are conducted. The researcher attempts to increase reliability and validity of the coding by using both analysis methods. In the manifest analysis, frequency of certain concepts mentioned by participants may be counted. For the latent analysis, an entire interview, paragraphs or sentences are read to assess an overall level of the research concepts. Earl Babbie (1991) states the following concerning the two content analysis methods:

Coding the manifest content-the visible, surface content-of a communication more closely approximates the use of a standardized questionnaire... Alternatively, you may code the latent content of the communication: its underlying meaning... Clearly, this second method seems better designed for tapping the underlying meaning of communications (p. 318).
Categories

In the pilot study, two Japanese females and two American females' interviews are analyzed. As a result, indirectness, modesty, cuteness, helplessness, and submissiveness emerged as categories. In this section, two of the categories, indirectness and submissiveness are conceptualized as follows.

1. Indirectness: Indirect speech is rich in ambiguities, elusive terms, indefinite constructions (Barnlund, 1989. p. 117).

2. Submissiveness: Contains a deed which shows strong sense of obligation to others that one has no sense of separate self-identity. (Barnlund, 1989).

Under the “indirectness” category, the following statements are considered to fall in.

American participants 1 (AP 1): “One example is that I’m more direct when speaking with the managers. I think Japanese women tend to be more timid and not so outspoken.”

AP 1: “It’s hard to be honest when you are so polite. Sometimes, in order to get your point across, you have to offend and you know, they really don’t like to offend. And often times they are not taken seriously because they are so polite.”
Under the "submissiveness" category, the following statements considered to fall in.

AP 1: “American females are more willing to begin projects and follow through with them whereas Japanese women tend to take instructions. You know, they wait to be told what to do rather than taking initiative to start something by themselves.”

American participant 2 (AP 2): “I think it’s the role they’ve always played in their culture. Being kind of subordinate to men in a workplace. I think it’s still carried over. They still see that way that they can’t get ahead so that there’s really no need for trying.”

Japanese participant 1 (JP1): “This can be applied to Japanese females working over here in general. They can’t say “no”. We cannot negotiate for our future and our interests. For instance, we are not good at negotiating to get promoted or to get a pay raise so we are behind other people.”

Japanese participant 2 (JP 2): “The Japanese don’t complain too much including myself. I’m trying to speak up, though. We have to speak up otherwise they don’t understand us. It’s difficult to demand a pay raise. It’s embarrassing to ask...”

Because all interviews with Japanese participants are conducted in Japanese, the reliability of the coding is checked by back translation. Also, the
research goes back to interviewees to examine whether what they stated is translated into English accurately.
Chapter III

Findings

Part I

The Japanese perspective

As Japanese and American participants see problems from different point of views, research results are divided into two sections: 1. The Japanese perspective and 2. The American perspective. Interviews with Japanese females produced following categories.

1. Expressiveness
2. Struggling between two cultures
3. Diligence
4. Socialization
5. Modesty
6. Out-group
7. Stereotypes
8. Conflict in working styles

Expressiveness

All participants in this research agreed that mastering the English language is one of the most important issues for Japanese females working in the States. It seems that imperfect language skills have a large influence on their self-perception rather than on actual quality of communication with
Americans. Most of the Japanese females claim that they are at a disadvantage because they cannot speak, write and comprehend English like Americans do. Kyoko says that it is cumbersome as she has to have someone proofread her written report every time. Sayoko suspects that one of the reasons that she is making less money than when she was in Japan is partly due to her language ability. She also stated that she often thinks her writing is not sophisticated enough and looks like an elementary school child’s work. Based on her writing skill, she suspects that her American colleagues think that she is not competitive but just a sweet person. Akiyo also talked about possible negative effects of imperfect English skill.

I cannot express what I really mean when the matter is very complex. So, I use less sophisticated and simple expressions. As a result I give people an immature and childlike image.

The above mentioned problems of not being able to express what they really mean are due simply to their level of language efficiencies. Yet, after talking with several Japanese females, it became clear that there are certain things they cannot say or ask for because of Japanese customs or the way they were raised in Japan.

Eight out of twenty Japanese females claim that Japanese females are not good at expressing their feelings, opinions or desires publicly to others. This seems to be attributed partly to the nature of the Japanese language as
well as their limited ability to speak like native speakers of English language.

Some behavioral implications of Japanese language are described by a number of linguists and social scientists (Bennett et al.; Caudill; Doi, b; Higa; Kunihiro; Miller; Morsbach; Wynne et al.; Yamamoto). Parallel literature illuminates status and gender differentiations which affect communicational patterns (Chamberlain; DeVos; Haring; Nakane; Norbeck and Norbeck). Communicational differences between Japanese and North Americans are discussed in most of these works with the differences which bear on this present research are briefly listed below:

1. An exquisite sensitivity to the social status of interlocutors. (In the Japanese language, this is promoted by an intricate series of speech forms appropriate to various status).

2. A relative lack of assertiveness in comparison to North American speech norms. (This includes a diminished use of the pronoun "I", or other references to self).

3. A calculated amount of vagueness inherent in the Japanese language. (A number of mechanisms contribute to this, e.g., the use of adjectives with somewhat inexact referents, and the tendency in conversation to make utterances which seem incomplete or cryptic by Western standards).

4. A conscious use of indirection and circumlocution. (This is designed not so much to deceive, but rather to diminish assertiveness and to fend off possible adverse reaction).
5. The significance of silence (or passivity) during verbal interaction.

6. A conspicuous focus on the interpretation of non-verbal communication. (Johnson and Johnson, 1975)

Many Japanese participants in this research claim that they are not good at negotiating their salary and promotions with their supervisors. They admit that their American counterparts are better at expressing their opinions or contributions they have made and also their ambition for promotions and desire to have a pay increase. Sumie said that:

We have a habit of not saying every single contributions we have made...we are not used to insisting on our opinions so much. I think that we have a different way of expressing ourselves to supervisors than American people do. When I see American co-workers telling about their contributions and what they have done for the company to their bosses, I am impressed by their skills of presenting themselves as very valuable to the company.

She says that it is difficult for her to convince people at work. When comparing herself to her American colleagues, she claims that her American colleagues are better at convincing their supervisors when trying to justify why they could not meet certain goals which were assigned to them. Sumie believes that the Japanese tend to think that people would understand each
other even if they do not explain things in details. She says that she does not like to tell her supervisors why she could not do certain tasks because it seems like she is making excuses to justify herself.

