

2016

The Sojourner experience: An exploration of identity transformation through communication

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The Sojourner Experience: An Exploration of Identity Transformation through
Communication

by

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Thesis

Submitted to the School of Communication, Media & Theatre Arts

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Communication

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November 15, 2016

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Abstract

This exploratory research focuses on the relationship between communication and identity transformation in the sojourner experience. It inquires the following: RQ1: How does communication affect the identity transformation process of sojourners? RQ2: How does identity transformation affect the way sojourners communicate? Ten participants from six countries were interviewed in a forty (40) minute interview session. A qualitative methodology with an open-minded exploratory approach using semi-structured questions to guide the interview was employed. A grounded-in-data coding and Owen's criteria for identifying themes (Owen, 1984) was used to identify emerging themes and overlapping narratives. The study revealed five themes from the "living abroad" experience: changing the way I talk, interacting with the host culture, meeting new people, the college experience, the self; and five themes from the "at-home" experience: I am more, is this home? people at home, at work, and where do I fit in to answer RQ1 and RQ2, respectively.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Cross-continental travel has allowed many individuals to travel abroad more frequently in pursuit of education, cultural exposure, enlightenment, or on business ventures. In the process they face a myriad of challenges that accompany such pursuits. These individuals are known as “sojourners,” temporary between-society culture travelers (Roskell, 2013). Through their travel and pursuits, these individuals may experience the phenomenon of culture shock. Acculturation, a component of culture shock, is the process of adjustment in a host culture, which explains the gradual assimilation of sojourners to the host culture. Once they are fully adjusted and assimilated, sojourners acquire intercultural communication competence (Kim, 2015; Onwumechili et al., 2003). Their continuous interactions with locals and their experiences with the host culture aid them in their refinement of intercultural communication skills (Pitts, 2009). Through continuous discourse with locals and new social networks, the assimilation process is made easier. The adjustment and assimilation to the host culture, however, facilitates changes in the life of sojourners. Through engagement with a host culture and new found social networks, a sojourner experience allows for a shift in values, beliefs, morals, standpoints, and adoption of a new culture (Kim, 2015). These shifts work in concert toward an identity transformation within the sojourner.

When they return to the home country sojourners experience reacculturation, a process that helps to explain why reverse culture shock happens. Identity transformation plays a role in the difficulty sojourners encounter when readjusting and reassimilating to home culture (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kim, 2015; Onwumechili et al., 2003; Orbe, 2007; Pitts, 2009). The identity change, coupled with the hardship of reacculturation, influences the way in which the

sojourner communicates with family and friends and complicates the sojourner's reassimilation. It is only through consistent engagement with communication frameworks that reassimilation realizes. It warrants mention that not all sojourners experience the aforementioned phenomena of culture shock, reverse culture shock, or identity transformation. The intensity or degree toward which any of these incidents are experienced is dependent on several factors, including the motivations for the sojourn (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kim, 2015; Pitts, 2009).

There is no question that identity transformation happens as a result of the sojourner experience. Previous research exists to support this claim (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kim, 2015; Onwumechili et al., 2003; Orbe, 2007; Pitts, 2009; Pritchard, 2011; Shelby et al., 2011; Sussman, 2000). Similarly, scholars have shown that sojourners experience culture shock and reverse culture shock through the cross-cultural adaptation periods (Adler, 1975; Allison et al., 2012; Edwards-Joseph & Baker 2012; Gaw, 2000; Hsiao, 2011; Hurn, 1999; Koenig et al., 2014; Meintel, 1973; Pritchard, 2011; Roskell, 2013; Shelby et al., 2011; Sussman, 2000; Young, 2014). However, no in-depth research exists to examine the moment identity change happened or what triggered the realization of the new identity. Moreover, the role of communication, in particular, has received scant review in the identity transformation process of sojourners, both abroad and at home. To such degree, the impetus of this study is to first, explore how the aforementioned identity change affects the way sojourners communicate and how communication affects the identity transformation process, and second, research the "critical incident" and the events leading up to the cognizance that identity transformation has occurred within an individual and whether reverse culture shock was an antecedent in uncovering that awareness.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Identity transformation experienced by sojourners does not emanate forthwith. It is a gradual process that is shaped by the sojourner's journey. Meaning, the host culture, new found friends, daily interactions, conquered challenges, defeats, and so forth all contribute to it. Moreover, the process of culture shock and how sojourners deal with acculturation affects that outcome. By the same token, strained interpersonal relationships and challenges with interpersonal communication between sojourners and their at-home social networks may be a result of the sojourner experience and possible identity transformation. Thus, a brief overview of culture shock, reverse culture shock, and the process of identity transformation will follow.

Culture Shock

Culture shock manifests itself in the lives of international students studying abroad, military and diplomatic personnel, missionaries, and numerous travelers visiting countries for extended periods. It has been identified as an occupational disease with an etiology, symptoms, and a cure (Meintel, 1973). Culture shock has since been extended to help explain the difficulties in integration and assimilation experienced by immigrants, divorcés, newly released prisoners, and students entering the workforce after graduation (Adler, 1975). The anxiety, stress, depression, and disorientation associated with cross-cultural transitions are known as culture shock. Introduced by Kalervo Oberg (1972), culture shock is described as an occupational disease brought on by the loss of familiar signs, symbols, and social intercourse (Adler, 1975; Allison et al., 2012; Edwards-Joseph & Baker 2012; Gaw, 2000; Hsiao, 2011; Hurn, 1999; Koenig et al., 2014; Meintel, 1973; Pritchard, 2011; Roskell, 2013; Shelby et al., 2011; Sussman, 2000; Young, 2014). Symptoms of culture shock include sleeping problems, fatigue, irritability,

loneliness, forgetfulness, nostalgia, and feelings of not fitting in (Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2012). Culture shock is brought on by ineffectiveness of intercultural or interpersonal communication, fear of becoming ill, and experiencing role-difficulty (Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2012; Meintel, 1973).

According to Oberg's (1972) model, individuals go through several stages while experiencing culture shock. The first stage, named the honeymoon phase, is marked by euphoria; the excitement of a new culture and experience. This is followed by disintegration, which is the confusion and disorientation experienced by sojourners. They find the socio-cultural adjustment difficult and feelings of dissatisfaction with the host culture occur. Disintegration is followed by reintegration. This phase is identified with the rejection of the host culture. The individuals may become hostile towards their experiences as a result of frustration with the transition process. They may withdraw from interactions and even consider going back to their homeland. The final stage experienced is adjustment. At this stage the sojourners have acquired coping mechanisms and developed an understanding of the host culture. The barriers that may have led to the previous transition frustrations have been overcome. The individuals now have gained a sense of autonomy. They immerse themselves in the culture and draw nourishment from the cultural differences and similarities (Adler, 1975; Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2012; Meintel, 1973; Roskell, 2013). The sojourner is said to have adopted the host culture after this stage.

