

A Portable Identity

A Woman's Guide to Maintaining a Sense of Self While Moving Overseas

Debra R. Bryson, MSW Charise M. Hoge, MSW

Chapter 6

The Turning Point: The Wheel

Up to this point, we've focused on what happened to you and your identity as a result of your overseas move. In Chapter 5, you learned that your identity is in transition, between one state of existence and another. You may feel that you don't recognize yourself anymore. Referring back to the metaphor of the crab, you may feel vulnerable and unprotected, as if you've lost your old shell and are waiting for your new one. You've gained a great deal of useful information and insight about who you were before the move compared to who you are now. But now you're at the turning point and it's up to you to decide what you're going to do with everything you've learned thus far.

When identity is in transition, one option is choosing to do nothing. However, you run the risk of a negative outcome to your overseas experience. You may find yourself very dissatisfied with your identity as it unfolds, and continue to feel that something is missing from your life. The negative or uncomfortable feelings we've discussed in previous chapters may persist if you choose not to resolve the transitional state of your identity.

However, unlike the crab, you can determine what your new shell will be like once it forms. You can shape your new identity. You can exercise your conscious will and make choices. Instead of doing nothing when your identity is in transition, you have the power to generate a positive outcome from the chaos and change. You can determine what type of shell you want and what your new identity will look and feel like. For example, self-assessment helps you determine what really matters to you; knowing this helps you incorporate these things into your new life in some form. Doing so will bring you more self-satisfaction. By making choices that will have a positive effect on your identity, you can also resolve any negative or uncomfortable feelings associated with your transitional state. This frees you to feel more joy in your life.

The Wheel

We've developed a model, which we call *The Wheel*, that functions as a vehicle to lead you out of your transitional state. The Wheel can help you reconstruct the four facets of your identity defined in Chapter 1 (internal view, external factors, roles, and relationships) that were affected

by the move. By using The Wheel, you can reconstruct your identity in a way that honors your emerging self and the choices you want to make. You will become more content and satisfied with your identity because you're in charge of reconstructing it. Also, your sense of identity will be less dependent on your external environment. Instead, you'll have an identity rooted to yourself.

In the remainder of this chapter, we'll discuss what reconstructing a sense of identity means, then outline and briefly discuss the three steps involved. We'll also illustrate these three steps in diagram form so you'll have a visual image of the reconstruction process. As you'll see, the various components of each of the three steps, when combined, form The Wheel.

After providing an overall picture of The Wheel, we'll devote separate chapters to each of the three steps of reconstructing your identity. In these chapters, we'll discuss each step of The Wheel in more detail. This will provide a better understanding of each step and illustrate how the steps overlap and work together to form The Wheel. We'll also provide you with practical information about applying each step to your life and situation.