The Japanese participants avoid asking for promotions or salary increases in a direct manner or they avoid asking entirely. Sakiko, an insurance broker said that she does not present her opinions or ideas at work as much as she should. She admits that she still retains a Japanese habit of being quiet and not speaking out what she thinks or wants. She said that:

Well... It is not an embarrassing thing to ask for a promotion pointing out the management that I have been doing this much work. But, it’s hard for me to say that. Of course, I want to get a pay raise and promotions in my heart. I just think that it would be great if my boss sees me working hard and recognizes my contribution, then gives me a pay raise even if I don’t ask for it...

These behaviors may be attributed to the fact that the Japanese value silence, passivity and non-verbal communication during verbal interaction as Johnson and Johnson claim.

Sakiko states that if someone does not ask for a promotion or a pay raise, Americans are likely to think that the person cannot ask for a promotion because she is not working hard enough or does not have confidence in her work. Thus, Japanese modest self-evaluation can be comprehended as a lack of confidence or not working hard enough by Americans.
Shigeko, an interpreter who has been residing in the States for more than twenty years said that she believes that Japanese people in general are not good at interpersonal communication when compared to Americans. She believes that Americans know how to criticize people in an encouraging way while the Japanese think it is impossible to criticize people without hurting their feelings and thus avoid criticizing others in a face to face situation. She said:

I think Americans are good at criticizing people using constructive and positive expressions. It seems that Japanese are less good at stating opinions when they are asked to present what they really think.

She maintains that Japanese females working in the United States should not be afraid of criticizing people at work. She insisted that in order for Japanese women to be taken seriously, they must learn how to criticize colleagues in a constructive and positive manner.

Shoko, a bank manager talked about her experienced difficulties in controlling her American subordinates which was due to her and her Japanese supervisor’s indirect instructions. She had several American subordinates working directly for her. Occasionally one of her subordinates asked Shoko if she could go home earlier because she was done with the day’s tasks. She said she personally did not care if the subordinate went home. Yet, she thought it was not right to send her home because it was against the
company's policy. Then she decided to send the subordinate to the manager of the office hoping that she would give up on leaving the work earlier. It seems that she sent the subordinate to the top manager so that she did not refuse the subordinate directly.

...So I said “You have to go and ask the manager.”, because it's not good to leave work earlier. But the girl really went to the manager and asked if she could go home!”

she was surprised when the subordinate went to the very top manager to ask if she could leave earlier. She says that she was surprised because any Japanese would give up on leaving earlier or sense that it is improper to leave earlier at the point when the top manager is involved in the case. This is because the Japanese are sensitive about a senior-junior relationship at work and are likely to refrain from asking trivial questions from high ranking managers. She said that the Japanese male manager also failed to tell the American subordinate to stay until the end of the day, she left earlier after all. As Johnson and Johnson state Japanese language inherits vagueness and avoids direct rejection to diminish assertiveness. In this incidence, her indirect refusal was not properly comprehended by the American subordinate thus she failed to control her subordinate.

Seiko, a small business owner talked about an unsuccessful business she dealt with due to her implicit contract. She claims that the Japanese do not make very detailed business contracts because a common sense is largely
shared and accepted among the Japanese. She said that she did not make a specific and detailed business contract with her American employees when she was not yet very familiar with American business customs. She said that she experienced many problems because of the lack of specifics. She talked about one incident when she sent an American musician to a Japanese entertainment agency.

The business contract did not explain the working condition in Japan in details. I explained the working condition in Japan to him and made a verbal business agreement...I had lots of problems because of this contract.

She said that the American musician she hired left Japan before the contract ended because the working condition was different from what he was told and expected. She says that common sense does not exist in the States in the same way as it does in Japan, thus it is dangerous to presume that people would understand her and handle situations in a similar manner as she does.

She said that she learned to make an explicit and detailed business contract and have her American employees sign business agreements to avoid further troubles. Yet, she added that she sometimes feels bad about doing this because it looks like she does not trust her employees.

**Struggling between two cultures**

Most of the Japanese participants in this research work for American
subsidiaries of Japanese companies or American companies which deal with Japan. Thus, the Japanese women also work with other Japanese people in the United States. It seems that working with the Japanese could possibly be a headache for Japanese females working in the States. Most of Japanese women interviewed for this research are hired in the United States. Thus they see themselves differently than those Japanese workers who are sent to the States from a Japanese office.

In a Japanese company in the States or even in an American company where Japanese people work, Japanese and American culture co-exist. The Japanese females interviewed say that they often must work to solve misunderstandings between American and Japanese employees. They stated they sometimes feel that they are in an awkward middle situation because their American supervisors require them to behave and handle jobs by following American business norms while their Japanese supervisors expect them to act like Japanese "office ladies" who do not have much responsibilities but always an efficient and good supporter of male counterparts found in a typical Japanese company back in Japan. Takako, an accountant said:

I'm the only Japanese in my section but there are two Japanese male supervisors at the very top level. Because the number of the Japanese in our company is very small, we have to work pretty close to each other. The Japanese male supervisors expect me to behave like a Japanese female. On the other hand, my
American boss expects something different from me. I find it difficult to keep a balance between their expectations...I am sometimes confused by changing my attitude between Japanese and American bosses.

Shizue has worked in both American and Japanese companies in the States. She said that she was capable of saying "no" to her American co-workers when she was asked for help if she thought she could not handle it. Yet, she admitted that she could not refuse the Japanese when she was asked to do some extra work in a Japanese company in the states. She said, "I cannot say "no" to Japanese people".

Kyoko says that she sometimes feels frustrated by the way her American colleagues and supervisors deal with Japanese clients. She says that there are certain things the Japanese expect from their business partners. Yet, her American colleagues and supervisors do not understand it since requests are usually not made clearly. She said that often at a business meeting, she senses that Japanese clients are not satisfied with the result of a meeting while her American bosses do not even realize that there is a problem. She says she understands Japanese business partners' unspoken dissatisfaction because she was raised in a Japanese culture, also. She said:

Even though Japanese clients don't make their points clear, I know what they are expecting from us because I'm from Japan. But American people do not understand it and sometimes they
ask the Japanese what they want over and over or just ignore their expectations.

When asked if she does anything to facilitate a business meeting or negotiation between Americans and the Japanese, she said she privately talks to her American boss and Japanese clients to explain about both sides’ expectations. Yet, she admits that she experiences difficulties in coordinating the Japanese and American sides due to diverse business customs.

I tell my Japanese clients to accept a certain business arrangement because my American boss tells me to do it, but the Japanese are frustrated by such an arrangement. They do not understand why they have to do such a thing.