Reverse Culture Shock

Reverse culture shock is experienced by sojourners upon return to their home country. The intensity of reverse culture shock is dependent on several reacculturation factors, nonetheless, the experience has been said to be "... felt more abruptly and acutely than any shock upon entering a strange environment" (Meintel, 1973, p. 52). Meintel (1973) defines

reverse culture shock as the “disorientation which sometimes characterizes the sojourner’s return home” (p. 52). The author described this occurrence as a “critical incident.” The realization that a change has happened within one’s self and the relationships with others in the home country has evolved as well. Researchers claim the intensity of reverse culture shock may in some cases exceed that of culture shock. Feelings of isolation, insider/outsider dynamics, not fitting in, and the process of acculturation are difficult during reverse culture shock (Meintel, 1973).

Individuals feel dislocation and displacement and “have to adapt to a place that has been transformed as much as they have changed themselves...., a place which is familiar and yet strangely foreign. They encounter explicit resistance, or ambivalence at the very least, towards the newness which they represent.” (Bielsa et al., 2013, p. 66). The friendly and patient nature of those in host cultures is not evident when the returnees are transitioning at home (Meintel, 1973). They are often met with stereotyped views of their experience abroad and may be faced with ridicule and intolerance when conversing with others from their country (Bielsa et al., 2013; Young, 2014). Similar to adapting to a new culture, the success of homecoming is dependent on ease of reintegration, and acceptance and recognition from family and friends of the change that has occurred in a person.

The reacclimation process studied by many scholars (Adler, 1975; Allison et al., 2012; Edwards-Joseph & Baker 2012; Gaw, 2000; Hsiao, 2011; Hurn, 1999; Koenig et al., 2014; Meintel, 1973; Pritchard, 2011; Roskell, 2013; Shelby et al., 2011; Sussman, 2000; Young, 2014) allows us to better comprehend reverse culture shock. Onwumechili et al. (2003) explains the process as involving the experience of unexpected problems such as perception of an unchanged homeland, unawareness of the changes within one’s self, expectations from family and friends of an unchanged person, and lack of interest from those close to the person’s foreign

experience. In addition to these factors, other variables, comparative in nature, that influence the reacclimation process are the length of the sojourn, changes in values, motivation of traveling abroad, personal characteristics, and the level of satisfaction with home and foreign country (Onwumechili et al., 2003). The latter factors also determine the extent to which individuals experience culture shock.

Identity Transformation

Identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005) explains the shifts in identity experienced by sojourners as they navigate through living in a new culture and returning to their home culture, as well as interacting with others. Identity is formed through an individual's ability to learn and change by way of new experiences (Onwumechili et al., 2003). Culture and environment play a pertinent role to identity formation. As individuals engage in transactional communication, messages and values are exchanged, forming identity. Identity is located and negotiated within four frames: individual, relationships, groups, and between relational partners (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). These four frames help negotiate identity at multiple layers of interaction (Onwumechili et al., 2003; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Thus, a person undergoes a progression of stages that shape the identity through an intertwinement of engagement with the world around them in these frames. These engagements assist in the development of new concepts, sensibilities, attitudes, and behaviors, which guide the transformation process, especially in expanding the repertoire of ways individuals perceive, understand, differentiate, and react to situations and encounters (Kim, 2015).

It is in this fashion that the sojourner's identity is transformed as well. As aforementioned, when acculturation and assimilation have occurred, the sojourner goes through disculturation, a period where sojourners engage in adaptive activities through intercultural

contact and communication. They acquire new cultural patterns and practices that conjointly allow the unlearning of old cultural elements no longer relevant to the current situations, shelving them temporarily (Kim, 2015). The prolonged enthrallment in intercultural interactions and communication accede the construction of the new identity (Onwumechili et al., 2003; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kim, 2015). The transformation starts with changes in the simple things like taste in music, dress, and food and become more personal, like convictions, standpoints, and desires. The composites of cultural identity are refined and a new identity is forged by the marrying of the host and home cultures in order to transcend cultural categories (Kim, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Y.Y. Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory provides a framework that explains how intercultural personhood is achieved. According to the theory, all individuals possess an open system facilitated by plasticity, the ability to learn and change through communication exchanges with the environment, which grants individuals the ability to evolve and adapt in conjunction with the sociocultural environment they find themselves in (Kim, 2009). Cross-cultural adaptation unfolds as human beings struggle with the disequilibrium experienced as a result of challenges in the new environmental conditions. Individuals continuously labor to gain intercultural competence through communication activities with the host environment. The person undergoes an evolution process that can be explained through what Kim (2009) coined as the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. The model describes a process that happens in a dialectic, cyclical, and continual drawback-to-leap pattern. It is also the driving force behind the adaptive change that occurs. The stress dynamic is synonymous with the disequilibrium experienced as a result of the new environment. Adaption happens when acculturation has been reached and alleviates the disequilibrium. The growth dynamic is achieved through continuous

communication and engagement to the host environment. As previously mentioned, the process is constant and develops as new challenges are encountered. The adaptive changes happen over time.

Several factors influence cross-cultural adaptation. One is speed, defined as, how quickly an individual can adapt to a culture, which is controlled by communication frameworks (Kim, 2009). These include intrapersonal, interpersonal, or social communication (Kim, 2009). How effective an individual's internal mental activities are in preparing to act or react to situations and how inclined they are to participate in face-to-face interactions with others increases cross-cultural adaptation. Other factors that play a part in the adaptation process are host receptivity, conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength (Kim, 2009). Defined, these refer to (a) the degree to which the host culture is accessible and open to an individual, (b) how much the host environment allows the individual to act in accordance with the host language and cultural norms, and (c) the extent to which ethnic groups allow individuals to participate in the host culture's communicative activities. Lastly, an individual's predisposition with regard to the preparedness, ethnic proximity or distance, and personality may affect the cross-cultural adaptation process (Kim, 2009). Basically, the theory states that openness, strength, and positivity are personality characteristics that can change the cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses and enhance cross-cultural adaptation. Interrelated to the latter are functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity, which work together for adaptive change to be reached. Functional fitness explains the ability of an individual to fully function within the cultural norms and communicative activities of the new environment. Psychological health refers to the mental and social well-being of the individual as adaptation has been achieved. Intercultural identity is the result of acculturation. The individual undergoes gradual and

unconscious changes that allow them to identify common threads among cultures and acknowledge the complex differences as well.

Kim's (2009) cross-cultural adaptation theory can be used to explain the process of reacculturation as well. As exhaustively discussed thus far, prolonged stay in the host culture can bring about disculturation, which can make interacting with the home culture troublesome. Employing this theory to examine reacculturation as an antecedent that facilitates the emergence of consciousness of what is said to be a latent cognizance of identity transformation and the challenges that accompany interpersonal relationships and communication as a result thereof is the purpose of this study.

