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# Cultural Misunderstandings

Mariko is a foreign student from Japan. About five months have passed since she entered university in the United States. Because she was a diligent student, she received “A” for all the classes she registered in her first semester. Mariko felt so sick one day, and visited Health Service Center of her university to see a doctor. Dr. Smith told Mariko that she had flu. But because her condition did not get any better, she went back to see the doctor a couple of times. When she visited the center today again; however, the receptionist told her to see Mrs. Thompson, the counselor of the center.

C: Hi, Mariko.

M: Hi, Mrs. Thompson.

C: How are you today? The doctor told me that you had flu. Have you gotten any better?

M: No, I still feel sick. I have a final exam in my speech communication class tomorrow, so I’m worried.

C: How long have you been in the States, Mariko?

M: About five months, Mrs. Thompson.

C: Could you tell me about your life since you came to the U.S.?

M: Well.....I have been studying hard every day.

[Counselor’s thoughts: Let’s see... foreign student from Japan. It is not usually a good idea to ask Asian students direct questions.]

C: Hi, Mariko.

[Mariko’s thoughts: Why do I have to see the counselor? I wonder if Dr. Smith is not on duty today.]

M: Hi, Mrs. Thompson.

[Counselor’s thoughts: Dr. Smith told me that this student came back to the center again and again. He also told me that her physical condition wasn’t serious at all. Before starting to counsel her, let me make sure she feels all right.]

C: How are you today? The doctor told me that you had flu. Have you gotten any better?

[Mariko’s thoughts: I do not understand why she asks such a question. If I felt better, I wouldn’t be here. Where is Dr. Smith?]

M: No, I still feel sick. I have a final exam in my speech communication class tomorrow, so I’m worried.

[Counselor’s thoughts: O.K., she doesn’t look so sick. But her voice is weak and she looks nervous. She must be a diligent student. Let me ask her simple questions, then she will feel relaxed.]

C: How long have you been in the States, Mariko?

[Mariko’s thoughts: This is a waste of time. If I can’t see the doctor, I want to go home and study.]

M: About five months, Mrs. Thompson.

[Counselor’s thoughts: Usually, sojourners experience depression after spending a couple of months in the host culture. That may be her case. Anyhow, I need to know more about her lifestyle.]

C: Could you tell me about your life since you came to the U.S.?

[Mariko’s thoughts: Oh, no. She started counseling me. I may be suffering from mental illness. I hope she will not tell anyone that I was here...]

M: Well, .....I have been studying hard every day.

## Reference

Wilmot, W. W. (1987). *Dyadic communication* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Random House.