She said that sometimes such a disagreement is never discussed by Japanese clients and her company (Americans’) side. Her American supervisors tell her to make Japanese clients understand the situation and accept whatever arrangement her American supervisors planned. She says that she feels frustrated because she understands both Americans’ and The Japanese’ expectations and their different business customs. Sayoko who works in a bank in California also stated that she has a conflict with her American boss regarding the way she deals with Japanese clients. She explained that Japanese people who have just arrived in the States are often feeling helpless and ask for a help even if it is not related to the bank business. She says that as a Japanese she helps the Japanese because she
understands that they are at a loss in the States. She helps them with answering many questions they have, and this often takes up time. Her boss gets upset because she takes too much time taking care of the Japanese. She says that her boss thinks she is not efficient enough to finish her day's assignments. Shoko says that the Japanese also know that Japanese tellers are more helpful with things which are not even related to the bank and they specifically choose Japanese female tellers to deal with. She stated that as a result she was often behind her tasks because she primarily helped the Japanese customers.

Seiko, the business owner of an American talent agency talked about difficulties in satisfying her Japanese clients. She says that the Japanese take care of American artists who are sent to Japan from her agency very well and often do them favors. She says that the Japanese do favors to artists out of goodwill but they also implicitly expect the artists to do something in return. She said that:

The Japanese do favors to talents. They do it out of goodwill but they also expect the talents to return their favors. For instance the Japanese may ask talents to extend the performance hours. But, they reject the proposal as it is not on the contract. Then the Japanese agents make a complaint to me. They say "We took good care of them but your talents do nothing for us".

She continued talking about her dilemma. She says that she understands both the Americans' and the Japanese' behavior codes, yet, it is
difficult to make both sides understand and accept each other. She believes that the differences in the Americans' and the Japanese behaviors are rooted in their cultures and the ways they were raised.

The Japanese females live and work in the States, yet, as long as they work with other Japanese people, they are often required to behave in accordance with a behavior code which is set by the Japanese. For Japanese females working in the States, an adequate behavioral change is necessary depending on whom they are dealing with.

**Diligence**

The Japanese are said to be workaholics. In Japan, people do not follow nine to five work schedule but many of them continue working till late at night. Also, the Japanese are used to working in a team to accomplish a single task so that they seem to believe that it is only natural to help others to complete a task even if they are not asked to do so. The Japanese females interviewed in this research insisted that they work harder when compared to Americans. Yet, overworking and helping others when not actually asked are not always considered to be good in the States. Shigeko talked about her negative experiences when she helped others with their jobs.

Japanese women work too much. For example, when assignments are being handled slowly and customers are waiting in line for a long time, we (Japanese females) run up to the customers and help them (even if they are not in the line which
the Japanese women are supposed to take care of). We just want to let the customers go through as soon as possible. But, this is not necessarily a good thing to do, because we then, let lazy people (other less efficient workers) always remain lazy. They think that we’ll always do their job. And then if we complain about their laziness, they would say, "You did it because you wanted to. I did not ask for it".

Three other Japanese females talked about the negative results of working too hard in the States. Sumie said that she does not want to leave her work in the middle of taking care of an almost completed assignment only because it is time to leave.

...It's not because I want to make extra money by working overtime. I just want to get my work done in a day. Americans see this negatively. They don't think that we are working hard but they think we are not efficient and that's why we have to work overtime.

Miyo talked about her experiences in her early years in the States. She said that she used to feel uneasy about leaving work when others were still working. Even though she was done with her tasks, she stayed and asked for more work. Eventually, other people in the office started to take advantage of her and began to pass their jobs to her. She said that she did not get any credits for working harder than others. She became frustrated because she did not think it was fair to her. Yet, she also said that she learned to work for
herself but not for others or the company from this experience. Shizue said that when she is given an assignment, she tries to finish it as soon as possible and usually she finishes it before the end of day. Then people think she is capable of doing more work. She ends up doing others' tasks as well.

Socialization

People socialize to build an interpersonal relationship. Unlike business interactions, people are more relaxed and use more casual, colloquial expressions when they socialize. Some Japanese women in the current research claimed that they felt left out or found it difficult to join their American colleagues in a casual setting. Kiyomi said that it took her ten to twenty years to understand American humor. She did not have any difficulties understanding her American colleagues at work when discussing business issues, but once they started to make casual communication and make jokes, she could not follow them. It was not a serious problem, yet, she admits that she felt a communication gap and distance between herself and her American co-workers because she could not socialize casually. Takako said that she is afraid that her American co-workers might think that she never socializes with colleagues at work. She said, "but the truth is I can't (make witty socializing talks) even if I wanted to." In the interview, a female Japanese counselor stated that Japanese-born females in the States are less sociable in general. She says that Japanese females seem to be not used to socializing with people. For instance, when someone made a comment about
something, they are often not sure whether to say something back or not. Unless they are asked to say something, they seem to remain quiet or miss a chance to make a comment. Sakiko, an insurance broker, also said that she felt awkward when she had to initiate a conversation with her prospective clients. She said that:

Well. I was quite confident in my language ability but in the beginning, I did not know how to begin a small talk with clients, to socialize, you know, to break ice. I didn’t worry about it too much but I tried talking about weather or something because it’s a safe topic.

Modesty

Most of Japanese females interviewed for this research think that they are modest compared to their American counterparts. A nail which sticks out is hammered (A tall tree catches much wind). As the Japanese proverb says, those who are too competitive and speak too much of their achievement are considered to be braggarts in Japan. Japanese-born females interviewed in this research are part of a culture which values modesty so that it seems that they are generally more modest compared to Americans. Their interviews reveal that they are having difficulties in giving up their modesty. Akiyo an executive manager who supervises many Japanese women in her office, says that Japanese women tend to try to be modest about their work abilities even if they believe that they are highly capable of handling advanced tasks. As a result, they become very frustrated because they are not evaluated properly
due to their modest presentation of themselves to others at work. Akiyo also believes that the modest behavior of Japanese females may be perceived to be "womanlike behavior" by Americans. She continued talking about herself. She said that she sometimes finds herself acting rather "cute". She claimed that she does it without actually knowing it.

No matter how careful we are (Japanese females), we give a womanlike or cute image to others without knowing it. So that people treat us in a less intimidating manner. Then Americans especially females, think that we are trying to get our ways by being feminine or cute. This is a very dangerous thing.

Sayoko who has been residing in the States for a little less than twenty years commented that she still feels that she has to be modest and must compromise because she is a woman. She said that:

I might say that I cannot do certain things too well by being modest. Even if I know I'm very good at it, I would not tell people I'm very good. But people over here (Americans) say that they can do ten things when they can do only one thing for instance. On the other hand, the Japanese would say that they can do only one thing when they actually are able to do nine different things. We are raised in that way. But it does not work here. If I say that I know only one thing, people think I don't know anything.
Sayoko said that because she is modest and not aggressive, she is more easily accepted by her American co-workers. Yet, she also talked about a negative side effect of modest behavior. She believes that being modest and non-aggressive brings a positive result to an interpersonal relationship, but such an attitude could hinder one from advancing her career. She stated that:

...but, I can not insist on my points in order to make a situation better for me. For instance, because I’m not assertive I cannot make a threat or anything of that sort to get a pay raise. I cannot insist on my position for instance saying a thing like “I’m gonna quit working here unless you give me a promotion”.