Purpose of Study

Not only is the acculturation and reacculturation process challenging, but sojourners have to deal with a myriad of changes that have occurred within themselves, their host and home environment and family and friends while going through this adaptation process. The multiple intercultural encounters they have experienced may lead to intercultural growth and identity transformation (Kim, 2015). Identity transformation often occurs as a result of changed values and beliefs, novel standpoints, adoption of a second culture, and exposure to eclectic individuals. The transformation is said to be latent and only reveal itself once the sojourner returns to their home country (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kim, 2015; Onwumechili et al., 2003; Orbe, 2007; Pitts, 2009). Reacculturation factors such as unexpectedness of reentry problems by sojourners, a fixed perception of an unchanged homeland, the awareness of changes in themselves, the expectation from family and friends that they have not changed, and the lack of interest of at-home social networks in their sojourner experience exposes and accentuates the identity transformation (Onwumenchili et al., 2013). The exposure to a different culture calls the home

cultural identity into question because it no longer matches the returnees' new found identity (Sussman, 2000). Thus, the sojourner experience, coupled with the identity transformation, works jointly in the development of intercultural sensitivity, enhanced intercultural communication skills, intercultural communication competences, intercultural personhood, and increased perceived self-efficacy (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kim, 2015; Onwumechili et al., 2003; Orbe, 2007; Pitts, 2009).

Based on the aforementioned, there is no doubt that cross-cultural adaptation and the processes of acculturation and reacclturation facilitate identity transformation. Nonetheless, inquisitive minds wonder how sojourners arrive at the state of discernment that a change within them has occurred, the "critical incident." Research used in this study (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Hsiao, 2011; Kim, 2015; Onwumechili et al., 2003; Orbe, 2007; Pitts, 2009; Selby et al., 2011; Sussman, 2000; Young, 2014) and countless others have extensively documented the adaptive changes of sojourners in host and home countries, as well as discussed the acquisition of multiculturalism and identity transformation as a result thereof. However, the role of communication in the identity transformation process and an examination of the moment of emergence of consciousness of identity transformation in sojourners need more exploration. This study is an exploration of how communication affects the identity transformation process of sojourners abroad and at home and the role reverse culture shock plays in the latent awareness or "critical incident" of sojourners that an identity change has taken place within them.

Thus this study poses the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How does communication affect the identity transformation process of sojourners?

RQ2: How does the identity transformation process of sojourners affect the way they communicate?

Chapter 3

Method

I employed a qualitative methodology with an open-minded exploratory approach (Treadwell, 2014) in this study. Participants were interviewed using a funnel format approach guided by semi-structured and open-ended questions.

Participants

The study consisted of ten (10) participants, who have resided in the United States for at least ten (10) months prior to returning to their home and have lived in their home country for at least six (6) months after their return. The participants (n = number of participants) were recruited through convenience sampling, using Facebook friendship network, as well as snowball sampling. The sample was diverse and included participants from Chile (n = 1), Finland (n = 1), Germany (n = 2), India (n = 1), Namibia (n = 1), Pakistan (n = 1), Senegal (n = 1), and Spain (n = 2). The participants ranged between the ages of 25-54 years. Six (n = 6) were female and four (n = 4) were male. The reason for their sojourn included au pair (n = 2), professional development fellowship (n = 5), and undergraduate and graduate studies (n = 3). To assess knowledgeability of culture shock and reverse culture shock, participants were asked to answer the question “Do you have any knowledge of culture shock? Do you have any knowledge of reverse culture shock?” Ten (n = 10) participants answered yes on knowledge of culture shock. Nine (n = 9) participants answered yes on knowledge of reverse culture shock and one (n = 1) answered no.

Procedure

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received and consent was granted by participants. A 7-item self-report demographic questionnaire was emailed to the participants

using a survey portal (SurveyMonkey.com). I used Skype video calling (n = 8) and Facebook Messenger video calling (n = 2) to conduct the interviews. Once the questionnaires were collected participants were asked to share their Skype video calling username with me or friend me on Facebook. I requested participants to set-up an electronic device of their choosing in a quiet, private, and comfortable location. One forty (40) to forty-five (45) minute interview session was held over a three week period at the participants' convenience. A funnel format approach was used to facilitate the questioning (Treadwell, 2014). A semi-structured interview method guided by umbrella and open-ended questions was used to allow me to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience, first in the host culture and upon their return home.

Instrumentation

The participant's interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were returned to participants in the form of a Microsoft Word document to verify and approve information. The participants were encouraged to clearly identify any errors or misconceptions by means of an email.

I used grounded-in-data-coding (Treadwell, 2014) and Owen's (1984) criteria for identifying themes. According Owen's (1984) criteria, themes are identified through reoccurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984; Wilder, 2016). I applied this method to identify emerging themes, concepts, patterns, and way of thinking in each interview. I then employed comparative analysis to find overlapping themes and narratives in order to determine overarching themes and categories across all interviews.

Chapter 4

Results

Living Abroad

The interviews were very holistic; and participants talked extensively about the acculturation process in the United States and their home culture. They shared the challenges, adversities, and lessons learned from each experience. Five key themes emerged that worked in concert to facilitate the participant's identity transformation through communication: (a) changing the way I talk, (b) interacting with host culture, (c) meeting new people, (d) the college experience, and (e) the self. These themes helped to answer RQ1: How does communication affect the identity transformation process of sojourners?

Changing the way I talk. Participants expressed that they had to use numerous strategies to ensure that their messages were understood. They noted that their accents made it difficult for their conversation partner to understand what they were saying. Some of the strategies employed to safeguard misinterpretation were repeating themselves, rephrasing statements, changing pronunciation and enunciation, rethinking word choice, using communication accommodation, and nonverbal communication. Marta, a fellow in a professional development program noted:

Because I have African accent or maybe French accent. The language I know is French. So it was very difficult. I had to repeat all the time...sometimes I just find some like nonverbal communication, just asking for words if I don't have the words, and then they would give me the words.

Another fellow, Helge stated:

The only challenge I guess for me was, umm, my accent is very British, probably because of the umm colonial influence...when I speak they wouldn't be able to, because of my

accent, be able to pick up what it is that I am saying. You know it is the tomato “tomato” kind of conundrum, if I can call it that. So I’ve had to just learn to say the words the way they say it so they don’t keep asking me, excuse me, what are you saying, can you repeat...umm, a lot of times it was rephrasing or using substitute words, speaking slowly, umm, or faster if...yeah...it depends.

Interacting with host culture. The participants shared numerous stories of acculturation. They emphasized that active participating in host culture traditions, interacting with locals, asking questions to give context to traditions and holidays, as well as imitating behaviors in certain situations helped them with assimilating to the host culture. A participant, Helge, shared her story of active participation that helped her assimilate:

As a cohort we tried to celebrate these events in our own right. I actually remember this one time we went to the super bowl where the Seattle Seahawks were playing in the final. And because they had won the year before there was a huge parade. And we had been looking forward to see that parade. So we went downtown and we were tailgating and we were having hot wings and fries, curly fries. You know, all of these things that Americans do during these events. Umm, nonetheless the Seahawks didn’t win and we were all very disappointed that that didn’t come down. But it really helped us to umm, you know, feel at home and do the things that the locals would do, and then we could actually have a meaningful conversation with the locals about said event.