Kyoko talked about her frustration when she could not have her subordinates do what she told them to. She claimed that Americans were very direct especially at work and did not hesitate to refuse their supervisor’s requests when they were working on something else. She admitted that she was hesitant to push her way on her subordinates when they refused to take care of urgent business she asked them to handle. She said:

Americans think that they are all equal individuals and a senior-junior relationship at work has less influence on them. For instance, I ask my subordinates to do some work as soon as possible because it is important, but they say, “No I can’t do that now because I’m taking care of something else.” They are very frank and direct. I’m not saying it’s wrong. But, this never happens in Japan. Subordinates never refuse their supervisors’ requests.
On the other hand, it seems that Japanese females are so modest that they cannot even refuse others when they do not really wish to do things they were asked to do. Shigeko and Miyo talked about their frustration when they had to work on holidays. Both of them were asked by their supervisors if they could work on holidays and they said they could even though they did not want to. Both of them admitted that they did not refuse their supervisors out of modesty. They kept working on holidays without complaining. Shigeko looked back at the experience and said:

...I think modesty is inappropriate in business. If you don't want to work on Sundays, you have to let them know that you don't want to. My supervisor thought that I was willing to work on holidays because I did not complain at all.

**Out-group**

Five Japanese females talked about hardships of being a foreigner or an Asian woman at work. As it is discussed in chapter I, it seems that ethnocentrism exists among Americans when a work situation is competitive or when American employees are not used to dealing with the Japanese or foreigners in general. Shigeko claims that it is difficult for a foreign national to get promoted to higher positions. She says:

In my work, I don't know any foreign nationals working at the very top level. When there is no competition, Americans are nice to us, but when the work is competitive, they see us as
members of an out-group. I feel a sense of rivalry.

Shizue said that she was the very first Japanese to be hired by a company in a relatively small city in California state, and she was very conscious about the fact that she was the only Japanese female working in the office. She worked very hard because she did not want her American colleagues to think that the Japanese are not good. She was promoted promptly and she believes that it made American co-workers jealous.

...and I worked hard and I was promoted. Then they (American female co-workers) were jealous about my promotions. I also think that they thought they were superior to me, so they did not like my promotions. I remember that they started to make unreasonable disparagements on my business letter, memos, e.t.c..

Sayoko also made a comment on Americans' attitudes toward Japanese females working in the States. When asked about American workers' attitude toward Japanese females working in the States in general, she said:

Don't they rather not take us seriously? Oriental people do not sue so they think it's O.K. to abuse them a little bit more. I should not talk like this, but isn't it the bottom line?

Shoko talked about an experience when a close American co-worker told her that she could not understand her because she is Japanese. She claimed that she and the co-worker worked closely and had a good working
relationship. Yet, when a problem came up, the American co-worker told her, “You are a Japanese anyway. It is impossible to really understand you”. Shoko said that she felt a barrier between herself and the rest of her American colleagues since then. She continued saying that:

...even if it’s (ability to speak flawless English) perfect, they see us as a Japanese and when something happens, they say “Well, she is a Japanese anyway or she is different from us anyway. I feel a line drawn between us (the Japanese) and Americans.

Shoko also said that she was found very useful in the States because times were very good for the Japanese economy and many Americans were interested in talking and asking her about Japan. At the same time, she also stated that some American clients were very bitter about Japan’s economic success and made harsh comments to her regarding Japan’s unfair trade with the U.S. and other related business issues between the two nations.

**Stereotypes**

In the previous chapter, negative effects of stereotyping was discussed. Japanese females in this research reveal that there are stereotypes of Japanese women created by Americans, and they often negatively affect Japanese females working in the States. Shigeko who works as a translator talked about her frustration due to the established stereotypes of Japanese females. She said that even though she has lived in the States for more than twenty
years and is married to an American, Americans still see her as a Japanese.
She believes that she behaves just like Americans and understands
Americans but she is still not accepted as an American by Americans. She said that Americans tend to think that the Japanese are too up-tight and the mold created by Americans worked negatively at job interviews. She also added that she is upset because she sometimes finds American males making sexist jokes in front of Japanese women particularly. She believes that they do this to Japanese women specifically because they know that Japanese women do not speak back to them nor accuse them of their offensive behavior.

Rika who is a visiting linguistic professor at a state university claims that her male students tend to hold typical Japanese female stereotypes against her. She is upset about the stereotypes that depicts Japanese women as quiet, gentle and willing to follow men's leadership. She continued talking about a problem she had with one of her male students.

One of my male students started to criticize my lectures over and over during lectures. I was very upset because I knew he was criticizing me in front of other students to prove that I would yield in just like the stereotypes say. Then I called him to my office after a class and persuaded him that my argument was logical. He seemed to be shocked as he was persuaded by a young little Japanese woman.
Conflict in working styles

The Japanese and Americans work in different ways. As it was discussed in chapter I, the Japanese do not have specific occupational specialties as opposed to Americans. In the United States, people are encouraged to have specialized knowledge on a single task, while in Japan, people have broad and general business skills and knowledge. Thus, they tend to work together to accomplish a task. As a result every one in a company has general ideas of what the others' jobs are like. Most Japanese females interviewed in this research had worked in Japan and they knew the advantages of both American and Japanese management or work styles. All Japanese females who have had work experiences in Japan prior to their arrival in the States claimed some sort of frustration with American management and working styles. The frustration was caused either by companies they were working for, the people they were working with or the headquarters back in Japan.

Shoko talked about her frustration with the Japanese s in Tokyo. She claimed that her Seattle office did not have much authority to make decisions. She felt frustrated while waiting for the main office to reply to a proposal she had sent. Setsuko talked about her frustration with the management system at her company. She claims that she often has communication problems with people in other departments because of the
redundant divisions. She believes that there are too many divisions in her company and that often causes misunderstanding between departments.

There are five or six divisions involved in order to make just a single loan document over here. When a mistake is a minor one, maybe it’s not a big deal, but if each department makes a mistake, it is going to be a big problem. Then each department blames another. While a task is going through from a department to a department, mishandling of a task happens all the time.

Shoko and Setsuko also talked about their frustration with American subordinates. They both claim that American entry level employees lack business common sense which they can expect from Japanese workers. They are frustrated as they have to explain tasks to be carried out in every single detail. Shoko thinks that one of the reasons why her subordinates are not as efficient as Japanese employees is due in part to a lack of corporate level training. In her opinion, American entry level employees do not have a broad view of how their companies work and what they do. She continues saying:

All Japanese entry level employees receive training to learn about their company and basic tasks so that they have a common sense in business in general. But, Americans don’t have that. Because they never receive training, then they think it’s O.K. to do just what they are told. They don’t try to get ahead and do more than they are told.
Setsuko believes that if her co-workers also had the same kind of training she had in Japan, things will go more smoothly without spending much time telling them what to do every time. She insisted that the attitudes of Japanese and American workers toward their customers are different. She continued that the Japanese are more customer oriented than Americans. She insisted that the Japanese arrange a way which would bring the best result to the customer even when the customer did not ask specifically for it.

Rika also said that she prefers to have proper training or guidance at her work. She admitted that she was a little at a loss when she started to give lectures at a state university. She said that she received neither training nor guidance in planning lectures but she was on her own. She said that she was not sure if her lectures were worthwhile or not. She claims that when people are not trained at work, they often get confused and lose direction. She thinks people may even do "lousy work" because there are no guidelines to follow.
Part II

The American perspective

All American participants recognized Japanese-born female workers whom they work with to be very efficient and capable individuals. The American participants praised and admired Japanese females' dedication to their firms and their pleasant and gentle attitude when interacting with people. Yet, they also talked about the problems and the frustration they experienced while working with Japanese-born females. The following categories emerged from the interviews with American participants.

1. Expressiveness
2. Lack of initiative
3. Lack of confidence
4. Out-group

Expressiveness

Concerns about Japanese female workers' ability to express their feelings and desires are talked among American participants. American participants admit that the Japanese females they work with tend not to express what they think as much as they should when compared to their American counterparts. Lori who has been working with Japanese females for eight and a half years says that Japanese females tend not to be open enough to speak their mind and say what they mean. She claims that she is
more direct when she is speaking with managers whereas Japanese women seem to be more "timid" and "not as outspoken" as she is.

Shari who has been working with Japanese females almost nine years also maintains that her Japanese female co-workers tend to be more timid especially when they deal with the management. She continued talking about perceived behavioral differences when dealing with a problem at work between Japanese females and Americans. She says that when there is a problem at work, her Japanese female co-workers tend not to say anything about it. She says that they seem to try to deal with the problem and not to bring it up nor make it an issue. She insists that if there is a problem, Americans usually bring it to the management and ask for a solution but not just let it go. She believes that the Japanese way of not bringing a problem to the management is an inefficient way to deal with a problem at work. She believes that problems should be clearly mentioned to the management in order to solve them efficiently. Meg also notices that her Japanese female co-workers are less expressive than herself and other Americans around her. She says that Japanese females tend not to express their concerns or feeling especially when there is a problem. When asked to list Japanese female workers' weaknesses, she stated the following:

Being indirect, not being honest enough especially with their supervisors identifying their problems. If they have a problem, they tend to speak among themselves, but do not take it to management.
She also claims that Japanese females seem to be concerned about seniority and try too hard not to offend their supervisors or the management. She suspects that it is one of the reasons which makes Japanese females tend not to mention existing problems to their supervisors. Meg thinks that Japanese females tend to try to cope with problems in order not to bother or offense the management by pointing out the existing problems.

Lucy who has been working with Japanese females for more than twenty years believes that Japanese females may experience a problem in terms of receiving promotions from American managers. When asked if not expressing one's opinion to supervisors enough could cause a problem in an American company. She said: As far as maybe to get ahead and be promoted I could see a problem, because an American boss might think that they might not speak up (when it is necessary to speak up to get a job done in a work place). They might see it as a weakness and might not give them promotions.

Kelly states that she is sometimes confused by the way both Japanese females and males speak to her. She says that “the Japanese do not always get clear to the point”. Kelly used the term “indirect’ when she described Japanese style speeches. Confusion and misunderstanding may be caused by expressions or speech styles which are unique to the Japanese. She noted that
when her Japanese co-workers or supervisors tell her to do something or correct some mistakes she made, often the statements sound like questions because of the way they express themselves or talk. Kelly claims that her Japanese female supervisor does not give her clear instructions nor tells her that something is wrong especially when she made a mistake. She says that she sometimes realizes what she thought was a plain statement was indeed an instruction to correct the mistake. She suspects that her Japanese supervisor thinks she is either careless or not listening to her.

Martha who had worked with about two hundred Japanese females for about two years claimed that when she started to work with them, she was uncomfortable because she felt like there was some kind of barrier between herself and the Japanese she was working with. She says that she is a very open, honest and direct person but she could not find any of those attributes in Japanese culture when working with the Japanese. She calls the perceived work relationships she had with the Japanese “secretive” because she thought work instructions or plans or even what was wrong at work was not expressed clearly and directly enough to her.

Lack of initiative

Whereas all American participants praise Japanese females’ dedication to their firms and their diligence, they think that Japanese female workers tend not to take initiative at work. The American participants insist that
taking initiative is valued in many ways and expected by management in the American workplace. The American participants talked about their frustration by observing Japanese female workers' lack of initiative, because they believed that their Japanese female colleagues were skilled and capable individuals.

Anita has been working with Japanese females for a little over twenty years. Most of the Japanese females she works with are in clerical positions. When asked to describe Japanese females' working behaviors, she said that her Japanese female subordinates were still like in school. She meant that they have a teacher who tells them what to do and what not to do. She claims that they tend to wait for an instruction to be given to them and not to take initiative. Anita believes that American females are more willing to start something new by themselves and wish to take initiative whereas Japanese females wait to be told what to do.

Donna who works with four Japanese females in an international firm also says that Japanese females do not seem to show willingness to start more advanced tasks at work. Yet, she added that Japanese females do whatever they are told to and complete the job with a strong sense of responsibility. She continued that there might be a tendency to take advantage of Japanese females' submissiveness and willingness to do whatever they are told to do even if it is not their job. She said that, "They go ahead and do it anyway because they are told to do so". She suspects that Japanese women are likely
to end up with doing unwanted extra work unless they tell people that they
do not have to and do not want to do it.

Referring to Japanese females who are in clerical positions, Lucy said
that they do not seem to take initiative to learn to write proper business
letters or ask for a different or more advanced task. She said that it is one of
the reasons that Japanese females who work for a Japanese firm in the States
often remain in lower positions with a lower salary. She claimed that the
Japanese management assumes that Japanese females are not assertive
enough to walk away from the Japanese firm to an American company where
assertiveness and initiative are required. Thus Japanese firms keep Japanese
female workers hired in the States with relatively low salaries.