Emilia, who lived in the U.S. for 13 months, stated that although she understood the English words she didn’t know what was meant because she didn’t understand the cultural context:

It was challenging in the beginning because I was missing the cultural context for a lot of things. So even though I understood the English words, I still didn't like really know what it meant.... The family explained me a lot of things. So, they for example took me to a lot of different events. So, for example if there was a holiday they'd explain me like what they do typically like during this holiday and like invite me to celebrate it with their families, and then their different family members would explain me even more the local culture and things like what their family does and so on.

The friendly nature of the American people helped some participants assimilate. As Emilia mentioned:

Umm, I had to learn small talk. My culture doesn't have it at all. So, I had to learn to be comfortable talking to people that I don't know. In the beginning it was very very confusing. For example when I walk into the store and people working in the store would ask me; Hey, how are you? I would be really confused, like, why are they asking me, do they really care? And well, almost like I answered them honestly but then like I figured like it's just a like a longer way to say hello (laughing).... It's a true story.

Meeting new people. All participants expressed excitement in meeting new people and making friends. They found that interacting and meeting a myriad of people, both local and from all over the world, allowed them to gain a new perspective, be enlightened, open minded, nonjudgmental, tolerant, considerate, outgoing, and be exposed to different cultures, values, beliefs, and languages. They believed these interactions to be personally enriching. When asked about meeting new people, Paul, another fellow in a professional development program shared:

It makes me more aware that that people are different yet you know the expectations are the same. People may be different in the way they look, they may be different in the way

they dress, they may be different in the way they communicate, but ultimately you got to be picking up the right skills.... But the exposure gave me a global platform where I could, you know, interact with the people from all over the world. And in my cohort only, we had 11 people from 11 different countries and practically all the continents were covered....It was a great experience learning about their food, their family, how they interact, their social locations, their festivals. So, that gives me a completely different perspective. It makes my horizon wider. It makes me understand that people are different, that cultures are different, yet, there is a basic similarity between all humans.

Camila, an international student shared a similar experience:

I think in the U.S. I learned to be more flexible and I learned how to be more patient with people. Here in my culture people are more judgmental. In the U.S. I had to learn that you don't know the story behind of each person. And that each person deserve their time and space and way they express or talk to you, is because of their experience. When you are with people with so many experience either you are open or it is a mess.

The college experience. All of the participants attended college in the United States to some degree. Some just took English classes while others attended college full-time. Several shared their college experiences and how interacting with others shaped them. Participants recalled feeling a sense of pride and self-confidence while telling their stories. In her story, Maryam, a fellow in a professional development program said:

The other thing was eye contact. I felt that in the U.S. it is very important that if you are addressing or talking to a person you have to establish an eye contact with him or her. But in [my country] if you are talking to an elder you are supposed to keep your gaze lower. That is a sign of respect. But in U.S. it was otherwise. I think I found it really hard

to call names to my teachers. So, just say Bill or Dorothy without giving them umm or addressing them as proper ma'am or sir or stuff like that. These were little things I took time to adapt to these changes.

Camila also shared:

I had speech class. That was a huge help to be honest. I...my speech class in community college, because in my country we don't have classes that you have to speak in front of people. In speech you have to speak in front of people in another language and in a very concise time for a very specific message. That really helped me.

In expressing pride, Vicente, also a fellow in a professional development program, recalled:

I think it I...I will answer you what I was inside of the some classes. Some umm and I...couldn't believe that I was there understanding ehhe the class. Understanding the topics, sometimes make me give them my opinion and I think, ehhe, the result of my effort during my five, six years was this experience.... To ehhe every weekend going to English class....

The self. The sojourner experience was not without challenges for the participants. They reminisced about stories of solitude, loneliness, and introspection. Few noted that spending time with themselves was the most enjoyable part of their experience. Others did not share this sentiment and expressed feelings of heartache and sadness from loneliness. All participants agreed that time alone allowed them to discover new things about themselves. Participants discovered that they were more extroverted or introverted. Helge said:

While I love, love, love, love the family and busy life, I also just feel for my personality type, which I've discovered, all this time I was sort of an extrovert border lining on introversion, I'm actually an introvert. Someone very close to me says; extrovert

tendencies. But that's just because I learned how to cope with people around me because my family is so big and we do a lot of stuff together.

Like Marta, a few participants became more outgoing.

I don't like going out all the time. I'm not used to going out all the time. But at the end when my other fellows call and say can we go somewhere, I would say, count me in. In the beginning I didn't do that.

A similar story was shared by Emilia:

I would say I had to become a lot like social and open. Because umm in my culture you don't really talk to people like outside your own circle. But then everybody is like really open and friendly and talkative in the States. And even from like different people from different cultures that I met. And even though, even they were not American, they were still a lot more open and friendly than my culture. Yeah, I had to talk talk a lot more with everybody.

The At-Home Experience

The sojourners' return to their home country possessed its own set of challenges. The participants shared their stories in the interviews, which produced evidence that can answer RQ2: How does the identity transformation process of the sojourners' experience affect the way they communicate? The research produced five (5) themes - (a) I am more, (b) is this home? (c) people at home, (d) at work, and (e) where do I fit in? - to explain how the sojourners' identity transformation influenced the way they communicate.

I am more. As a result of constantly pushing themselves to adapt to the host culture and interacting with more individuals than usual to aid acculturation, participants recalled adaptive changes that were cemented and in so doing facilitated identity transformation. In sharing stories

about how this change has influenced how they communicate, participants used nouns such as opinionated, frank, firm, expressive, assertive, and a good listener to describe themselves.

Maryam noted:

Yes, my style of communicating has also changed. It has undergone a transition because previously I was not that open about and frank about what I used to say. But I think now I have become very open after I have come back from U.S. I become very bold about what I speak. I can easily speak my heart out now. While previously I used to be concerned about what others are thinking about me while talking. At times I was holding back my creativity as well. Innovative ideas that I have in my mind. So, I would hold those back. But now after coming back from U.S. I tend to give all those ideas, all those thoughts that coming to my mind very openly in a much bolder way.

A similar thought was raised by Gretchen, a cultural exchange student, when she recalled her time as an au pair:

I really have umm opinion now about things. That's for sure because I also learned in the USA when I had to leave the family the mother cried and I said no, I cannot stay here, sorry. And that was the first time I said no to somebody, like, really. It was a bad time and I learned that I have to tell people what I think. I still have to learn more I think. It is important to me to say what I really think.

A few participants emphasized the importance of active listening. Alfred, an international student shared:

I definitely became a way better listener. Because I think even in communication it's more important to understand the other person's point of view and then to make sure that your point of view is well communicated. Because even if you, yeah, if you cannot make

the other person understand your own point of view being able to understand them more fully it's a very important step to communicate well.