Lack of confidence

All the American participants admit that although their Japanese
female co-workers are very skilled and efficient individuals, they do not seem
to have confidence in their work abilities. The American participants claim
that Japanese females may be missing opportunities to get ahead due to their
modest self evaluation and lack of confidence.

Jessica who works for a Japanese company says that she is sometimes
frustrated by her Japanese female clerks who work at different sections of the
firm because they do not seem to be willing to answer telephone calls from
her department. She says that Japanese females seem to be afraid of taking
messages on the telephone and they just let the telephone “ring and ring”.

She said:

...It’s just that they seem like they don’t really want to get involved. Mostly because I think they don’t really have the answer for you when you call. I think part of it is because they are afraid that they won’t be understood or they’ll not understand the person on the phone because of language problems. They are a little timid.

Interestingly two Japanese participants admitted that they are sometimes afraid of answering telephones. They claimed that it is more difficult for them to understand people on the telephone because they cannot see the person and are not able to use or see gestures to help in understanding the person. They admit that they are sometimes reluctant to answer the telephones. Yet, one of the Japanese participants said that by forcing herself to answer telephone calls and forcing herself to have conversations with unfamiliar people, she gained confidence in her English ability. As Jessica claims those Japanese women who hesitate to answer the telephone to take a message may be lacking confidence in their language ability.

Sofia is a head secretary of an American subsidiary of a Japanese company and deals with a number of Japanese female workers. She claims that the Japanese females she works with do not seem to challenge something more advantageous because they are not confident enough in their abilities. She talked about one incident which surprised her.
One of her Japanese female co-workers was not treated fairly by the management. She was neither getting a pay raise nor promotions. Sofia said that the company's intention of trying to make her leave her job was very clear. Yet, the Japanese female continued working for the company because it was a "Japanese company". Sofia believes that the Japanese woman stayed with the company because it was a "protective" environment. Sofia claimed that her Japanese company does not pay Japanese females who are hired locally well and often their American counterparts are treated better by the Japanese management. When asked why Japanese females still work for a Japanese firm under such unfair conditions, she said, "a Japanese company is like an old couch. It may not be the best thing to have or may not look good but Japanese females just feel comfortable with it".

Because Sofia is a head secretary, sometimes headhunters ask her to refer them to skilled Japanese women. She tells her capable Japanese female employees to take advantage of the offer which pays better and places them in a much better position. Yet, she claims that most of the times Japanese females do not even look at the offers. She said that Japanese women refuse the offer saying it is "kind of scary" and "too much for them". Sofia suspects that Japanese women do not seem to believe in their abilities to survive in an American company. She thinks one of the reasons Japanese females are less attracted to an American firm is their lack of other Japanese-born female companions. She claims that the Japanese women she works with may not
be perfectly satisfied with their present work situation, yet, they seem to stay in the current situation rather than to transfer to an American company where they have to work as minorities under an unfamiliar management and working style. Sofia believes that if Japanese women are a little more confident in their work skills, they will be better off working for American companies because they will have a better chance of getting ahead in an American company rather than in a Japanese company.

Ronnie also talked about a perceived behavioral tendency of Japanese-born females residing in a large city in California. She believes that the Japanese females in that area tend to stay together. She said:

I find it very difficult to imagine them (Japanese females) trying to break away completely from each other in order to educate themselves in American ways...Many of them are very content just to stay in a structure of wherever they live. And they don't integrate with Americans as much as they should.

Dorene also addressed the Japanese females' tendency of not having enough confidence to work among Americans in a competitive environment. She believes that Japanese females' lack of confidence is partly created or enhanced by Japanese males' expectations of what Japanese females should and should not do at work. Dorene said that, "Japanese males do not let Japanese women live up to fulfill their professional pursuit". As Dorene claims Japanese business is still dominated by males and the number of
females who manage to reach the management level is still scarce.

Consequently, there may be a tendency among Japanese females to think that they are not able to get ahead in a competitive environment because they are not taken seriously by their male counterparts. Thus, Japanese females may become less confident in themselves in a business environment. Mona who has been working with Japanese females for four years says she always encourages her Japanese female friends working for Japanese companies to transfer to an American company. She said that Japanese women still tend to work for a Japanese firm in the States. She believes that Japanese women are putting limitations on themselves by working for a Japanese firm. She believes those Japanese-born females who decided to come to the States to work have a strong ambition to become successful and desire to be recognized for their capabilities. Yet, they are often frustrated because they still work for a Japanese firm and are treated in the same way as when they were in Japan by the Japanese management. Dorene, Mona and Sofia think that most Japanese females are not confident enough to work for an American firm which is not directly related to Japan.

Jessica also said that, “Japanese women need to be more aware of what is going on around them”. She means that Japanese females should look around to see what kind of better jobs and positions are available and what kind of opportunities there are in their work. She believes that opportunities often become available to those individuals who show willingness to learn
new things beyond the work they are assigned to. Jessica claims that Japanese females do not usually show intentions to learn something new. She admits that many Japanese women stay in clerical positions in a Japanese firm and do not try to get ahead by transferring to other companies or asking for more responsible tasks. Jessica thinks that Japanese females seem to be putting limitations on themselves as they do not evaluate themselves highly enough to do something more advantageous. Like Dorene, she also believes that Japanese women’s lack of confidence is partly created by Japanese culture. She said that, “it is a shame that Japanese women still put limitation on themselves in the States because no body is trying to limit Japanese women from getting ahead”.

Out-group

In this section problems or misunderstanding caused by Japanese females’ behaviors which are unfamiliar to Americans are presented. American participants admit that sometimes they are confused or frustrated by Japanese females’ behaviors which they do not usually find among Americans. As a result some Americans treat Japanese workers as “out-group” members and draw a line between themselves and the Japanese.

The first behavioral difference mentioned is Japanese and American females’ attitudes toward career and family plans. Lori believes that Japanese females dedicate their time to their children more than American women. She claims that when Japanese women become pregnant, they tend to quit
working in order to dedicate their time to their child, whereas American women tend to go back to work after they deliver the baby. She continued talking about her concern about the practice by Japanese females. She said:

This (Japanese women quitting their job after delivering a baby) happened to three or four Japanese women (in her office). Once they became pregnant and delivered the baby, they did not return to work.

When asked if she can think of any bad effect when Japanese women do not return to work after they delivered babies in the States, she said that she is worried because her company might presume that she is not coming back to work after delivering a baby either. Lori works for a Japanese company with several other Japanese women so that she is concerned that the Japanese management who is used to this practice may assume that Lori will also quit working. She says that she hopes that her company's experience with the Japanese females' practice does not affect her decision of whether or when to have a child in the future.

Secondly, nonverbal behavioral habit of Japanese females was mentioned by Shari. Shari thinks that Japanese females giggle a lot compared to their American counterparts. She added that it is especially true with Japanese women who have not been in the United States for a long time. She believes that they behave in such a manner partly because of the way Japanese women are raised in their culture. Yet, she claims that such things like
giggling and cuteness can be "destructive" in an American work environment. She insists that it is difficult for her to take someone giggling seriously when discussing an important issue. It seems that Shari is confused and frustrated because she does not see any reason why Japanese females should giggle when she is talking about a serious, important business matter.

Finally, the Japanese' English emerged as a cause of problems. Frustration also seems to be caused among Americans by the way Japanese people speak to them. Kelly says that she sometimes overhears her American co-workers making negative comments on Japanese workers in her company. She says some Americans think that Japanese managers are abrupt and rude. She explained that it is partly because of the way their English sounds. She stated that sometimes when Japanese managers make a request to American employees, it sounds like a blunt order due to their accent and improper grammar usage. She says that some of her Japanese female supervisors' English is not so fluent and they often make rather abrupt requests. She believes that because Americans do not really respect a strict upper and lower rank relations or seniority as the Japanese do, the rather imperative tone of instructions by the Japanese may upset them easily. She says that those American people who make negative comments on Japanese workers often criticize the Japanese as an out-group whom they cannot understand or relate to. She added that she was shocked because even
American workers with higher education make negative comments and do not understand that Japanese workers may sound different or even rude because English is not their mother tongue. She believes that it is especially true when the working situation is very competitive and people tend to use any excuse to attack workers from overseas.
Chapter IV

Discussion

The themes which emerged from the analysis of the interviews reveal answers to the research questions on the working conditions of Japanese-born females in the United States. The most important point which should be called to attention is that Japanese-born females are perceived as a dedicated, capable workforce by interviewed Americans. As it was mentioned in the introduction, the existing literature on Japanese-born females working in the States reflects only Japanese women's perspectives. Yet, there are many problems and difficulties experienced both by Japanese female workers and their American co-workers. The problems were discussed by the participants of the current research. This signifies that to be perceived as a dedicated, capable employee is not the only key for a foreign national worker to become successful in American corporate life. The analysis of the results of the current research should help foreign workers in the United States to become accepted and competent.

Japanese females interviewed for this research have been residing in the States for different time lengths. The years of residency vary between one to over twenty years. All Japanese participants talked about experienced communication difficulties both based on their language abilities and cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan. Interviewed Japanese women admit
that they may be promoted slower than their American counterparts due to their language skills, modest self-evaluation and their tendency of not speaking up when it is necessary. Yet, there is one noteworthy tendency among Japanese females' descriptions of experienced difficulties when working with Americans. It is that those Japanese females who have resided less than five years spoke more about linguistic problems even though at the same time they are able to comprehend, speak and write the English language at work. On the other hand, those who have resided more than five or eight years emphasized existing cultural gaps between themselves and Americans. They admit that there are problems due to their language ability, yet, they seem to be more concerned about the problems which are based on behavioral differences due to the cultural differences between the two nations than the language barrier.

A question was raised considering this tendency. Are those Japanese females with a relatively short residency period in the States less aware of existing cultural gaps between themselves and Americans because they have not lived in the States long enough? Are they more concerned about improving their language competency to have smoother daily interactions with Americans?

The diverse generations within interviewed Japanese females may also be a cause to differentiate their main concerns when working with Americans in the States. Since 1985, after a national labor force survey was conducted by the Japanese government, the word, "kekkon-nan"- difficulties in getting
married has been often spoken of by the Japanese mass media. Sakamoto (1992) conducted a survey to study the reasons Japanese men and women use marriage counselling services. Sakamoto claims that Japanese men still hope to get married but women have started to be less attracted to marriage.

Sakamoto maintains that men claim that they do not have opportunities to meet a woman even though they hope to meet someone. Women claim that they have opportunities to meet men, yet, they cannot find a man whom they wish to marry. Sakamoto claims that those women who visit with a marriage counsellor often have a higher education and professional career. She states that those women are hesitant to marry too soon because they are concerned whether their prospective husbands will respect their career and equally participate in household matters. Sakamoto also points out that the number of Japanese women who wish to maintain their maiden names after marriage has been increasing. These tendencies suggest changes in Japanese women.

According to the Japanese government’s survey, 19 % of Japanese women aged between twenty-five to twenty-nine were unmarried. In 1975 and 1985, the rate increased to 20.9 % and 30.6 %. In 1990, another survey was conducted and the result showed that 40.2% of the women in this age group were not married. It seems that Japanese women in the younger generation have started to question the traditional forms of marriage, relationships between men and women, and women’s role. They seem to be seeking equality between men and women, self-identity, in the form of keeping their maiden names, and
independence by considering their career before marriage. These qualities are also valued by contemporary American women and accepted more in an American society than in Japan. Thus, even though Japanese women are still perceived to be more modest and submissive than American women, Japanese women of a younger generation may have less difficulties in adjusting themselves to the American culture and corporate life because of their value system. The research results on diverse concerns of Japanese female workers may be indicating that Japanese females are changing and starting to value what American women do.

All Japanese females interviewed say that they prefer working in the States rather than in Japan or at least enjoy working in the States if they do not have work experience in Japan. They say that they enjoy responsibilities at work and the respect for personal life, i.e. that they do not have to socialize with their co-workers after work hours if they do not wish to. They also claim that they are in favor of the independent working style rather than the Japanese style of working in a team. Moreover, Japanese women state that they really enjoy frank and casual working relationships with their supervisors. All of these attributes are difficult to obtain in Japan.

Yet, even though Japanese women claim to enjoy these working conditions, they are perceived to have difficulties in adjusting themselves to work comfortably under those conditions by Americans. For Americans,
Japanese female workers seem too conscious about seniority. They are also perceived as not to be seeking more responsibilities than what they are already assigned. Also, they are perceived to have less ambition or take less initiative to advance in their career track compared to Americans. Japanese women themselves are in favor of American working styles, yet, ironically, they are perceived to be still a little malfunctional by mainstream American workers.