Vicente had this to say about listening:

I think listening more. This is the main expression of communication. Less talk more listen. Ehhh more more ehhh active listening ehhh of the ideas and feelings and feelings of my ehhh of the people in general. Not just my team, my family, in general I think. Now I ehhh I talk less and listen more.

Is this home? The realization that a change has happened within one's self is in most cases followed by the return home. The country has evolved or has stayed the same, which makes reacclturation challenging for many. Participants shared anecdotes of some of their reacultaration experiences and how their identity change influenced the way they interacted with the home culture. Sebastian an international student who lived in the U.S. for two years stated: "I feel like I was going to a country 20 years ago. Like everything is more old. Everything it's not that economic developed. Umm, everything is more small." Paul said:

It is the small things. Like in terms of traffic you know. In the U.S. even if there is no one there is hardly any police, constable, or beat inspector that is standing at the junctions. You people just follow the rules. If it says stop, it is stop, and you stop, and then go. Now here, the traffic rules are followed only when there is someone they are standing at the beat then you can get fined. On their own people don't follow. So I got very crept by that. It's not that it wasn't happening before. But because of that exposure, because of that cultural exposure I could say that, hey this is not good.

Helge had this to say about being home:

We would still be...men would expect women to take out the trash. They don't insist on taking it out. I mean if they take it out they do but it's not something that they feel like they need to do as they do in the States. I remember the one day I was in the office and we had gone to the cafeteria and I had to go with one of my male colleagues and he pushed open the door and just left it and I nearly walked smack into this class door thinking that he would, well, becoming used to he would hold the door for me. When he didn't I found myself scolding him about it, like aren't you a man, aren't you supposed to hold the door. What's wrong with you? Then I had to check myself, you are not in the U.S. anymore, you are back home.

Emilia commented:

I was really annoyed by how cold and distant people are here. There is no like spontaneous chit chat. That doesn't just happen with people here too much. And like when I told you about my experience like going to the store in the states in the beginning how confusing it was, and like after staying there for a year, and I came back to [my country] and I went to the store, and people didn't ask me how I was, and didn't wish me a good day in the end, I was like, oh my gosh, these people are so rude.

People at home. Not everyone experiences strained relationships at home. Some, those who engage in cross continental travel often, find their relationships with social networks at home unaltered. Others, however, intensely experience strained relationships with family and old friends. They sometimes don't acknowledge or recognize the change that has occurred in the person. Participants gave renditions of incidents with family and friends. Gretchen recounted her interactions with those at home:

I also changed a lot I think and I didn't want to be with the same people again anymore. Some people they were really conservative, is that the right word? Because they were like, not right people for me, they were thinking of material things more. The cars, the job, and the status. I don't know maybe it was important to me too before I went to the U.S. but then I saw that rich people. I lived in a rich house with rich people. I saw that it's the worst. Then I thought I want to be with real friends, live with them together.

Another participant, Emila, stated:

Well in the beginning it really felt like we didn't have like anything in common anymore. Because like I have been away for so long. It was kind of like our lives went on different paths. During the time, they settled down and I was only starting studies, so it was tough. Umm, well I guess after I came back and like spend time with them again, like then we started to have things in common since we like did things in common. So, like we slowly like build the relationship.

One participant, Maryam, noted:

However, there are a few friends, I must confess, that I have lost a few friends in [my country] because of those value systems that I have adapted to. So, only a few friends are not Umm on my priority list anymore. Because, they have not acceptable who I have become after coming back. I have lost them unfortunately. But it is their right to decide what they want in their life, so I am acceptable of that.

At work. Nine (9) of the participants were professionals and went back to work after their sojourner experience, four (4) looked for and found jobs few months after returning, and one (1) participant started college. In their interviews participants talked about how their experience allowed them to become advocates for change, be more confident and assertive in the

workplace, as well as be more considerate and respectful of others. Helge talked about being a woman in a male-dominated job industry and how she asserted herself:

I used to consult. Now I'm part of an organization where we bring in consultants. So I'm literally sitting at the other end of the table and I know what good service looks like. I used to do that. So, when a consultant tries to be funny, or get away with murder, I can check them. Umm and I do that. So, I think in the past I would not have been able to. I would have just continued with those same trends and be burnt out.

Marta also noted that:

Yes, I am more confident now to speak my mind. I don't care about the cultural rules and the work I'm doing right now is very beneficial for me in the work I'm doing right now. Because we have to fight against some traditional problems, which you have these tools to help women. I feel more confident going to people, talking to them, talking about the bad things that might happen with some customs. So that's it.

Others like Maryam shared stories that broke cultural and religious norms:

I have learned how to prioritize certain things. In [my country] what happens is that we pray five times a day and most of the people would pray five times a day. Especially those that are staunch Muslims. And at times people spend a lot of time praying instead of, you know, doing their work during office hours. So, one value set that probably changed was that, you know, I used to do the same. I used to pray during the office hours and I used to think that it is something which is mandatory. But now what happens is that I consider work very important. I do pray. I do give time to all those things that I believe in, but I have learned how to prioritize. Like, I would not leave a person outside my office because I'm praying. I think that is not right. Previously, I thought that it's alright;

it is my right to pray or do whatever I want. If a person is waiting for me, he should, I shouldn't be, you know, like mindful of that. But now that has changed. I think that my value set gives more importance to other people now. So, in that way I think it has been a transition.

Paul noted timeliness as a positive change that addresses being considerate to others.

I value, you know, people's time that much more, even if it is a subordinate. If I said I'll be in a meeting at a particular time, I ensure even otherwise. I used to be more punctual than generally speaking. But now I'm punctual the American way. Yeah, so that is a positive I take because that is a positive in their culture that you have to respect people's time. When you have given time, you have to be, you have to show up on time.

Where do I fit in? While some of the participants (n = 4) did not experience any ambiguity or role difficulty upon their return to their home country, others found it difficult to seamlessly assume their roles in the family as well as friendship circles. Negotiating their new role within the social networks became a daunting task of playing catch up. Participants shared the process of fitting in as the new person they've become. Helge said:

And umm also just realizing that while things might have stayed the same, things have changed, because just as you became accustomed to getting by without your family and without that immediate support over there, they too started doing things differently to get by without you here. So, you can't just exactly fall back into that old step because they too have now become accustomed to doing things without you or not needing you as much as they might have before. It is such a confusing time umm but you have to, you have to sort of be conscious in each and every moment to realize that umm yes, I've been

away, yes things have changed, or yes they've stayed the same, and this is my new role coming back into the culture, coming back into the community and all that.

Camila described how she had to fight for time with friends and negotiate her role in the friendship circle:

I remember the one time I came back and I wanted to go out but they went out for three years to places that I haven't been out. That's when I decided for me not to go with them anymore. You are trying to come back to the past. It is really hard because you are just not there anymore and they're not there anymore. You've changed and it is complicated. A lot of time they have their routine and you have your routine and they don't understand that. So you are trying to fit in and it's like almost you ask them to make time for you because they continue and have their routine and you are all over the place. And that was hard. To fit in.

When talking about her relationship with her family and how to react to the changes they saw in her, Maryam said:

So, I think that my family has actually umm felt all these changes in me. And initially it was very difficult for them to accept these changes in me and accept my views after coming back. But I had to, umm, adopted the strategy of being very convincing. Like I have been very persistent about convincing them and I have been encouraging others to go and have, you know, international experience and read books about international authors.

The Critical Incident

Apart from exploring how communication and identity transformation influence each other in the experience of sojourners, this study aimed to research the critical incident, the

moment of emergence of consciousness that an identity transformation has occurred in them. In their interviews, the participants were asked when they realized they had changed. The answers varied in timeline, but a definitive acknowledgement of identity transformation was found. Marta shared her experience saying:

When I came back, after I came home. Maybe months after. It's just interacting with people. If you just discover that you cannot accept some things, things cannot go the way they used to go. And so it is because I had time. I told you what was most difficult for me was that solitude. But that solitude helped me to think a lot. To think a lot about my interaction. To think a lot about my interaction with people, my colleagues, and some decisions. So that solitude was really not only negative. That solitude helped me change, that's where I think my change came from. My thinking.

To answer the same question Maryam said:

It wasn't a one day experience that I, I did realize. I didn't realize that I've changed in one day. It was a process. Change is always a process that comes with a lot of multiple experiences. I realized I have changed while I was in the U.S., right? I recall an incident that when I, the first day of my class, when I was in my class, I was very hesitant, I was very traditional. I wouldn't shake hands and stuff like that. But umm on the end of our program I remember that I was hugging each and every one in our class. And other than that I felt that while I was in U.S. I have changed because there were people that could talk about anything or everything with me and I would listen to them very patiently. I would not react to their views. I would accept them the way they are. That is one thing I felt that I was undergoing the transition. But it was always a set of experiences. It was not something that happened one day. It happened over a period of time. I realized that while

I was in the U.S., especially the second half of my program, you know when it was almost half way through.

Another very insightful realization was shared by Emilia. She said:

Hmmm, well, when I came back and was like talking with like my my family and my friends. I have realized we have kind of like really different interest. Or like they used to be the same or similar but then like since I had like lived very different life than them for quite a long time and yeah that's probably, yeah, that's when I noticed it and just like being back in the umm like same old same old environment and I was like really just like still craving for really new place and adventures and that. It happened immediately.

From the above narratives it can be gleaned that the prolonged enthrallment in intercultural interactions and communication accede the construction of the new identity and that the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social communication frameworks, both abroad and at home, facilitate the cognizance that identity transformation has occurred. The data of this study also shows that reverse culture shock does not act as a sole antecedent in the uncovering of this awareness; the acculturation process also contributes to the awareness that a change has occurred in one-self.

The Sojourner Experience

The acculturation and reacculturation process is very challenging. The open system facilitated by plasticity, the ability to learn and change through communication exchanges with the environment, allows sojourners to discover a myriad of truths about them. Their multiple intercultural encounters lead to intercultural growth that results in changed values, standpoints, and beliefs, and similarly, it strengthens them. To answer the question has your values or beliefs changed? Maryam noted:

Yes, my value set has changed as well. Previously, since I was living in one kind of society, one kind of culture, one kind of religion, I never questioned my own value set. Okay. But after coming back from U.S. I started questioning my own values and my own practices. Right? And I felt that some of my practices and some of my own values were not correct. And I've changed those.

Helge explained:

I think if anything they were made stronger. Umm, I'm Christian and I don't, I'm just looking back over the period before I was all by myself. I don't think I spend as much presence or as much time in the presence of God as I did while I was abroad. Umm and then being exposed to different religions umm also affirmed what I believed in seeing differences and similarities really umm just strengthened my foundation in Christ....And the people that I surrounded myself with were always on the positive side of things and they were fighting for umm fighting against these perils. Whether it was racism or sexism or tribalism and all of that stuff. And that also sort of helped affirm that I believed the human race looks like or should look like. Umm, I'm not wrong. Like, I'm not going crazy. That really affirmed that for me as well.

Gretchen shared her change: "I met in Michigan feminist girls and I started thinking more about feminism and now I am a feminist myself. And the first time I met feminist was in Michigan. That's changed like a lot."

The enlightening nature of the sojourner experience shared in the narratives by participants continued throughout the interviews. Their anecdotes were evident of personal growth, maturity, novel standpoints, enlightenment, and self-efficacy, to name a few. When asked what changed about you almost all participants (n = 6) answered, "I became mature." To

the question, what did you learn from your experience, the words tolerance (n = 4), nonjudgmental (n = 5), and exposure (n = 8) were a common thread. Emilia recalled:

Like I saw so many places and learn about like and learned of all these different cultures through my friends. And it's really just like I got to know that there is so much more to life like places, people, cultures, traditions and all of that that I have like ever experienced. And probably, like I learned more in one year than what I have learned in 20 years in like living in this small town. Like it was really crazy experience.

Vicente noted:

This is the result of my experience in U.S. When you live with two friend from Pakistan and one friend from Iraq you have to share ehhe way how you ehhe see the world. You have to learn what is eh Ramadan and you have to ehhe understand why they do the ehhe the way they confront the difficult and how is it their culture the same way....Is another perspective of the life. If you come back to your ehhe country and it don't eh intergrade that you are not eh really ehhe putting all you are knowledge and for the people for the team for your family. You have to change your personality after that experience. Ehhe it's the truth.

The question of how their communication styles changed both abroad and at home or how communication abroad influenced the way they communicate at home brought to light strategies employed abroad which stuck around. Helge commented:

I don't know why the things that we learn sort of while we are adults stick a little much faster and harder and longer to your persona than the stuff that you have been taught all these years while you were growing up. I don't know why that is.

Thus, participants shared how practicing patience, communication accommodation, active listening, and nonverbal communication, to name a few, while interacting with individuals abroad became part of newly formed communication strategies at home. In his story, Paul shared:

So that is something that I think the communication strategy has unwittingly helped me. It was not intended but because I got in the practice of, you know, trying to listen more, and by more, I thought that was a useful tool for me to take it to the professional scenario here.

Maryam said:

One thing that I learned in the U.S. is not only about speaking, it is not only about words. Communication is about words, it's about facial expressions, the way you are behaving, the kind of things you are wearing on yourself, like jewelry or make-up. All these things are part of communication. But in U.S. I felt that these things are very important as part of communication and they give a very you know holistic image of you as a person for the other listener. So, communication is also about the nonverbal communication. And that was one lesson that I learned in the U.S.

Helge explained an interesting conundrum she found herself in with regard to practicing communication strategies learned abroad at home:

And then this was also something that they taught us in, or not taught us or alerted us on before we left the U.S. is tone and body language. Umm, which, yes, we've known this all this time, but because you are vigilant of your tone and your body language and how it might be interpreted umm, you, you're sort of present in when you convey a message to make sure that it gets to the next person correctly. And I've found that I still practice that

since I've been back, which has helped in many different ways. Apart from the time when even when I try to convert a message, or convey a message in a certain manner I am misunderstood now again on this side. Umm, I feel like I can never win.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The five themes identified under the “Living Abroad Experience” work together to answer RQ1: How does communication affect the identity transformation process of sojourners? Ting-Toomey’s (2005) identity negotiation theory explains that as individuals engage in transactional communication, messages and values are exchanged, forming identity. The five themes each show how the transactional interaction with the host culture, locals, and individuals from around the world impacted the lives of the participants and molded their identities according to their experiences. The multiple layers of interaction shaped their identity through the intertwinement of engagement. A transformation process comes to fruition, which expands the participants’ repertoire in the way they perceive, understand, differentiate, and react to situations and encounters (Kim, 2001), and thus, their convictions, standpoints and desires are influenced.

Similarly, the stress-adaptation-growth model discussed by Kim (2009) explains the approach participants embodied in adapting to the host culture. The continuous drawback-to-leap pattern, Kim (2009) explains, drives the participants to be active participants of the host culture and to be open to the new experience, new people, and new learning. The communication frameworks discussed in Kim’s (2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory controls the expediency of participants’ adaptation to the host culture. As in Ting-Toomey’s (2005) identity negotiation theory, Kim’s (2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory states that how participants act and react to situations are based on their interactions with the host culture and the world around them. The participants’ narratives tell stories of openness, perseverance, strength, positivity, and flexibility, which are all personality characteristics that shape identity and can change the cognitive,

affective, and behavioral responses to the sojourner experience. Participants readily admitted the transformation they underwent. They have embraced their intercultural identity and raved in the knowledge that there are common threads among cultures and proudly recognize the complex differences as well.

This enlightenment is not achieved at once. It is a dialectic, cyclical, and continual process that presents itself in a drawback-to-leap pattern (Kim, 2009). The aforementioned communication frameworks of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social communication (Kim, 2009) granted the participants the ability to operate in and explore the situations and encounters they were faced with from within themselves, in relation to others, and with their environment. These multiple frames of communication shaped the way the participants saw themselves in the host culture.

Complimentary to the aforementioned, the participants' "At Home Experience" is influenced by their abroad experience. Under this heading, the five themes which emerged worked conjointly to answer the second research question (RQ2): How does the identity transformation process of sojourners affect the way they communicate? The navigation between living in a new culture, returning to the home culture, and interacting with those at home operates in a reverse motion of negotiating the multiple layers of the new identity formed. Thus, sojourners undergo a progression of stages through engagement with the home culture, family, and friends. They start with engaging in adaptive activities, such as finding a job, going back to work, school, or discovering their new role in society and social networks, as admitted by participants. However, through negotiating their new found identity and the old identity, they find themselves in a precarious position of defending their new identity through daily interaction. These interactions bring to light the new change of boldness, expressiveness, frankness, and

outspokenness in the manner of communicating, and subsequently, they apply communication strategies they've learned abroad to translate confidence, open-mindedness, tolerance, nonjudgment, consideration, and so forth, in daily interaction. Similar to the adaptation that happens abroad, adaptation at-home unfolds in a dialectic, cyclical, and continual drawback-to-leap pattern. Initial at home interactions caused participants stress and ambiguity. However, the continual interaction with the social networks brings forth the boldness in accepting the change that has happened within them and pushing those around them to accept and embrace those changes as well. Participants shared that their new changes were both welcomed and shunned, and as a result, their interpersonal relationships were redefined. This is representative of part of Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory that deals with functional fitness, an individual's ability to fully function within the cultural norms and communicative activities of the new/old environment.

Comparable to acculturation, reacculturation is achieved through continuous communication and engagement to the home environment. The process is constant and develops as new challenges are encountered. This exploratory study of the sojourner experience, through a communication lens, found that the reacculturation process is guided by the sojourner's abroad experience and the identity transformation that has occurred. Their at-home assimilation is shaped by the learned behaviors, personality traits, novel standpoints, and communication habits/strategies formed abroad, and thus, they operate from that frame of being. Furthermore, interactions within communication frameworks, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social communication, are conducted from that platform to facilitate reassimilation.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The sojourner experience is without a doubt a catalyst in the identity transformation of sojourners. Scholars have shown that sojourners experience culture shock and reverse culture shock through the cross-cultural adaptation periods. The emergence of an intercultural personhood, intercultural sensitivity, enhanced intercultural communication skills, intercultural communication competencies, and increased perceived self-efficacy are part of the development that the experience brings. The prolonged enthrallment in intercultural interactions and communication accede the construction of the new identity.

The findings of this study add to this body of knowledge on the sojourner experience. This study was twofold. First, it explored the “critical incident” and the trigger in the realization that identity change has occurred. Previous research discussed in this study (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kin, 2015; Onwumechili et al., 20013; Orbe, 2007; Pitts, 2009) claimed that the identity transformation was latent and only revealed itself once the sojourner returned home. However, this study found that the “critical incident,” as discussed by Meintel (1973), which is the realization that a change has happened within one’s self and within the relationships with others in the home country has evolved as well, happens over a period of time instead of as a result of a “critical incident.” Additionally, participants in this study discussed their identity transformation at length and pointed out that the cognizance of their transformation emerged through multiple interactions and incidents, some abroad and others at home. Certainly, the realization was more poignant at home. Nevertheless, incidents involving change in character, standpoints, values, and relationships were reported by participant while they were abroad, which proves that realization of identity change happens while living abroad as well.

The second part to this study's exploration involved the role of communication in the sojourner experience. Although previous research acknowledged that communication is a factor that contributes to the identity transformation of a sojourner, it only focused on the intercultural aspect of communication. Meaning, the sojourner developed intercultural sensitivity that provided for intercultural communication competences and enhanced intercultural communication skills. The findings of this study open a new dimension in the multi-faceted experience of a sojourner as it pertains to how communication affects the identity transformation. This study found that engaging in adaptive activities such as active participation in host-culture traditions, interacting with locals, and meeting new people shape the way sojourners communicate. Sojourners practice communication accommodation, rethink word choice, change pronunciation and enunciation, engage in active listening, and pay more attention to nonverbal communication. These are just few of the ways in which communication accede identity transformation. Through continual exercise of these communication skills, a new persona emerges. The dialectic, cyclical, and continual nature of such discourse brings forth someone more confident, opinionated, assertive, frank, firm, and expressive, - the list is endless. To such degree, the identity transformation achieved through the abroad experience influences the way sojourners communicate.

The new personality traits, standpoints, and communication strategies adopted, by virtue of the experience, are all composites that form the new identity. These composites emerge in the daily interactions with others when they return home. The communication patterns and habits acquired whilst abroad also affect reacculturation. Thus, discourse at home is laced with innuendos, conversation fillers, vocabulary, nonverbal elements, analogies, and communication skills learned abroad, which may make conversing with at home social networks problematic. As

found by this study communication affects identity transformation in sojourners and in turn affects how sojourners communicate, therefore their identity change emanates forth within their interactions with those at home.

Limitations of the Study

This study found four major limitations. First, memory recall was challenging for some participants. It was evident throughout the interview process that some participant never actively reflected on their sojourner experience in terms of the impingement on their identity transformation and the role of communication therein. They could only remember the most salient and broader aspects of their sojourn and were unable to completely fill the gap with detailed accounts. Second, some participants were not fully aware of the impact communication had on their identity transformation. This can be accounted to participants' inability to view communication as an agent of intrinsic change. Research discussed in this study shows that adaptive activities sojourners engage in are conscious and unconscious. Intercultural contact, which facilitates intercultural personhood, may be viewed as conscious, while interpersonal and intrapersonal communication may be viewed as unconscious. The reason the latter may be viewed as unconscious is because of the continual and daily occurrence thereof. A transfer of ideals, beliefs, values, ambitions, culture, tradition, and such happens with each interaction, but awareness of such transfer does not present itself until active reflection takes place. Thus, little to no regard is given to the impact of communication during each interaction. Third, the participants' sojourner experience possessed multiple layers of stories, people, situations, and encounters that contributed to their identity change, which could not be crammed into a forty (40) minute interview. Hence, this study only previews a snapshot of the entire sojourner experience and the effects thereof as it pertains to identity transformation and communication.

Fourth, the age demographic of participants in this study ranged between 25-54 years, and it is unknown whether a younger-aged sojourner's experience will be different to the participants' in this study, since individuals are more impressionable at a younger age.

Future Research

This study focused mainly on interpersonal communication and the influence the interactions with the host culture had on sojourners. In order to assimilate to the host culture, constant interaction with the host-culture traditions, locals, and international people occurred. Rightfully, these interactions shaped every aspect of the sojourner's life while living abroad. And though the experience is multi-faceted and layered, most research focuses on the effects of culture shock, acculturation, reverse culture shock, reacclimation, and the intercultural personhood. The two focal points of this study, the "critical incident" and the role of communication in identity transformation of a sojourner is a jump-off to discover and explore the other aspect of the sojourner experience. One facet that emerged in this study is the fact that participants spend a lot of time in solitude and referenced thinking a lot. Tales of retrospection, looking back at their life thus far, and introspection, looking within one's self, were told. Future research should explore the impact intrapersonal communication has on identity transformation and the role it plays in the transformation process. Surely, these moments of solitude grant clarity and examination on a life lived, individuals met, things experienced, challenges overcome, decisions made, dreams realized, failures succumbed, friendships lost, and success achieved. Secondly, the constant negotiation with the self and the environment to conform, concede, or withstand any situation, encounter, or challenge; and not to mention, beliefs, values, culture, morals, and so forth, give rise to delve into the psyche of the sojourner to gain a better understanding of the internal struggles they are faced with daily. Making any decision with

regard to how to act, respond, or approach any situation or interaction takes into account past experiences as well as the aforementioned. Accordingly, an exploration of how the internal use of language and thought processes affect identity transformation presents and new spectrum of ideas and features in the sojourner experience that makes the experience much richer than just acculturation, reacculturation, and emergence of intercultural personhood.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

Self-report Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your country of origin?
4. How many months/years did you live/study abroad?
5. How many months/years have you been back in your home country?
6. Do you have any knowledge of culture shock?
7. Do you have any knowledge of reverse culture shock?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Funnel Approach

Umbrella Interview Questions

1. What was the purpose of your sojourn?
2. Can you describe your experience?
3. How long have you been back in your home country?
4. Can you describe your experience since being home?

In-depth Follow-up Questions

A. Sojourn Experience

1. Was it challenging to communicate with people from the host culture?
2. Did you have to learn English?
3. What kind of strategies did you use to ensure that people understood what you said?
4. How did you express yourself to ensure that your message was received?
5. How did communicating with individuals from the host country shape the way you see yourself?
6. Did you feel like you had to change the way you approach people while interacting with them? How did this make you feel?
7. What was the most challenging about living abroad?
8. What did you miss about home while living abroad? Did these things make your adaptation process harder?
9. What kind of things did you have to change about yourself to be able to better adapt to the host culture?

10. Do you think embracing and interacting with the host culture allowed you to better communicate? E.g. taking part and celebrating in host culture traditions and holidays

B. Reacculturation Process

1. How did it feel to be home? Did you talk to someone about it?
2. How did your family and friends welcome you upon your return to your home country?
3. Did you have to tell a lot of stories about your experience?
4. Were things different or the same when you got home?
5. Do you still enjoy the same things about home as you did before?
6. What do you miss most about your host country?
7. What kind of thoughts ran through your head when you returned?
8. How do you feel now being home for more than 6 months?
9. Do you see the world differently? If so, what made you see that?

C. Identity Transformation

1. Have you noticed any changes within yourself?
2. How would you describe the changes?
3. What do you think caused the changes?
4. How did you become aware of these changes? When did you realize something was different with you?
5. Can people tell you've changed?
6. How do they react to these changes? What do they say?
7. Do you like the changes you see within yourself?

D. Interpersonal Communication

1. Do you believe your sojourn experience has given you an insight into the differences in the way people communicate? How has that helped you become a better communicator?
2. Did you find it difficult to communicate with your family and friends initially after your return? How so?
3. Do you use any of the strategies you learned about communicating abroad at home?
4. Do you think you are better at expressing yourself now than when you left home? If so, how?
5. Do you think you've acquired communication skills from being abroad and interacting with a variety of people?
6. Do you think living abroad has changed the way you communicate with people now?
7. Do you think the changes you've seen within who you are now as a result of your abroad experience have affected the way you communicate to people at home?

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval Letter

RESEARCH @ EMU

UHSRC Determination: EXEMPT

DATE: October 9, 2016

TO: Valerie Biwa, B.S.
Department of Communication, Media, Theater Arts
Eastern Michigan University

Re: UHSRC: #968856-1
Category: Exempt category 2
Approval Date: October 9, 2016

Title: Making Sense of the New You: The Sojourner Experience. An Exploration of Identity Transformation through Communication

Your research project, entitled **Making Sense of the New You: The Sojourner Experience. An Exploration of Identity Transformation through Communication**, has been determined **Exempt** in accordance with federal regulation 45 CFR 46.102. UHSRC policy states that you, as the Principal Investigator, are responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of your research subjects and conducting your research as described in your protocol.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please submit the **Human Subjects Study Completion Form** (access through IRBNet on the UHSRC website).

Modifications: You may make minor changes (e.g., study staff changes, sample size changes, contact information changes, etc.) without submitting for review. However, if you plan to make changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a **Human Subjects Approval Request Form** and obtain approval prior to implementation. The form is available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects or change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an **Event Report** form, available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website

Follow-up: If your Exempt project is not completed and closed after **three years**, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3080 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Alissa Huth-Bocks, Ph.D.
Chair
CAS Human Subjects Review Committee