Other noteworthy tendencies found in this research are that many Japanese females work for Japanese, rather than for American companies. In a Japanese company, even in the States, they have to work under a Japanese style management often with Japanese male supervisors from Japanese headquarters. Under such a circumstance, Japanese females cannot obtain the favorable working conditions previously mentioned. Many Japanese women talked about difficulties working under Japanese male management. Japanese women claim that Japanese male managers demand a working style from them which does not accord with the style expected from their American co-workers and supervisors. Japanese female workers are living in two different cultures which demand very different working manners. Some of the Japanese females said that they decided to work in the States because they prefer the American working style to Japan’s. Yet, it is ironical that they still have to work in the same way as they used to in Japan because of other Japanese people around them. This type of problem was not hypothesized based on the existing literature. Further research to study conflict within Japanese workers in the
States is necessary.

A question was raised considering the tendency of more Japanese women to work for a Japanese corporation rather than an American firm. Why do Japanese females choose to work for a Japanese company where they are treated as subordinates to males as some of the research results indicate? Are Japanese females not interested in working for an American firm or do American firms not employ them? If Japanese females seek a job from an American firm, what kind of obstacles would they experience?

Finally, as discussed in the literature review, it was revealed that Japanese-born female workers experience hardships because of their cultural origin. Interviewed Japanese women are well aware of the fact that what is valued and believed to be good in the Japanese business is not always good in an American corporation. All the Japanese women knew and insisted that being modest and subordinate does not do them any good in the States. It was found that Japanese women do not try to impose their Japanese working style on Americans. They try to be flexible and are willing to learn American working norms. They try to be outspoken and assertive, yet, they also admit that it is difficult to change their behaviors and value system which they learned to be appropriate in Japan. This research should help the Japanese women to look back on what they have done to become adjusted to American corporate life and also what is yet to be done to become more competent in the American workplace. The collection of problems and experiences discussed by both American and Japanese participants
should help the Japanese and their American co-workers to develop a better working relationship and understanding toward one another. Also, the researcher hopes that these results will help potential Japanese-born female workers to be prepared for such difficulties.

Further research should be carried out to find answers to those questions raised in this section. The current research takes the form of a qualitative research method. This study shows types of Japanese females' behaviors which hinder competitiveness in the American corporate life. An unobtrusive field research method is recommended to find out how exactly Japanese women behave differently than Americans from a neutral observer's point of view. Such a research effort should be able to provide the Japanese female workers with practical tips and suggestions as to how to enhance their competence when working in an American firm.
Appendix A

A. Interview questions for Japanese females

1. How long have you been working in the United States?

2. What is your status in your organization?

3. What do you most enjoy about working in the States?

4. What do you least enjoy about working in the States?

5. How confident are you in your English language ability?

6. Have you ever felt uncomfortable when working with Americans?

7. What differences do you see in your work behavior and in American workers if at all?

8. Have you ever had difficulties communicating with Americans?

9. In your opinion, what kind of obstacles Japanese females might encounter when working in the States?

10. What are your strengths as a Japanese female when working in the States?

11. If you had to list your weaknesses when working in the States, what would you list?

12. If a Japanese female who wishes to work in the States asks for advice from you, what kind of advice would you give to her?

13. What is the general attitude or condition of work environment for foreigners in the States?
Interview questions for Americans

1. How long have you been working in your organization?
2. What is your position in your organization?
3. Do you consider yourself to be a member of mainstream American culture?
4. How long have you been working with Japanese females?
5. How are Japanese female workers different from their American counterparts?
6. Have you ever felt uncomfortable working with Japanese females at work?
7. Have you ever had difficulties communicating with Japanese females at work?
8. How confident are you in Japanese females' work abilities?
9. What are Japanese females' strengths when working in the States?
10. If you had to list, what are Japanese female workers' weaknesses when working in the States?
11. In your opinion, what kind of obstacles Japanese females might encounter when joining an American corporation in general?
12. If you had to give advice to Japanese females working in the States, what kind of advice would you give to them?
Appendix B

Permission to conduct the present research by University of Montana Institutional Review Board for use of human subjects.
DATE: February 12, 1993

TO: Ms. Yumiko Kurihara and Dr. James Polsin
Department of Communication Studies

FROM: University of Montana Institutional Review Board for Use of Human Subjects in Research

As a result of an administrative review or deliberations by the University of Montana Institutional Review Board your proposed research project, "Communication Difficulties Experienced by Japanese Females When Joining American Corporations in the U.S." has been approved and is considered a "no risk" project not requiring the written informed consent of the participants.

To involve sufficient risk to require the written informed consent of the participants as defined in the UM Policy Statement for the Use of Human Subjects in Research as amended in the memorandum of December 28, 1978, to your department.

has been conditionally approved and the conditions imposed by the Board are:

has not been approved in its present form. The Board suggests that you:

NOTE: It is mandatory that you report immediately to the IRB:
1. Changes in procedures,
2. Unanticipated problems,
3. Adverse reactions of, or effects on, subjects.

James A. Walsh, Chairman
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CHECKLIST

Submit one copy of this checklist and your proposal for each project that requires IRB review. The IRB attempts to evaluate proposals within ten working days. Approval is granted for one year's time, at the end of which period the principal investigator may reapply to the IRB for continued approval (see IRB procedures summary for details).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Submitted to IRB</th>
<th>Projected Start Date</th>
<th>Project Ending Date</th>
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<td>February 10, 1993</td>
<td>April 29, 1993</td>
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Project Title: Communication difficulties experienced by Japanese females when joining American Corporations in the U.S.
Principal Investigator: Yumiiko Kurilhara
Telephone: 549-3168
Mailing Address: 324 S. 6th East, Missoula MT 59801

Co-Investigator(s): None

Signature(s):

Faculty Supervisor: James Polsin
Telephone: x 4257

Department: Comm Studies

(My signature indicates that I will supervise the project and that I have read the proposal and agree that it accurately and adequately represents the planned research.)

Please answer the following questions:

1. Does the attached proposal respond to the 10 items on pages 3-4 of the procedures summary? (Circle one)
   - Y
   - N

2. Is a consent form being used?
   - Y
   - N
   - a) If yes, does the attached proposal respond to the eight items on page 4 of the procedures summary? (Circle one)
     - Y
     - N
   - b) If no, do you request that the form be waived? (Circle one)
     - Y
     - N

3. If the project involves minors, are the children old enough that their signatures will be requested? (Circle one)
   - Y
   - N

4. Will the subject receive an explanation of the research before and/or after the project? (If yes, attach a copy)
   - Y
   - N

5. Is this project part of your thesis or dissertation? If yes, please indicate the date you successfully presented your proposal/prospectus to your committee:
   - APR 29, 1993
   - DEC. 15, 1992

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY: Project #
Administrative/Full Committee.................Date
Approval/Conditional Approval
Conditions Satisfied.........................Date
References


Wu, Jenai. (1992) Masochism and fear of success in Asian women: