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"NEVERMERICANS?": HOW COMMUNICATION ISSUES SHAPE THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY AMONG THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

by

Lyudmyla Pustelnyk

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts School of Communication Advisor: Jennifer Machiorlatti, Ph.D.

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WE HEREBY APPROVE THE THESIS SUBMITTED BY

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"NEVERMERICANS?": HOW COMMUNICATION ISSUES SHAPE THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY AMONG THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Western Michigan University, 2012

This study of Intercultural communication and identity uses Cultural Contracts theory and Narrative theory to explore how international students communicate about their understanding of self (identity) and how this understanding is influenced and changes during their studies in the United States. Research participants who have, or are currently studying in the U.S., from Eastern and Central European countries were interviewed about their communication experiences while in the U.S., resulting in different expressions of identity – in-between identity, feeling Americanized, global citizen, and crystallization of native identity – which developed as the result of their U.S. university studies. Their narratives also enabled important themes to surface, as well as distinguishing different factors that contribute to the ways international students understand their identities. Results indicate that international education plays an important role in both personal growth and international students' new sense of identity. Additional findings suggest that the concept of global citizen requires further inquiry, possibly developing new definitions of identity hybridity.
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Lyudmyla Pustelnyk
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Multiple Identities, Communication, and Cultural Integration of International Students in the U.S.

The long line for the passport control area of immigration at Chicago O’Hare airport was moving slowly as usual, while the multilingual crowd of travelers from all regions of the world chatted and gesticulated. Some of them waited more than an hour and exchanged mostly annoyed comments on the unhurried procedure. No natural light was reaching the huge area of the passport control section; the air, though conditioned, felt heavy to breath. Step by step, meter-by-meter, everybody in the line approached the booth of the immigration officer who was the gauntlet between visitors and their possibility to stand on American soil. Waiting in such a line is a repeated routine for me. I have been through this process dozens of times after coming back from traveling abroad or to my home country of Ukraine. My time spent in the United States has been occupied with graduate studies at the Western Michigan University School of Communication and the Department of Political Science. These years have brought forward the process of identity shifting and identity reformation, as identified and explained by Jackson (2002) as cultural contracts. My experience as an international student in the U.S. could serve as an illustration to Ting-Toomey’s theory that we negotiate our identities due to “the choices cultural interactants make in securing their self-image” (Jackson, 1999, p.359). In my case, these choices were dictated by the status of the sojourner who was gradually, yet not fully, integrated into the new culture.
The nearby section of the passport control area, the line of those possessing U.S. passports, is much shorter and moves quickly. Immigration officers seem to have limited questions for Americans reentering their home country.

I was stricken by a sudden and confusing thought: not considering the formal issues (such as citizenship), culturally, I could belong to each of the lines. Moreover, I also might fit into neither of them, since my European background is under the great influence of American experience, and vice versa. How could intercultural communication, one area of my studies, explain this dilemma of formal and informal identity, cultural belonging and perception?

This experience of split identity where I could be in either of the immigration lines – those for citizens and those for foreigners, is similar to the experience of transients, or people, who do not stay in one place for a long period of time, as described by Onwumechili et al: “Rather than fully adapt to one culture, they [transients] live between the borders and boundaries of different cultures” (2008, p.117).

For example, my ears caught the fragments of American conversations in the neighboring sector. Two middle-aged women, whom I remembered from Munich where I changed planes for the Chicago flight, discussed their stay in Germany. While on board, we even exchanged a few words with one of the women, hoping that the weather in Midwest will be not so exhaustingly humid as it was in Munich those days.

In my line, I understood communication of visitors from at least three other countries. There was a group of a five young people nearby, they laughed over some jokes told in Ukrainian. The elderly couple in front of me complained in Russian about “those lazy guys in uniforms”, while a man’s voice explained over the phone in the loud
Polish that he was still in the line. The man seemed not to care that no phones are allowed in the immigration area. Despite the fact that I was required to stand in one line, I associated with the other. I was standing in multiple worlds culturally, one formally and at least three personally (based on my citizenship and recent residency). Listening to and understanding English, Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian languages communicated an experience of belonging to American and the listed European cultures, yet at the same time I did not feel fully identified with any of them.

“So, you are Ukrainian,” the immigration officer half-asked, half-stated after he stamped my passport and returned my documents. I nodded saying, “Yes, I am”, though realizing that what I acknowledged did not sound in an agreement with what I thought about myself.

For the officer, my foreign passport with an American visa, issued in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, was an identification of one more Ukrainian citizen who came to the U.S. Yet I considered myself Ukrainian only to some extend. Moreover, part of me even wanted to hide my “Ukrainness” as something that one is not very proud to admit or share with others.

I had, as I believed, quite a legitimate reason for thinking like that. It was the end of summer 2009, the year of diminishing democratic governance in Ukraine demonstrated by the election of authoritarian leader Victor Yanukovych. During the elections of 2009, he defeated his predecessor; the first and the only democratically elected Ukrainian president, Victor Yuschenko, who emerged as the hero of the peaceful Orange Revolution of 2004. The immediate backslide of my birth country from democracy following Yanukovych’s taking office, the great fiasco of the “Orange”
ideas, and the spoiled image of Ukraine in the world made me frustrated and feeling ashamed of Ukrainian citizenship: After all, I was a part of the nation that could not protect its democratic achievements.

One more motive for feeling fragmented as Ukrainian was my experience as a graduate student at Western Michigan University. When I returned back to Ukraine for summer holidays, I often heard from my friends and relatives that I “became rather Americanized”. They explained that I have become out to be overly polite and too often used phrases like “Can you please?” and “Thank you”. Occasionally, some of my friends got displeased – when I insisted that by tapping my hand during a conversation they violated my privacy. Finally, almost all of them answered, “This is not America here”, when I wondered why people did not complain about the woman from the neighboring street, who was burning her trash. Within a few hot weeks in July, she burned her trash every day and spoiled the surrounding air. After I complained to the town office, my neighbors’ reaction was “This must be so American like – to think that authorities will protect your rights”. No action was taken against the woman; and indeed, this was very different from the U.S. where I felt that everybody was equal before the law. So far, the judgments about me as “becoming Americanized” came out as the result of communication between individuals that stood for two different cultures: me, who was exposed to and influenced by American way of life, and my friends, who represented the native Ukrainian culture.

Do other international students, specifically, those from the developing countries, experience similar feelings about themselves? This thesis explores how the international students’ understanding of self is constructed and changed within their studies in the U.S.
Using interviews as a primary source for gathering data, this thesis also looks at how communication issues participate in formation of students' identities. Specifically, interviewees' reflections on their environments in the U.S. are viewed as instruments that provide me with understanding of the concept of identity through students’ stories, because “The reflexivity of narrative sensemaking ... assumes that language “affects what we see and even the logic we use to structure our thought” (Brown and Rhodes, 2005, p.171). The interviewees’ reflections entail diverse experiences, thus their narratives, or “structures through which events are made sense of rather than just being” (Brown and Rhodes, 2005, p.172) can be viewed as those reporting different parts of their identities, as well as also multiple identities of the same individuals (Steinmetz, 1992; Somers, 1994; Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001).

For instance, as a visitor, students and researcher in the U.S., I developed a feeling of dual identity, or, as Ritzer (2005) explains an individual who is rooted in “different cities, territories, ethnicities, hierarchies, nations, and religions, and so on at the same time” (p.159). As the researcher, I also realized that neither my Ukrainian, nor American identity is stable and fixed, since both of them “are relational and negotiated through a communication process... The emerging [dual] identity is not static and ascribed to predetermined group membership” (Fong and Chuang, 2004, p.52). Together with other issues, this thesis also explores how the perceptions of different parts of identity are created and changed, and what communicational aspects contribute to this change.

In particular, my cultural background entails knowledge of living in a developing country, which is Ukraine, and cultural adaptation in the U.S. On the one hand, cultural
adaptation made me more informed about social, professional, and other American standards. Conversely, I feel more distanced from Ukrainian culture and do not have a clear definition of my current identity. Therefore, I also hoped that this study will help me to understand what cultural affiliation – Ukrainian, Polish, Western, global or other – dominates my personality. As Ellis and Berger (2003) point out, the researcher’s own reflections on the topic of investigation can deepen the knowledge of his/her self. The same reflection motivates his/her expressiveness in the course of interview and results in better perceptiveness of what the interviewee says. In due course, my cognitive and emotional reflections (Ellis and Berger, 2003) facilitate my role as a human instrument for gathering data.

Another consideration is how communication with formal institutions can significantly influence perceptions of certain components of the dual identity: While I was thought to be Americanized in Ukraine, I am still classified as a foreigner in the U.S., and thus required to follow protocols of “visitors”.

In particular, my status as a visitor from a Health Department identified country caused an expensive tuberculosis screening – $120 in 2006; it was mandatory for international students from the developing countries, when I arrived to the U.S. in 2005. While going through the process of screening, I thought that American or other Western students had equal chances with me to be exposed for tuberculosis while traveling to different places overseas. The university policies based on information from the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control did not force them to be screened; however, while requiring international students from developing countries to do this, the policies definitely categorized them as “other”. Thus far, communication of
international students with formal institutions can also be understood as a factor that affects their identities.

In some instances and to some extent, the experience of the international students from the developing countries in the U.S. could be compared to the similar of African-American women, who are “legally part of the U.S. nation-state but simultaneously subordinated within it” (Collins, 2001, p.3) as those with a lower status and targeted by group discrimination. Sojourners from the developing states can find some similarities with the mentioned discriminated group in terms of parallels in their historical legacy. In case of African American women this is slavery, in case of those from the third world this is the totalitarian and/or colonial past of their native countries. Thus, while formally African-American women can enjoy all the liberties granted for the U.S. citizens, the intersecting social hierarchies make it problematic for African-American women to benefit from these liberties. In the similar way, the number of formal regulations imposed on international students in the U.S. make them feel enjoying their rights differently from their American counterparts while in the U.S. (Please, see the section The phenomenon of international students in the U.S. of Chapter One).

So far, these were primarily communicational experiences that influenced perceptions and identity, which, in turn, appealed to one or another part of my individuality. Since the construal of our own perceptions can be viewed as a product of social influences (Fitzgerald, 1993; Kim, 2008), identity, in turn, can be seen as a form of communication evolving from “a human capacity for self-awareness that, through meanings and symbols, guides and transforms human action, ultimately mediating between culture and communication” (Fitzgerald, 1993, p.26). Therefore, one’s identity
is not only a composition of what other people think about this person, but also how the individual interprets others’ understanding of him/herself (Fitzgerald, 1993; Kim, 1996; Berry et al., 2006; Kim, 2008). Not surprisingly, these interpretations may conflict with each other (Fitzgerald, 1993; Hitlin, 2003; Jung et al, 2007).

With the increased migration of people to different countries, for education or other reasons, it is important to understand the various changes that international students experience in order to provide support systems, meaningful learning environments, and cultural transformations that they go through within their journeys. The latter understood not only as travels from one country to another, but also as students’ arrivals to more broader and enriched sense of personhood.

Do all international students experience identity changes and, if so, to what extent? What are the causes of diverse identity changes among persons who choose to live in regions other than their place of birth? How do people manage multicultural identities – those imposed and those chosen? Finally, how are changing identities of international students shaped within their interactions in the U.S.?

The questions above emerged because identity and communication are inseparable from each other (Brickhouse and Potter, 2001; Ogan, 2001; Milstein, 2005; Kim, 2008; Drummond and Orbe, 2010). In particular, there are six basic principles that connect identity and communication: identity as a part of all communication processes, as a result of situated communication practices, as a set of communication practices, as a social process tied to the previous actions and future interactions, as a part of dialectical discourse, and, finally, “identities always indicate the beliefs and values of those who enact them” (Drummond and Orbe, 2010, p.374). Eventually, it is vital for any research
of individual identity construction to understand how the listed principles are utilized within communication by foreigners (in this case of the researcher and international students) and those representing the dominant (American) culture.

As follows from these six principles, identity appears as an outcome of the negotiation process (Jackson, 1999; Fong and Chuang, 2004; Hecht et al, 2005; Jackson, 2002). Therefore, the research employs Cultural Contracts theory as the framework that highlights negotiation through socialization as a basis for identity formation. The notion of Cultural Contracts theory emerged in 2002 as a way to explore and understand how people make meaning of who they are in a “divided” world, racially and culturally (Jackson, 1999; Jackson, 2002; Onwumechili et al, 2003; Hecht et al, 2005; Jackson, 2010). Narrative theory will frame the analysis as a concept that highlights the role of social interactions and “coherent elaboration of narratives about individual and collective history” (Steinmetz, 1992, p.489) seen as the key elements in one’s arrival to his/her understanding of self (Steinmetz, 1992; Somers, 1994; Cooper, 2011; Danto, 2011).

Narrative theory is rooted in hermeneutics and phenomenology (Journet et al. 2011). According to the theory, people experience their lives as temporally extended from past to future through present. Eventually, human action is understood as a meaningful narrative that determines cultural commitments of an individual and thus constitutes his/her sense of identity (Steinmetz, 1992; Labov and Waletzky, 2003; Journet et al. 2011).

Both of these theoretical foundations are further discussed in the review of literature and theoretical foundation sections of this thesis.
Chapter One, the literature review, analyzes how communication issues of international students, their adaptation and construction of their “new” selves are featured in scholarship. Omissions are also identified, which can help explain the international students’ experience. Following the review of relevant literature, the theoretical foundations and the relevant research questions for this thesis are presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Three discusses the research questions, while Chapter Four talks about methodology used to explore identity negotiation and perception. This entailed qualitative in-depth interviews with international students in the U.S. from Eastern and Central European countries as an instrument of collecting data for this study.

I have selected this geographical region, since I, as a human instrument for this research, share the same or similar socio-cultural background with people from the same part of the world. Traditionally, people in this region are not accustomed to direct or low-context communication style, yet they are used to contextual, or high-context style. These factors provided the research with data that helped replying the research questions most fully and in a greater detail. In addition, I am fluent in Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish, and at least one of these languages was familiar to my respondents. Finally, narrowing of the pool of participants enabled focusing the research on identity formation of international students from particularly post-communist world as different from the same process in the selves of young learners from the developed Western countries or other regions of the planet. However, I am also aware that sharing the same background with interviewees can produce some bias in the results of this research. Therefore, the interview protocol articulates questions in such a way that potentially can facilitate neutrality of the researcher (see appendix A).
Following the interviews, the data was coded, analyzed and is discussed in Chapters Five and Six within the theoretical framework of Intercultural Communication, specifically, ready to sign (assimilation), quasi-completed (adaptation), and co-created (mutual valuation) cultural contracts, through story-telling and narrative theory. The results of this research are presented in Chapter Seven. Discussion is presented in Chapter Eight; limitations of the study and implications for future research are offered in Chapter Nine.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication styles of international students

In order to understand the multiple nuances of communication and identity, in this section I will review not only communication styles that dominant in the region, which is native for my participants, yet other styles as well.

International students present rather a distinctive group, if compared with their American counterparts. Some foreigners are occasionally seen as goal-oriented and competitive with Americans (Lamm and Imholf, 1985; Bale, 1991; Bratsberg, 1995; Alba and Nee, 1997; Delanty, 2000; Mahroum, 2000; Edin et al., 2003), while others might be prejudged as “wanting” something from the more affluent host country of the United States. But the group labeled “international students” is quite diverse in terms of various value-orientations and goals, as well as dissimilar worldviews (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Kim, 1988; Martin and Nakayama, 1996). In the same way, their ways of adaptation to American life differ as well depending on a number of factors such as their exposure to other cultures in their home countries, their social media use and sense of globalization, as well as their individual and community customs, values and beliefs.

For instance, students from countries that are considered collectivist and group-oriented are often more quiet in classroom settings, since their native cultures lay more significance on group loyalty (Okabe, 1983; Martin and Nakayama, 1996; Schwartz and Bardi, 2001). On the contrary, those from individualistic societies can be more assertive (Oetzel, 1998; Fiske, 2002). For them, the individual is more salient than the group.
While students that represent the first group can feel uncomfortable in the U.S. classroom, those from the second group can find it suitable. The ways in which people are socialized and enculturated do not change easily when they move to the new place – even temporarily, because enculturation "refers to the sustained, primary socialization process in their original home" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p.100) and assumes engraving cultural patterns into individual’s nervous system (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992). Within their home cultures, sojourners internalize their principal cultural values over the extended period of time, while their stay in the U.S. is limited by the term of studies. Eventually, cultural and behavioral patterns of international students define their communication styles – whether or not the latter are similar within their new surrounding (Becker, 1968; Al-Shariden and Goe, 1998; Liu, 2001; Hernandez and Ruiz Mendoza, 2002). These deeply rooted communication patterns also influence specific challenges that international students face. Moreover, much of the scholarly literature on communication and identity for international students has yet to address the phenomena of social media, which has ruptured once insular societies, with more global perspectives. The specific use of social media is beyond the scope of this particular study, but may significantly influence communication and cultural identity, because it offers connections out of one’s traditional ways of being, and also provide connection to one’s family and friends, even when displaced to a new country. Even though some scholarship addresses the issue of how the use of social media participates in identity formation (Jensen, 2003; Valkenburg, 2005; Greenhow and Robelia, 2009), these studies do not study international students as a targeted group.
Research before the globalization of social media networks indicates that international students from collectivist countries may find it difficult to become accustomed to direct, or low-context communication style, which is preferred in the U.S. It assumes that speaker's messages expose his/her true intentions; the point is pronounced with a straightforward tone of voice (Martin and Nakayama, 1996; Liu, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2005). This is different from indirect style, such as those used in Japan (Liu, 2001), Korea (Hwang, 1990), Arabic (Zaharna, 1995), and Spanish-speaking countries (Hernandez and Ruiz Mendoza, 2002). The indirect communication presupposes the speaker not to sound imposing or insisting; s/he articulates the message in an implicit manner and in the subtle tone (Matsumoto and Kudoh, 1993; Martin et al., 1994; Shih and Brown, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

In the similar way, foreigners that are used to contextual, or high-context style, will have to adjust to a more personal mode of communication that dominates in North America. Here the language emphasizes the sense of I, as well as informality and equal power relationship (Richardson and Smith, 2007). The value is placed on respecting personal identities and casual interaction (Stringer and Cassidy, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Addressing university professors by their first names in some American classrooms is an example of such a communication style. However, within contextual communication that stipulates status, role-based dealings, and regulation (Agar, 1994; Martin and Nakayama, 1996), the value is placed on honoring prearranged power-based identities (Bernstein, 1971; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Thus, Asian students may feel more appropriate to address their mentors by the title with the last name than to use just their first names. The same can be said of youth and students from Poland, Ukraine, Russia, or
Moldova, who have very formalized relationships with those in position of authority and thus to prefer avoiding informal addressing of their professors.

Since the mentioned verbal styles are connected with instrumental and affective dimensions of communication (Martin and Nakayama, 1996), one can expect that Japanese or students from Arabic-speaking countries will value affective interaction, in which they anticipate the listener to sense the message before it is worded (Richardson and Smith, 2007). But in order to communicate effectively in English-speaking countries, these students will have to reengineer their manner of speaking to instrumental. English speakers use the latter; their messages are sender-oriented and goal-oriented. As a result, confident and persuasive statements characterize instrumental communication. Of course gender identity and other cultural differences also influence communication styles and adjustments in new countries. Moreover, not all international students can be studied as a ‘similar’ group, another reason this research focuses on students coming from Eastern and Central Europe.

Among English speakers the modes of communication can be characterized by nuances of differentiation: while the U.S. Americans will prefer the matter-of-fact tone, or the complementary verbal style for delivering their messages, the British will be more apt to use understated communication (Nevett, 1992). The latter assumes an absolute avoidance of emotional coloring of speech and voice. Opposed to complementary and understated interactions, the animated verbal style assumes strong emotional involvement of speakers and a continuous interruption, as it usually happens in French conversation (Carroll, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 2005).
Despite on the existing classification of communication styles, one should not think, that international students would communicate only within the frameworks of the verbal modes, pertinent to their native countries. Moreover, to consider such reductive tendencies will lead to stereotyping sojourners (Leki, 2001). In reality, they use diverse modes of interaction, since “people communicate differently in different speech communities” (Martin and Nakayama, 1996, p.129). For example, the manner of speech of three of the subjects (two Russians and one Ukrainian) in this study, who reside in the U.S. for more than three years already, were clear examples of complementary verbal style. As already mentioned above, this mode is typical in the U.S. Yet I also noticed the same communication model while interviewing other five students from Romania, Slovakia, and Russia; all of these respondents stayed in the U.S. for less than two years. On the contrary, one of the respondents from Russia, who studies in the U.S. for almost four years, avoided any emotional coloring within our conversation and seemed to be almost formal while sharing his stories with me. This student was definitely using understated communication style. It can be supposed that while, for instance, talking to their classmates or professors at school each of the mentioned participants used quite a different communication mode from the one employed within the interview with me.

This happens because sojourners have to arrange various issues and thus adjust their communication to different contexts: Like those produced by acculturative stress (Yeh and Inose, 2003) or while dealing with the institutions that enforce immigration procedures or other formalities. These challenges significantly contribute to sojourners’ perception of their American environment (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998).
Martin and Nakayama define sojourners as “travelers who move in new cultural contexts for a limited period of time and for a specific purpose (1996, p.167). “Contexts” seems to be the key word here, since cultural adaptation of international students is closely connected with the every day situations (Martin and Nakayama, 1996; Al-Shariden and Goe, 1998; Misra and Castillo, 2004; Ting-Toomey, 2005). If contexts are supportive, the sojourners’ transition from initial and inevitable phase of culture shock to the stage of acculturation, or “the processes whereby the culture… is modified as the result of contact with other culture of one or more societies” (Teske and Nelson, 1974) is smoother. The mentioned processes are intertwined with the identity change of sojourners (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p.99; Oberg, 1960; Nash, 1991; Ward et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2005). In favorable contexts, students also have better chances to become intercultural (Martin and Nakayama, 1996; Al-Shariden and Goe, 1998; Zhang and Dixon, 2003), as well as these contexts potentially can soften the impacts of culture shock. This might also be influences by how much a person has traveled, his/her experience of the global, and/or use of social media to connect ahead of time with their new country. The listed factors may lessen culture shock; the study of these factors is an area ripe for additional research.

This phenomenon of culture shock is “a stressful transitional period when individuals move from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p.116). Feelings of anxiety, bewilderment, loneliness, as well as psychosomatic issues, such as headaches and stomachaches, emerge from an identity disorientation state, which is one of the basic characteristics of culture shock (Oberg, 1960; Ting-Toomey, 2005).
Stewart defines culture shock as a condition “brought on by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (1977, p.26). In other words, this condition separates individuals from their original background (Gudyknst and Hammer, 1987; Gudykunst and Kim, 1992). The shock unfolds as a sojourner realizes the distance between his/her identity, maintained by the home culture, and the demands and differences imposed by the host culture. New cultural environment confronts sojourners’ identities through differences in verbal and nonverbal communications, language, and cultural values, as well as in sociopolitical and economic systems (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Liu, 2001; Mahadevan, 2008; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Nevertheless, this experience is also described as a transition resulting in the adoption of new values, attitudes, and behavior patterns (Furnham, 1987). Though being accompanied by the feelings of frustration and depression, culture shock can be a productive occurrence that boosts “subsequent psychic growth” of the sojourner (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992, p.252). Thus, changes occur in foreign students’ feelings of selves within their intercultural adjustment, or “the short-term and medium-term adaptive process of sojourners in their overseas assignments” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p.123).

Yet the mentioned changes also can come out as a co-cultural identity (Orbe, 1998; Urban and Orbe, 2007). According to Orbe, those who do not belong to the dominant or privileged groups, select to form a minority, or co-culture group. Findings from the scholarly literature agree in viewing sojourners as more apt to construct a minority group identity rather than seek identification with the host society within the initial stages of their adaptation (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Mori, 2000; McPhail, 2002; Schmitt et al, 2003; Yeh and Inose, 2003). Moreover, positionality of sojourners as
cultural outsiders also makes them use co-cultural communication practices (Urban and Orbe, 2007).

For example, nine out of twelve subjects in this study sought out others from their region who spoke similar languages: Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and Romanian first. During the beginning of their studies, seven out of nine formed co-culture groups with other international students from their native countries or the same geographical region. However, by the end of the second year of school, five participants reported weaker ties with their co-culture groups and increased contacts with Americans.

The reasons to submerge into co-culture identity among international students on American campuses may surface from cultural differences on the one hand and those originating from the nature of the sojourners’ academic activities on the other.

Among the former are “specific vulnerabilities [that] align with psychosocial implications” of the sojourners’ home cultures (Tafarodi and Smith, 2001, p.86). For instance, the emphasis on social harmonization can promote in some international students from collectivist states avoidance of contacts with Americans as those that can be potentially harmful for social harmony.

Other reasons comprise the diverse concepts of friendship and romantic relationships in America and other cultures; the concept of individual privacy, which among international students is often “defined strictly in the context of groups” (Mori, 2000, p.138). American customs and traditions that are not familiar to sojourners, and the different attitude towards certain values (Furnham, 1987; Gudykunst and Kim, 1992). In particular, misunderstandings happen when Americans’ expressions of politeness like “I’ll be happy to help you” or “See you soon” can be interpreted as the statements of
interest or intentions to start romantic relationships (Mori 2000). The same can be related to continuing friendship, which is perceived on sojourner’s end whereas Americans say this without deeper meaning. Such misinterpretation usually leads to the sojourner’s disappointment and isolation from the representatives of the host culture. For example, one of the participants was first disappointed and confused with her communication at the supermarket, when the cashier asked her “How are you?” The student recalls her experience of telling the clerk a story about her problems in the U.S. and noticing that the shop-girl looked embarrassed. Only later, while socializing with Americans more, the student realized that the shop assistant’s question was just an example of polite communication rather than her interest in the respondent’s issues.

The different treatment of religious holidays in sojourner’s original society and in the U.S. can produce the same effect, even if both the sojourner and his/her American counterparts represent the same religion. For instance, Christian tradition in Central and Eastern Europe prohibits doing any physical work on Sundays unlike most American realities regarding weekend “work”. Yet another example is closing down businesses during Saturdays and high holidays in parts of New York where strict Orthodox Jewish law is followed. Therefore, this research suggested to me to include a question about celebration of holidays in my interview protocol in order to seek some specific data about the subject’s experiences. It is interesting that all of those students that preferred limited contacts with Americans, as well as most of those, who developed good connection with Americans, reported rather formal approach than emotional attachment to both their native and the U.S. holidays.
Another set of issues is addressed within the context of the academic or professional environment of sojourners. Language barriers usually become a major obstacle (Furnham, 1987; Borjas, 2000; Mori, 2000; Ogan, 2001; Laguerre, 2006). Even those who are advanced in their fields of study usually find it difficult to prove their level of knowledge because of their foreign accent and an insufficient command in English (Borjas, 2000; Mori, 2000). The lack of language proficiency affects gaining trust and acceptance at American institutions. In the same way, an inadequate understanding of rules and procedures in educational system and poor access to communication networks on campus (Ridley and Udipi, 2002; Urban and Orbe, 2007) can become a source of sojourners’ dissatisfaction.

Besides that, sojourners who “generally represent the best educated segments in their home societies” (Mori, 2000, p.138) can have unrealistically high expectations from their academic performance in the United States. Failures to obtain the desired achievements cause problems of mental health, such as lowered self-esteem, loneliness, homesickness, and even depression (Schmitt et al, 2003; Yeh and Inose, 2003).

Scholars highlight other grounds for creating co-cultural identity among sojourners. These include the sense of powerlessness and lack of support from American peers in the group work (Leki, 2001), as well as stereotypes about them and racial or ethnic prejudices held by the representatives of dominant groups (Furnham, 1987; Mori, 2000; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). One of the respondents for this study told me that the stereotypes that her American peers hold about her country, which is the former part of the Soviet Union, has become an obstacle for her to develop closer relationships with American classmates rather than just polite communication: “They even had some songs
about... how they live in that Soviet Union, do they love their children at all, or are they so evil that they don’t even love their children, or something like that.”

Finally, sojourners can also experience crisis moments, like an illness or death among their families abroad, financial hardship or problems with immigration bodies (Takahashi, 1989; Arthur, 1994; Khoo et al, 1994).

Nevertheless, co-culture grouping is not a fixed state and is constantly fluctuating, reinforced or tested due to everyday communication with the dominant group (Herring et al., 1995; Orbe, 1998). Therefore, co-culture members implement different communication strategies. Selection of these strategies depends on a number of factors, like the sum of lived experiences of an individuals, their abilities to enact different practices, situational contexts, and perceived costs and rewards, connected with specific communication practices (Orbe, 1998; Ramirez-Sanchez, 2008). Considering the mentioned factors, co-culture members utilize at least three main strategies while dealing with dominant group. In particular, they employ assimilation communication strategy, when they accept the majority’s cultural standpoints. They also combine in their interaction both the majorities’ and co-cultural views; this is accommodation strategy. Finally, co-culture can emphasize the strategy of separation, such as intra-group networking among international students (Orbe, 1998). In this research, such a strategy has become a case for the single respondent, who told about having mostly negative experiences within her studies in the U.S. and having friends only among people from her native geographical region. As you will read in the methods section of this thesis, specific questions were constructed as part of the interview protocol in order to seek information about such strategies.
These communication strategies, as well as the diverse previously listed communication styles, rarely remain stable across the sojourner’s period of stay in the U.S. (Orbe, 1998; Leki, 2001). Within their adjustment to the American environment, international students also change their attitudes towards different issues of the host culture (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Gudykunst, 1977; Martin et al., 1994; Oetzel, 1998). Therefore, it is noteworthy to observe how different stages of sojourners’ adaptation shape their new identities.

**Sojourners’ adaptation in host society**

Adaptive transformation of sojourners includes four phases (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992). First the sojourner goes through initial fascination with the host culture. Then s/he experiences a stage of hostility or ambivalence towards the host society. In the recovery period the sojourner increases their language skills and obtains more knowledge about the host society. The final stage of adaptive transformation means that the sojourner begins to accept and enjoy new customs (Taylor, 1994; Kim, 1996; Milstein, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2005; Shi, 2006).

Still, before reaching a manageable and health “end-point”, adaptation means going through a number of physical, emotional and/or psychological challenges. Even for those with excellent communication skills, changes that occur in themselves are never a smooth, or predictable process (Martin and Nakayama, 1997; Kim, 2001; Bennett and Bennett, 2004). Therefore, some authors view intra-ethnic or intra-national communication as a prerequisite for further adaptation and establishing cross-cultural contacts. During the initial stage of adaptation, it is natural for foreigners to seek moral
and psychological support inside their own national, language, or ethnic groups rather than outside this group (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998; Ogan, 2001; Laguerre, 2006). In particular, all students in the group of subjects for this research reported their first and most successful communications in the U.S. with those who spoke their native languages and belonged to the same national groups.

This kind of communication seems to be the most natural for international students, since the sojourners’ mental health as the necessary element for successful adaptation can be maintained through support relationships and trust. The latter are more likely to develop on the basis of shared cultural values inside the ethnic or national group (Kim, 1992; Ying and Liese, 1994; Berry et al., 2006). It can be assumed that other members of this group have already spent more time in the host society than the sojourner. Thus, they can provide the newcomer with knowledge about cultural differences of the host society and save him/her some painful mistakes while dealing with those differences on his or her own. The same intra-group members can also provide the sojourner with reliable contacts in the host society and in this way serve the sojourner’s faster adaptation (Bonacich and Modell, 1980; Berry; 1992; Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998; Lee, 2004; Berry et al., 2006). Moreover, “through establishing and participating in ethnic communities, international students are able to better maintain their cultural identities and reproduce aspects of their native cultural environments” (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998, p.700).

However, scholars do not treat this phenomenon unanimously. Mori describes sojourners’ socializing inside their groups as creating a “highly artificial environment” (2000, p.138) that slows down sojourners’ adaptation. This happens because they have
limited chances to gain the needed command in English, communication skills of the host culture, and, finally, develop understanding of the dominant society (Wong-Rieger, 1987; Mori, 2000; Schmitt et al., 2003; Kuo and Roysicar, 2006). The mentioned finding was proved by the stories of two participants in this research, who reported that sharing apartments with people of their nationalities within the first years of their studies slowed down their progress in English. Eventually, these students selected living with American roommates during the second year.

International students that maintain contacts with their own ethnic group and the host culture can develop a bicultural identity (Pedersen, 1991; Shih, 2000; Koshima, 2006), which may change over time as social media and technology allow more frequent and easier contact with home cultures, while immersed in new cultures. Biculturalism is the result of living on the juncture of two cultures and laying a claim “to belonging to two cultures” (La Fromboise et al., 1998, p.123). Earlier scholarship suggests that biculturalism leads to the “marginalized person” with a divided self and thus the inner psychological conflict (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935). Such a divided identity is not fully loyal to any of the cultures s/he feels affiliated with.

But the more recent literature views biculturalism as a positive occurrence, and particularly in case of international students. Bicultural identity reduces acculturation stress (Lee and Koeske, 2004; Yoon et al., 2004), promotes satisfaction with social and academic life (Sandhu, 1994; Shih, 2000), allows smoother adaptation to the host culture (Sualez et al., 1997; Hammer, 2002), and serves as a ground to develop an intercultural identity (Bell and Harrison, 2002; Heyward, 2002). Furthermore, some international students are already multi or bicultural, having traveled a lot before coming to the U.S.
As one of my respondents told me in his interview, prior to his studies in the U.S. he traveled intensively to Western Europe, as well as North America. Consequently, before becoming a student in the U.S., he already felt that his identity consists of not only his native Slovak self, but Western as well.

Becoming bicultural begins with acquiring the culture of the dominant society (Pedersen, 1991; Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Bell et al., 1996; Sam, 2001; Koshima, 2006). Gudykunst and Kim highlight the role of communication in absorbing the host culture, since “adaptation occurs in and through communication, and, indeed, an important outcome of adaptation is the identification and internalization of the significant symbols of the host society” (1992, p.217). The mentioned symbols are perceived through socialization activities; the latter help sojourners with recognizing values of host society, forming attitudes towards these values, and establish relationships with the bearers of values (Lee et al., 2004; Shih, 2006). In this respect, sojourners’ adaptation through communication does not differ from the same of immigrants’ adaptation. Here the increase of interpersonal contacts inside of the ethnic group is associated with the increase of inter-ethnic contacts that finally leads to change from homogeneous friendship circles to heterogeneous ones (Kim, 1977; Mortland and Ledgerwood, 1987; Punetha and Giles, 1987). Thus, the foreigner’s intra-ethnic social skills are crucial for his/her adaptation in the host society. The individuals who possess them will be more successful in obtaining the necessary information, as well as social and psychological support they need for adaptation.

For instance, the participant for this study, the graduate student from Slovakia, told me that he had a very few chances to travel abroad because of financial reasons, and
his two-years studies in the U.S. appeared to be his first long-term absence from the native country. Yet despite his limited command in English, he made a lot of friends from different countries, including America, within the first month after arriving to his school in the U.S. This student also appeared to be rather open and generous as the respondent; he was an apparent model of extrovert, which was not typical for other male interviewees. Eventually, the mentioned participant could not recall any example of his negative communication in the U.S., as well as he reported his adjustment to American life as a smooth progression.

Findings from intercultural communication studies, if projected on sojourners, demonstrate the importance of several issues that foster or impede the sojourners' communication process. Scholars point out the degree of similarity or difference between the original and host cultures and the degree of salience of physical distinctiveness (such as skin color or facial features) as the important predictors in establishing or avoiding communication (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Arthur, 2000; Halualani, 2004; Sidanius et al., 2004). From this standpoint, the authors argue that sojourners from Europe are more likely to initiate contacts with North Americans than those who, for instance, come from India or African countries. Yet the personal attributes, such as tolerance for ambiguity and risk taking, extroversion, internal locus of control, cognitive complexity and flexibility seem to be even more significant in view of the fact that: “even in instances where strong prejudice or actual enmity exist towards strangers, it is still possible for the personality of a specific stranger to overcome these barriers and to win a position of respect” (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992, p.224). Additionally, competence in English or a common language may also affect this.
On the contrary, the negative self-image and general dissatisfaction with life are associated with “inability to relate to the people in the host society” (1992, p.226). In the same way those who think that Americans hold an unfavorable image of their country will have less likelihood of accepting American culture (Gudykunst, 1977; Sam, 2001; Liu, 2001; Misra and Castillo, 2004).

Other critical elements for adaptation are age, language proficiency, and educational level prior to migration. Gudykunst and Kim found that older strangers experience greater difficulties in “acquiring new cultural patterns” than those of younger age (1992, p.225). In the same way, sojourners whose knowledge of culture and training in the language of the host country is poor, find it more difficult to adapt (Sam, 2001; Liu, 2001). Eventually, sojourners’ sociability and personal traits contribute to their good communication skills. Evidently, these skills are the necessary premise for successful adaptation in the host society.

Consistent with these findings, Furnham (1987) found that foreign students who established relationships with local people reported broader satisfaction with their both academic and nonacademic experiences. Gudykunst (1977) states that intimate contacts of student sojourners with Americans appeared to be associated with more positive attitudes towards American culture than sojourners who only had casual contacts.

Positive perception of the host culture is one of the signs of adaptive transformation of sojourner; it leads to the process of his/her psychic development (Kauffmann et al., 1992; Kim, 2001; Bennett and Bennett, 2004; Milstein, 2005). This process indicates that “the individual grows into a new kind of person at a higher level of integration” (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992, p.251). Such an individual shows behavioral and
cognitive abilities. Among them are openness, knowledge of other cultures, empathy, perspective taking, and behavioral flexibility (Taylor, 1994; Martin and Nakayama, 1997; Hook, 2003; Davis and Cho, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2005). The listed abilities assume that this person avoids coming to judgmental or stereotypical conclusions about others. Moreover, s/he is ready to adapt his/her behaviors and reactions to other cultural ways and experiences, as well as explore and utilize these ways and experiences (Berwick and Whalley, 2000; Davis and Cho, 2005; Leask, 2009; Battistoni et al., 2009). In other words, an individual develops intercultural competency, or “an adaptive capacity based on an inclusive and integrative world view, which allows participants to effectively accommodate the demands of living in a host culture” (Taylor, 1994, p.154).

Becoming intercultural also requires certain traits, like openness and maturity to grow beyond the psychological limits of any culture (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992). Kim also suggests that intercultural identity should be utilized as a “counterpoint to and extension of cultural identity, highlighting the phenomenon of identity transformation beyond the perimeters of the conventional, monolithic conception of cultural identity” (2008, p.359).

Nevertheless, intercultural communication studies show that only a small proportion of sojourners reach the stage of intercultural identity (Furnham, 1987; Kim and Ruben, 1988; Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Ting-Toomey, 2005). The literature gives some insights on the reasons why not all sojourners become intercultural. Foreigners’ adaptability and the degree of their negative, positive, or mixed perceptions of the host culture depend on both external factors, or the environment of the host affiliation of the sojourner (Church, 1982; Al-Shariden and Goe, 1998; Leki, 2001.
Hook, 2004; Kashima and Loh, 2006) and internal factors, or his/her traits and skills (Liu, 2001; Hitlin, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2005; Kim, 2008; Battistoni et al, 2009). As it follows, intercultural identity is more likely to emerge when external factors support the progress of the internal ones.

According to Furnham, yet another factor of a sojourner’s motives also matters in his/her ability to become intercultural, since “motives and expectations help shape their reactions to their environment” (1987, 43). Furnham provides the results of the interviews with 69 Asian students who had returned from pursuing higher academic degrees overseas. Sixty-four students reported that obtaining the academic degree was a main motive. Only two said that the main reason was culture learning, while the remaining three listed personal development, such as becoming better people and finding themselves as the basic reasons for going overseas. However, Furnham does not provide any evidence whether the students’ motives were formed before academic experience or they were changed within training abroad. Making this distinction is important because it allows better understanding of the roles that the environment and sojourner’s reaction to this environment play in the adaptation and shaping (or not) the intercultural identities of international students. In this research, obtaining American education and thus gaining success in life, appeared to be the motive for the most of participants before their coming to the U.S. Yet upon cultural immersion, some of them also reported an additional drive, which is becoming better persons.

Recent communication scholarship draws parallels between sojourners’ interculturalism as “transformation of learning into desired attitudes” (Davis and Cho, 2005, p.1) and global citizenship as understanding intercultural contexts together with
responsibilities before local and global communities (Brecher and Childs, 1993; Kim, 2008; McDaniel et al., 2008; Deardorff, 2009). The “global citizen” identity can emerge because of students’ extended staying in the foreign country (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992). They can feel that their ties with the home countries weaken but the bonds with the U.S. have not become strong enough to identify themselves with Americans. One of the avenues to cope with this situation is acknowledging oneself as a resident of the world that belongs to a specific country only through formal citizenship or nationality while feeling right as a member of the international community (Kauffman et al., 1992; McIntyre-Mills, 2000; Williams, 2002; Bennett and Bennett, 2004; Davis and Cho, 2005). The person with the mentioned identity also acquires intercultural competence, since it fosters one’s integration into the global cultural realm (Taylor, 1994; Davis and Cho, 2005; Samovar et al., 2008).

On the other hand, one can suggest that intercultural competence affords the departure of the individual from home culture to extend, where s/he does not affiliate him/herself with this culture as the individual’s primary identity (Falk, 1993; Phinney and Onwughalu, 1996; McIntyre-Mills, 2000; Kim, 2008; Battistoni, 2009). For that reason, closer examination is needed to understand factors that contribute to the mentioned departure with the following possibility of arrival to the sense of the global citizen’s identity.

The emergence of the global citizen’s identity in sojourners

As previously mentioned, finding one’s way in the host culture through the support of one’s own national or ethnic group is just another dimension of adaptation
(Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Edin er al., 2003). Therefore, such units as ethnic enclaves and diaspora regions can serve as essential links between sojourner's acculturation and acquiring his/her identity of the global citizen (Lin, 1998; Arthur, 2000; Edin er al., 2003; Laguerre, 2006; Huang, 2009). This kind of self is expected to surface as a consequence of globalization, a “process creating interdependence among societies and cultures that were previously separated... [It] means openness to cultural change and creates new opportunities for dialogue” (Baraldi, 2004, p.53). In turn, through embracing the idea of global citizenship the individual comes to better understanding and appreciation of his/her native culture (Taylor, 1994; San Juan Jr., 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2004; Huang, 2009).

According to Grossberg, “diaspora emphasizes the historically spatial fluidity and intentionality of identity, its articulation to structures of historical movements (whether forced or chosen, necessary or desired)” (1996, p.88). Members of a diaspora distinguish themselves from migrants, since the latter rarely retain cultural and religious traditions of their homeland. Diasporas do not assimilate completely; they strive to maintain their cultural identity that preserves connections with homeland (Safran, 1991; Butler, 2001). The scholarly findings on the role of diasporas in foreigners' adaptation in their new cultures are in accord with the idea of intra-group support previously discussed in this thesis proposal. In particular, the literature summarizes that throughout the first years in the host country, immigrants' interpersonal interaction and organizational involvement within their ethnic community is stronger than in the host society. However, at the same time, immigrants continue their active membership in both host community and their own ethnic community (Kim, 1977; Lin, 1998; Reichman, 2006; Bhatia and Ram, 2009). Kim
(1977) and Reichman (2006) found that immigrants increase the volume of both American and diaspora friends during the first decade upon immigration. Then, the number of ethnic friends decreases.

An example of Soviet Jews who emigrated to the U.S. between the 1960s and 1990s is yet another evidence supporting the importance of diaspora in the newcomers’ adaptation. As Walter Zenner (1987) argues, American Jews, whose ancestors emigrated to the U.S. from Europe, looked at the immigrants from the Soviet Union as aliens. They did not perceive them as Jews but rather as Russians that were not warmly welcomed in American Jewish community. The absence of contacts in the ethnic group in the U.S. resulted in more extended and painful adaptation of Soviet Jews to American culture than of that of Jews who arrived to the U.S. from European countries.

The exploration of foreigner’s affiliation with diaspora identity is important not only from the perspective of cultural adaptation. Further analysis allows understanding the role, which diaspora plays in shaping identity of sojourners as global citizens. Specifically, the diaspora consists of elements of the homeland and the hostland (Laguerre, 2006), a context that contributes to identity formation. However, in her book *Diaspora, Politics, and Globalization* (2006), Laguerre argues that diasporas cannot be treated as separated ethnic units in the hostlands but rather as bridges between their countries of origin (homelands) and the rest of the world. “Diasporic political engagement amplifies the ethnic and the transnational orientation of the community” (2006, p.4). This role of diaspora also reflects the current phenomenon of globalization whereupon the nation-state looses its priority in defining the individual’s identity (Falk, 1993; Mahroum, 2000; McIntyre-Mills, 2000; Skliar, 2001). This happens because “The
The concept of global citizenship shifts rights and responsibilities from a national to an international level” (McIntyre-Mills, 2000, p.19).

The notion of global citizenship in the contemporary world is where the individual who associates him/herself with the diaspora is not limited only to the intra-ethnic contacts but can also benefit from the global communication through the diaspora. In particular, transnational virtual communities in which diasporians participate while exchanging messages with the homeland through Internet or other means of communication can contribute to framing the issues of democratization and international politics (Laguerre, 2006). The case of the Ukrainian Orange revolution at the end of 2004 can be viewed as an example of such an impact of diaspora. The specific activities of Ukrainian ethnic communities across the world mobilized the global support to the Orange revolution (Ashlund and McFaul, 2006). A few years later, the phenomenon of Arab Spring of 2010 proved the power of social media in political movements, as well as it showed one time that participants of these movements affiliate themselves with global democratic community (Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian, 2011; Sharekh, 2011).

According to Laguerre, diasporazation shares an important similarity with globalization: Both emerged as the result of constraints in history, society, and culture. This similarity made it possible for Laguerre to come up with a definition of diasporic globalization as the phenomenon that implies migration, “the dispersion of the emigrants to more than one site, the connection of the various sites to each other through various forms of social interaction, and the maintenance of transnational relations between the homeland and the resettled émigrés” (2006, p.5). Such an approach to diaspora enables the analyses of shaping sojourners’ identities not only through the issues of his/her
experience of living in the host society, and the bonds with the country of origin, but also through the context of “the multinational universe” (2006, p.7). In other words, the sojourner acknowledges that the formation of his/herself is affected by the changing patterns of global communication as well (Falk, 1993; San Juan Jr, 2001; Heyward, 2002; Laguerre, 2006; Kim, 2008).

Phinney and Onwungalú’s (1996) findings on perceptions of American ideals among African-American and African students are noteworthy in this respect. The authors discovered that while for Black Americans self-esteem was positively correlated with racial identity, it was unrelated to self-esteem of Africans, who came from the countries where the issue of race was less salient. But racial identity concerns of Africans increased with length of their residence in the U.S., which can be interpreted that Africans affiliated themselves with African Americans as a minority group. However, unlike American black students, Africans felt that American ideals of freedom of speech and religion and both educational and economic opportunities are more applicable to them. Thus far, Africans’ identification with African-American community through the issue of race reflected their affiliation with the hostland. Yet their aspirations towards dominant American ideals also demonstrated the global perception of the U.S. as a free country where “education, hard work, and perseverance will make their dreams come true” (1996, p.138). Consequently, African students’ new identity can be seen as the product of the ideals cultivated in the hostland but also as a result of applying globally recognized values that constitute the basis for human rights (Falk, 1993; McInire-Mills, 2000; Delanty, 2000). On the contrary, Africans’ affiliation with Black Americans of diaspora was partial and seen only through the racial issue; since African Americans did
not share the sojourners’ belief about the applicability of American ideals. While Phinney and Onwungalu’s study does not focus on persons from the post-communist world, it gives some insights about how the new sense of identity of the subjects of this research is constructed. Specifically, most of the respondents share the belief of African students that American education and hard work gives them a chance for a better life.

Ogan (2001) further explores the concept of mixed identity in her book *Communication and Identity in the Diaspora: Turkish Migrants in Amsterdam and Their Use of Media.* The large Turkish community in The Netherlands preserved its ethnic identity through “a collective memory in the new home” (2001, p.1). On the other hand, the Turkish diaspora in this country did not assimilate with the local people, unlike how diasporas may link with host societies in other countries. Mixed marriages between Dutch and Turks are rare despite living in The Netherlands for decades. The majority of Turks that were interviewed by Laguerre claimed that they feel their ties with the homeland Turkey are much stronger than their ties with The Netherlands.

Several reasons contributed to the fact that the Turkish community remains isolated in this host society. These are different religious identities (Christian religion for Dutch ethnics and Islam for Turkish ethnics), the existing racism towards people of non-Dutch nationalities in The Netherlands, and the state’s policies that did not provide sufficient support for Turkish immigrants in their attempts to learn Dutch language. Specifically, those who arrived in the early 1960s complained that a Dutch-Turkish dictionary was not even available for their use.

The possibility to adopt Dutch nationality without losing Turkish citizenship that was granted for Turks in 1992 did not change the situation. Most of the Turkish
respondents still claim that they feel more of a sense of belonging to their homeland rather than to The Netherlands. The younger generation of Turks in The Netherlands identify themselves as European-Turks or Dutch-Turks, although many young people have problems with defining their identity: “The sons and daughters of first-generation migrants are often torn between wanting to stay in The Netherlands or returning to Turkey to spend their lives” (2001, p.53). Even though this seems to sound in unison with early findings on bicultural identity, that points out on the absence of loyalty to any of cultures in bicultural person (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935), it can be assumed that the specific realm of Dutch-Turks in modern Europe gives them more chances to develop cross-cultural identity rather than feel distressed because of lack of connections with their historical Motherland and The Netherlands (Essers et al, 2008).

If applied to sojourners, these findings can help to understand how their new identities are contoured. On the one hand, after residing in the host-land for an extended period of time, they can feel weaker identification with their homeland. As it happened with Yasemine, a young woman in her late twenties, who has a university degree and has tried to move between Turkish and Dutch communities without finding a satisfactory place for herself (Ogan, 2001). She says that there are a lot of problems with Turkish culture, where one is not free. While in Holland Yasemine feels the freedom of the individual, yet she does not feel a sense of belonging to Dutch culture. However, this does not seem to cause her negative reaction, since “It brings more color to your life. People today are not from particular place; they are from a lot of places” (p.71).

This idea sounds in unison with what Natalia Chumak, a Fulbright student from Ukraine at Columbia University, who told the researcher about her stay in New York
during her studies. Natalia preferred to rent an apartment in Brighton Beach, populated mostly by the former citizens of the Soviet Union. She explained her choice with a rationale of much cheaper accommodations than in other parts of New York, as well as the need to feel an atmosphere of Slavic culture. "There were many Russian stores and restaurants around, where people mostly communicated in Russian" – Natalia said. "I could ask them about everything and had a strange feeling that those folks were like fellows from my native town of Gorlivka but more open and friendly. Brighton Beach people became "Ukramericans" for me. Socializing with them was really helpful in terms of my initial adaptation here and gradually getting Americanized later" (personal communication, September 20, 2009).

Thus, the research on diaspora and identity implies that the international experience of living in the host society for the sojourner does not necessarily mean diffusion of his/her identity (neither hostland, nor homeland affiliation), but creation of new identity, in which neither hostland, nor homeland dominates. Rather, this new identity contains the processed ideas of both hostland and homeland, as well as values of global community.

Ironically, scholars do not see the impact of ethnic enclaves, or "distinctive settlement areas" established by the immigrant groups in many American cities and suburbs (Logan et al., 2002, p.299), on students-sojourners identity in the same way, as the diaspora’s role can be viewed. Sojourners’ participation in ethnically oriented unions on campus enhances their feelings of ethnic selves, yet contributes to their integration into American life only to the limited extend or does not contribute at all (Guiffrida, 2003; Halualani et al., 2004; Kurotsuchi, 2004; Sidanius et al., 2004).
In their study *Ethnic Enclaves and the Dynamics of Social Identity on the College Campus: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, Sidanius et al. (2004) found that even when the decision of international students to join ethnically oriented student organizations on the ethnically diverse American campus further increased the level of their ethnic identity, there was no indication that the experiences in these sororities or fraternities increased the students’ sense of common identity with members of other groups, as well as their sense of belonging to the wider university community. Moreover, ethnically oriented student organization membership appeared to increase the sense of ethnic victimization among both White and minority students.

While exploring the ethnic enclavisation on campus, Halualani et al. (2004) arrived at similar conclusions “that racially/ethnically different university students have limited interaction with each other in the multicultural university that hails and promotes “diversity” (p.357).

According to these studies, socialization in ethnic enclaves impedes rather than promotes acquiring intercultural identity in international students. It can be suggested that this happens because, unlike diasporas, ethnically oriented student organizations are temporary by their status. Participation in these unions is limited by the period of studies. One can assume that in order to preserve the uniqueness of such groups, they put more emphasis on the intra-group communication, while the outside interaction is not a priority. On the contrary, intra- and outside-group communication is more balanced in diasporas as the formations that exist over the extended period of time.

Yet another set of reasons entail communication patterns established by the group identity of the dominant White culture in most of American universities. According to
Tanaka, 2003 this identity is based on the White superiority over all others including, but assuming not only the racial aspect. Not surprisingly, "current approaches to diversity [on American campuses] may be dependent on practices that unintentionally pit one group against another" (Tanaka, 2003, p.2). Therefore, it is logical to suggest that international student’s identity is an issue of the constant negotiation with the groupings that represent the dominant culture at the university.

Why is it important to understand the experiences of international students studying in the United States? The next section provides a justification for selecting international students as the subjects of inquiry and highlights some potential challenges that the study of these sojourners presents. Following this section, the theoretical foundation for this thesis is presented. In particular, Cultural Contracts theory will be analyzed as the premise offering insights into the process of international students’ identity formation.

The phenomenon of international students in the U.S.

International students, as well as different issues they deal with during their stay in the U.S., are already addressed in the vast academic literature (Du Bois, 1956; Lambert, 1956; Banks, 1993; Martin and Nakayama, 1996; Altbach, 1991; Altbach et al., 2009; Altbach, 2010). Sojourners present a specific interest for researchers, since their number is increasing (Paige, 1990; Yeh and Inose, 2003; Altbach et al., 2010), while the dynamics of this group’s mobility is often viewed as an important evidence of global socio-political trends. Among those are “brain drain” in the developing countries and the “brain gain” in Western states, the impact on the economies of nations, and the degree of
political freedoms in different parts of the world (Simington, 1989; McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol, 1998; Smith and Bender, 2008; Altbach, 2010).

The United States is a top-destination country for foreign students from all over the world, and within the recent decades more and more international students come to American educational institutions (Graham and Diamond, 1997; Pimpa, 2001; Mahroum, 2000; Sklair, 2001; Skrentny, 2001; Bhagwati, 2003; Yeh and Inose, 2003). For instance, if in 1990-1991 academic year 407,529 foreign students arrived to study at the U.S. universities (Nguni, 1993); in 2000-2001 this number was 547,876 (Yeh and Inose, 2003).

It could be expected that after the 9/11/2001 terrorists’ attack the quantity of those applying for American higher education would decrease due to the toughened procedures of entry to the country. Security measures had already prevented the citizens of “state sponsors of terrorism” from obtaining American higher education in sensitive fields – according to the State Department’s “Technology Alert List” of 1994 (Kulakowski and Chronister, 2006). The measures hardened even more in the aftermath of the September attack. In particular, the changed laws require foreigners to be full-time, not part-time students, as was previously allowed. State Department (embassy) screenings of those seeking J-1 or F-1 student visas have become more rigorous and demand supplementary information and documents. For example, international students are required to submit additional paperwork to verify their scholarly achievements, their ties with home countries, and financial sufficiency. Under the U.S. Patriot Act of 2001, international students can be subjects to the further searching at the airports, constant scrutiny, and monitoring their records at any time (Romero, 2002; Kulakowski and Chronister, 2006).
Eventually, the 2001/02 online report of Institute of International Education (IIE) in Washington, DC charted declines in the enrollment of students from many Muslim countries (www.iie.org). Nevertheless, the amount of international students still remains as a significant percentage of university students and it is growing. The same report of IIE highlighted an increase of 6.4 percent of foreign students in the U.S. in the 2000-2001 academic year. In 2007/08, this number “increased 7 percent over the previous year to 623,805 students” (http://www.opendoors.iienetwork.org).

Studies show that foreigners are attracted by the high standards of American education, the probability of future employment in the U.S. after university graduation, and by the chances of higher wages in the USA than in their native countries (Kemp, 1995; Graham and Diamond, 1997; Mahroum, 2000; Mori, 2000; Pimpa, 2003; Altbach, 2010). Many students view the U.S. “as a crucial center of information and advanced technology” (Mori, 2000, p.137). Those, whose countries have poor civil and human rights records, are also fascinated by American level of respect to the individual’s freedom and dignity (Baldi, 2001; Skrentny, 2001).

According to other scholars, there is one more significant feature that distinguishes foreign students in the U.S.: The majority of them view the U.S. as the country of their future citizenship (Baruch et al., 2007). In order to obtain the desired status in America, they provide the necessary arrangements to study or work by all means including those that violate American legislation (Lamm and Imhoff, 1985; Borjas, 1994; Bratsberg, 1995; Bhagwati, 2003). From this perspective, many international sojourners can also be seen as potential non-returnees. Ironically, American legislation treats all the visa applicants from specific developing countries in the same way. These people are
viewed as probable immigrants, no matter the individual intention of international students to stay in the U.S. permanently (Lamm and Imhof, 1985; Bhagwati, 2003). Despite that “Third World graduates settled in the industrialized nations often retain contacts with their home countries and increasingly return after a period abroad” (Altbach, 1991, p.305).

Ultimately, the way in which the students are perceived in the U.S. is closely related to the existing themes and sentiments of immigration, which are among the most complicated in the contemporary world (McIntire-Mills, 2000; Skrentny, 2001; Baruch et al., 2007). Labor mobility fueled by immigration is blamed for creating a lack of jobs for native citizens in developed countries (Lamm and Imhof, 1985; Bratsberg, 1995; Mahroum, 2000), while their Third World counterparts are affected by the brain drain, another consequence of immigration (Lamm and Imhof, 1985; Phinney and Onwughalu, 1996; Graham, 2001). In this case and for the purposes of this study “Third World”, as cited by the above authors means the economically underdeveloped countries of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. These regions are considered as an entity because of common characteristics of poverty, political instability, and economic dependence on the advanced countries (Wolf-Philips, 1987; Migdal, 1988).

In addition to the issues of legal immigration, undocumented immigrants from the Third World are frequently held responsible for creating even more serious problems. People who come from the developing world are often seen as lacking understanding of social and cultural standards established in the United States. According to Finckenhauer and Waring (1988), that these immigrants can threaten “American values”, such as law
and morality, because their native countries have cultural norms that disrespect these values.

Immigration is perceived contributing to the increase of the crime rate (Finckenauer and Waring, 1998; Turner, 2007); overpopulating big American cities like Los Angeles or New York, and even endangering the national identity of Americans (Lamm and Imholf, 1985, Hansen, 2007). It is noteworthy that some authors, like former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm and Gary Imholf (1985) view both legal and undocumented immigrants as those who impact American society only negatively.

Not accidentally, American laws relating to immigration have increased in recent years (McKay, 2009). According to CNN Politics report *What does Arizona’s immigration law do?,* “in 2005, 300 bills were introduced. The next year, that number nearly doubled, and in 2007, more than 1,500 bills were introduced. Another 1,305 were introduced in 2008” (www.cnn.com).

In April 2010, the infamous Arizona Law (SB 1070) was adopted; it orders immigrants to carry their alien registration documents at all times. The same law allows police officers to question people if they have any reason to suspect that these individuals stay in the United States illegally. Critics of the law see it as fostering racial profiling and discriminating the rights of individual (Glover et al., 2010).

Such attitudes reflect the existing opinion in the U.S. about foreigners specifically from the developing countries and those whose first language is not English. In turn, the international students’ awareness about being treated as probable immigrants plays an important role in shaping their opinions about the U.S. Since being perceived as an immigrant is usually affiliated with extra inspection from societal institutions and
mistrust of potential employers, this perception and subsequent treatment may result in the feeling of being rejected by the "promised land" of America (Schmitt et al., 2003). This challenges foreigners' idealized expectations from their American experience that they may have before or during their stay (Church, 1982; Paige, 1990). However, after spending some time at American university, international students can alter their initial insights and expectations about the U.S. as the country of equal opportunities or a flourishing democratic model for the rest of the world (Baldi, 2001; Dudziak, 2002; Altbach, 2010). It is considered that those who come to the U.S. cherish the mentioned ideals most (Kuptsch and Pang, 2006), thus the sojourners' understanding of these ideals are significant.

A number of diverse reasons can add to the transformation of the foreigner's opinions. International students may experience cultural and/or social barriers within their formal and informal contacts in the U.S. (Church, 1982; Al-Shariden and Goe, 1998; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). Because of their non-American status they can be rejected while seeking job opportunities. For instance, working for the U.S. governmental structures requires American citizenship. Non-governmental employers often turn back the non-citizens' job-applications, since otherwise they have to take a burden of additional paperwork while hiring such a specialist (Franz, 2005; Lopez, 2006).

It can also be problematic for the foreigner to continue his/her studies at the PhD level. Some U.S. schools require students from abroad to get higher GRE scores' averages than the same for Americans as a necessary condition to be admitted to the program, while "the content and context of the [GRE] exam were found to be biased against international students" (Mupinga and Mupinga, 2005).
Yet the issues faced by international students in the U.S. are not related only to the theme of immigration. The area of international education also poses challenges that need to be addressed.

Potential challenges for international students’ studies

The research literature on international education practice highlights the language barrier and mixed chances of employment of international students as the most related problems to this group of learners.

In particular, Hinofotis and Bailey (1981), Borjas (2000), and Marvasti (2005) explore the perceived effectiveness of foreign-born teacher’s assistants (TAs) and point out on their “limited communication skills” (Hinofotis and Bailey, 1981, p.121). According to the authors, an inadequate English proficiency of these faculties has a negative, though modest, impact in the academic performance of American undergraduate students. Because undergraduate students explain their undesirable grades by difficulties in understanding the spoken English of international assistants, it can be assumed that certain degree of negativism in respect of international assistants is a part of the attitude towards them in American academia. As derived from Borjas (2000) and Hinofotis and Bailey (1981), such an opinion about foreign faculties can reinforce their status of co-culture group (Orbe, 1996) on the university campus. This status may serve as an impediment for the Teaching Assistants’ (TA) integration into American society.

One more topic that the existing body of literature does not seem to shed enough light on is whether the insufficient communication skills pertain all the international students (including TAs) or only those coming to the U.S. from certain regions of the
planet. Most of the scholarly writings on foreigners in American academe focus on particularly Asian students (Tang, 1993; Borjas, 2000; Mori, 2000; Shih and Brown, 2000; Zhang and Dixon, 2003; Marvasti, 2005) and emphasize their poor knowledge of English as the basic obstacle for their successful adaptation. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the mentioned problem is also common for the international students from the rest of the world. In the same way it is ambiguous whether communication difficulties result only from the language barrier or can they also be attributed to other issues, like the international Teaching Assistants’ perceived ability to be successful in their jobs on American campus; their “reflective practices, and issues of identity and self-worth” (Park, 2004, p.349).

In addition, the differences between the schooling standards in the native countries of international faculties and the same in the U.S. can also be correlated with viewing foreigners as those with limited communication skills and thus not well-suited for teaching at American university. For instance, in accordance with traditions of Chinese (Lin, 1999; Peterson, 2001; Fengzhen, 2002), as well as Eastern European education (Tomiak, 1992; Gerber, 2003), students are expected to memorize a lot of presented information and fully concentrate on the explained material; the atmosphere in the classroom is rigorous (Fengzhen, 2002). This contrasts with a more democratic environment in the American classroom, where students can use computers during the lecture or leave the room without asking the instructor’s permission. On the other hand, international faculties from the mentioned parts of the world can see this as students’ lack of attention to the material. Therefore, they could relate students’ academic performance
not to the TAs’ communication skills but rather to students’ manner of learning and the American classroom culture.

Finally, there seems to be a deficit of the literature reflecting on positive impact of foreign faculties in undergraduates’ academic success, as well as their input in expanding students’ cultural and educational horizons, contributing to overcoming racial/ethnic stereotypes or lack of global knowledge. Only a narrow segment of the scholarly writings address a constructive role of international TAs; among those are the works by D. Roach (1998) and B. Fleisher et al (2002).

Another concern that emerges from the international education practice in the US is the poor chance of employment both in the U.S. and the native countries for the international graduates with the degrees in English (Braine, 1999). While facing difficulties with finding a job-placement, foreign graduates can view both their home and host cultures as those that communicate rejection to them. One shift in this might be freelance or contract work via the Internet, which has more fluid workspaces but these positions are also limited.

On the contrary, international graduates with engineering diplomas or degrees have good opportunities to find jobs specifically in the U.S. (Lowell, 2001; Tang, 2003; Jones, 2003). They “are increasingly remaining in the United States” (Jones, 2003, p.22) According to Jones, the growing competition with foreigners even can threaten the professional future of American born engineers.

These issues create both positive and negative experiences of international students, which can contribute to their newly emerging identities. Therefore, it is compelling to learn to what degree foreigners’ views of the U.S. are preserved or changed
within their experiences of studying in the U.S. Presenting these views through interpersonal and intrapersonal communication adds to sojourners' understanding of how others see them. In turn, the perceived identity of the foreigner through communication with the host culture changes his/her feeling of self too (Swann, 1983; Hitlin, 2003).

The following section will present how the phenomenon of the intrapersonal conflicting identities is addressed in the scholarly literature. In particular, I discuss the scholarship, which explore the foreigners' communication styles; their adaptation in the host environments; the issues, which arise within their cross-cultural communication; the affiliations with their Diasporas and national enclaves; and the role of globalization in shaping identities of international students.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Cultural contracts theory

During the summer months of 2010, I had the opportunity to travel extensively mostly accompanying my husband Valery while he was engaged in business. We first traveled to France, staying for a month, and then a week in Tunisia. While abroad, I communicated with the representatives of the same Arab ethnicity in both countries, but in each of them I negotiated the American part of my identity differently.

There was a large Arab community in the town of Douiai, where we lived while in France. This group comprised of families of former citizens of Algeria and Tunisia; these states were French protectorates in the past. While entering the businesses owned by the representatives of Arab ethnicity, I was often asked where did you come from. Having traveled to France directly from the Kalamazoo, Michigan airport, I responded honestly answering that I arrived from Michigan. After that response, the shopkeepers perceived me as American. Some started asking how I liked my president Obama, others shared that they have relatives in Chicago and Detroit, who study or work there. The owner of the grocery shop, Akhmet, with whom we became friends, made us “promise” to come to his Douiai store the next time we visited, because “I love America and Americans.” At one point, I realized that I did not want to disclose to Akhmet and others that indeed I was not American, and after a few days passed, it seemed too late to disclose my citizenship. After all, I felt proud about that my accent was recognized in France as “American” (even though in the U.S. it is acknowledged as “European”). Second, I was a bit embarrassed, since I did not tell the truth about my nationality from
the very beginning; on the other hand, I did not want to inform everything about myself to this new acquaintance.

In local shop in the city of Tabarka, Tunisia, I was again asked about my origin. Since I recently acquired Polish citizenship, I preferred to identify myself with Poland. After hearing the shopkeeper’s response it was a lucky decision not to mention my American university experience. “It is good you are Polish, but not from the USA or Germany. This can be recognized from the way you speak English”, he said. “Here we don’t like these countries and those domineering and arrogant westerners.” I was not enthusiastic about further discussion with the shopkeeper, even if to persuade him and talk him into at least considering that not all westerners are domineering and arrogant. It appeared that she was the only woman on the street in the Muslim country that, according to the shopkeeper, was not friendly to the tourists from the developed Western states.

While I revealed my American identity in France, I chose to withhold this information in Tunisia. In other words, validated self in the first case and disconfirmed it in the second. This difference in communicating one’s identity is explained by Ting-Toomey’s identity validation model (2005). According to Ting-Toomey, when a person perceives a positive identity validation, s/he is likely to view the self-image positively. On the contrary, when the identity is seen negatively, self-image will be viewed in the same way. Validation and disconfirmation of identity are articulated through verbal and nonverbal messages. Confirming messages entail “recognizing others with important group-based and person-based identities, responding sensitively to other people’s mood and affective states, and accepting other people’s experiences as real” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p.112). On the contrary, disconfirmation assumes not recognizing the existence of
the others, not responding sensitively to cultural strangers, and not perceiving the validity of others’ experiences. Therefore, communication is a crucial element of identity validation; participants in the communication occurrence make choices in order to secure their self-images. Within a dialogue, those representing different cultures apply diverse communication strategies aimed to reach the common ground on the one hand, yet not to make them vulnerable.

Ting-Toomey’s model served as a basis for the cultural contracts theory developed by Ronald Jackson “to make sense of identity effects or outcomes as necessary end products of identity negotiation” (2002, p.362). Jackson states that people need cultural contracts for the sake of protecting and defining the self. Therefore, every individual settled at least one cultural contract within his/her lifetime, and each contract has an impact on person’s self (Jackson et al, 2008). Figuratively, “signing” such a contract occurs because even in casual interactions people exchange worldviews and attitudes that encompass their identities. Moreover, those interacting use each other as guideposts for normative behavior. Consequently, identity negotiation is about coordinating one's identity to match (or not resist) the presence of other cultural identities (Jackson, 2002). At the same time, identities have meanings for the individual after they were first negotiated personally, within the self.

Depending on life situations and risks evolving from these situations, some cultural contracts can be more attractive for the individual than others. Thus, power contributes to signing the cultural agreements. Difference and conflict are two additional significant factors. They determine how people arrive at the points of their identities through the verbal and nonverbal exchanges, as well as their undisclosed standpoints that
become the tools of negotiation (Onwumechili et al., 2003). Within negotiation and conversation, people expect to diminish the impact of differences and conflict.

Jackson distinguishes between three groups of cultural contracts: ready to sign (assimilation), quasi-completed (adaptation), and co-created (mutual valuation). Despite this division, all types of contracts express salient premises that identities need affirmation, they are not stable, can be understood interactively, and they are unquestionably contractual (Onwumechili et al., 2008). Breaches of contracts can be penalized by, for instance, community ostracism, termination of relationship, or revision of the previously signed contract (Jackson, 2002).

The ready-to-sign, or pre-negotiated contract is the most common, even though this type is the least effective in the intercultural communication. Usually those representing the dominant group present such contracts to those from the minority group. The dominant group believes that others considered as “different” (Onwumechili et al., 2003; Hecht et al, 2003; Jackson, 2010) have to conform to the majority’s norms and values. The pre-negotiated contract is usually attached to the unconscious level and therefore those who impose it often may not be aware that their dominant culture causes shifts in others’ identities. By definition, these contracts do not assume any compromise.

One of the instances of such a contract can be a frequent practice of international students to change or “adjust” their native names to those familiar to Americans. Jiaying Non-Han, a student from China, with whom I made friends two years ago in Austria, told me that while taking one of her classes at the U.S. university, she offered her peers and professors to call her Jane. She did so, because in her other class they often mispronounced her native name. Jiaying explained her choice by not willing “to make
Americans feel confused and uncomfortable” (personal communication, October 28, 2010). Jiaying’s “switching” to Jane reflects her submission to dominant group’s rules. It can be assumed that once she insisted on her native name, this could result in her limited communication with Americans.

Within quasi-completed contracts, people from different cultures feel their identities are partially valued. Thus, they can preserve parts of their cultural worldviews without fear of penalty (Jackson, 2002; Jackson, 2008). Those representing minorities appear to be most opting to compromise in order to ease any relational tension with those from the dominant group. Nevertheless, quasi-completed contracts leave marginalized individuals still feeling marginalized (Hecht et al., 2003). Quasi-completed agreement is being negotiated when an individual feels the need to shift identities temporarily at work or school to make others comfortable (Jackson, 2002; Onwumechili et al., 2003). One of the extreme manifestations of such a contract is when international students adopt the colloquial manner of their American classmates and often use the expressions like “that’s cool!”, “right on”, “awesome!”, they act in accordance with quasi-completed contracts. Using the mentioned expressions, sojourners negotiate about parts of their selves; within communication inside of their native groups they may never repeat these idioms. Yet pronouncing them while socializing with the dominant group increases chances of social survival and being accepted by this group. Even if sojourners realize that being accepted does not mean that the majority is interested in their cultures, values, or worldviews.

Finally, in co-created contracts both parties mutually arrive to agreement, in which the cultural value of participants is appreciated by each of them (Jackson, 2002). The relationship in such contracts is fully negotiable. Such contracts are perceived as “the
optimal means of relational coordination across cultures" (Cooks, 2007, p.74). This type of contract assumes the ideal context for the dialogue between the majority and minority members, since it promotes acknowledgment and valuation of cultural differences (Jackson, 2002; Onwumechili et al., 2003; Cooks, 2007; Jackson, 2010).

Cooks (2007) argues that multicultural persons usually sign co-created contracts by demonstrating that they go over cultural boundaries and belong to every culture. Such individuals do not want to admit they have their own culture that differs them from others. Rather, they want to get others to see that cultural dissimilarity does not matter for the productive relationship.

The annual Russian Festival in Kalamazoo, Michigan, organized by Kalamazoo-Pushkin Society, can serve as an example of co-created contract signed by the dominant group with the minority. Within this event, American organizers of the festival take time to understand and familiarize others with Russian people in Michigan. Among others, the festival also involves Russian and Russian-speaking students, who participate as the hosts of the event. In this way the dominant group sends a message that they not only recognize the cultural distinction of the other ethnicity but also value this distinction.

**Sojourners and cultural contracts**

Onwumechili et al. (2003) utilized the framework of the cultural contracts theory for their study *In the deep valley with mountains to climb: exploring identity and multiple reacculturation*. The authors explored the identity issues of intercultural transients such as sailors, international business travelers, seasonal migrant labor groups, legally supported multiple residents, and the related reacculturation processes of transients.
Onwumechili et al. focus on identifying how transients negotiate identity during multiple reacculturation and the effects of identity shifting. Among these practices are mindfulness as creation of new categories, openness to new information, and awareness of more than one perspective. The second effect is multicultural personhood, or the individual who competently traverses cultural borders. One more outcome of identity shifting is community building, with the end objective being to develop a “third culture” with a previous stranger that requires that the two interactants move away from their previously ascribed culture toward one that is co-constructed.

The structure applied by Onwumechili et al. serves as a functional guide for this thesis. Even though their study entails the concept of reacculturation, while this thesis puts more emphasis on acculturation of sojourners. Nevertheless, the employed theoretical structure allows some prediction about how international students might shift their identities. Unlike other theories, the premise of cultural contracts highlights that the individual’s self is inseparable from understanding of him/herself, the background of the home culture, and communication with the host culture. It is also noteworthy that the theory “brings together the concepts of identity and intercultural negotiation” (Onwumechili et al., p.124) and analyses identity as a constantly fluctuating issue.

Yet another significant issue is that the theory spotlights communication, meaning not only one’s interactions with others but also the inner communication with one’s self. The researcher suggests that the individual’s motivation is an important variable in this progression. Even though there is vast literature on sojourners’ intercultural contracts and their selves, the facet of their motivations remains to be under explored in the scholarly writings. Specifically, I did not find relevant material on sojourners’ motives before and
after their coming to American university, therefore the relevant questions on students motivations were included in the interviewing protocol. Another gap in the scholarship is how communication with the host culture influences sojourners’ objectives as indicators of their worldviews. Finally, there is a limited study on how the changes in motivation contribute to international students’ multicultural, global citizenry, or other identities.

Therefore, this thesis also employs Narrative theory as an additional tool of qualitative communication inquiry. This theory enables understanding the individual self through the stories s/he tells about him/herself and makes it possible for the researcher to trace personal motives as parts of identities of international students.

Narrative theory: How our stories communicate about understanding of self among international students

According to Labov and Waletzky (2003), “any sequence of clauses that contains at least one temporal juncture, is a narrative” (p.74). Journet et al (2011) consider narrative “as a form of hermeneutic expression in which human action is understood and made meaningful” (p.3).

Because human beings are storytellers, oral, written, or visual narratives assist us in navigating our place in the world. They guide us on how to act and how to evaluate what goes on in the world (Hall, 2005, p.75). According to Machiorlatti (2010), the stories of different people, therefore, are reflections of their worldview, that is, the complex web of interrelated beliefs, values, and practices. Worldview is part of our learned cultural orientation; it informs our social organization, our relationships to nature/environment, our beliefs about humanity, as well as cosmological or philosophical questions about the nature of the universe (p.129).
The story about the lived experience of the individual is a key concept, and one can understand that narrative serves as a way to express and disclose one’s identity, or at least a part of this identity. Narrative investigation, therefore, addresses first of all the analysis of language in which the lived experience is recounted. Yet this investigation enters not only the domain of language, since currently narrative employs the areas of sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, communication studies, literary theory, philosophy, as well as psychology and ethnography (Herman and Ryan, 2005).

Such a broad spectrum enabled some authors to “equate identities with stories about persons” (Sfard and Prusak, 2005, p.18), since complicated intra- and interpersonal communication mechanisms contribute to how the person perceives him/herself, what information s/he prefers to share with others, and how s/he narrates this information. Because “stories and narratives are extremely complex processes involving interactivity, character representations, narrative dynamics, user experiences, decision-making processes, participative narrative forms and affective and social behaviors” (Louhart and Alyett, 2004, p.510), identity cannot be seen as a stable formation. Rather it is a subject of continuous changes, which is shaped and reshaped as the result of interactions with others. Moreover, the individual is not necessarily aware of these changes, since changes in identity occur on both conscious and unconscious levels. Conscious means one’s acknowledgement of responsibility of what is said, and this responsibility is what one projects in his/her narrative of self (Cooper, 2011). Yet unconscious components are additional core elements of the narrative, which also participate in the process of how identity emerges within the story.
How people tell their narratives depends on the number of factors (Louhart and Alyett, 2004; Herman and Ryan, 2005). Among those are the states of biological and psychological well being, as well as individual’s cultural and historical backgrounds together with the same backgrounds of the larger human entity that the author of the narrative feels to be affiliated with (Labov and Waletzky, 2003; Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Young, 2011; Zebroski, 2011). Derived from this, narrative constructs both individual and collective identities, as well as supports individuals to integrate their selves “with the current state of the changing world” (Cooper, 2011, p.230).

So far, it can be assumed that the range of sentiments contained in international students’ narratives can be rather wide and diverse on the level of individual self. Yet this research project expected some similarities in the stories that pertain to group identity of foreign learners in the U.S. In particular, I anticipated that the motivations to study in the U.S. would emerge in students’ stories shared during their interviews.
CHAPTER IV

THE AREAS OF INQUIRY OF THIS STUDY

Educational experiences and personhood

It can be assumed that the shortfalls mentioned above emerge from the domineering focus of the literature on international students’ academic institutional surroundings, while the impacts of their other environments are not sufficiently covered in the scholarly writings. Meanwhile, the international students’ cross-cultural communication in the U.S. can include, but not be limited to, their native and American friends and acquaintances beyond the university’ campuses, home- and host families in America, employment environments, religious organizations, and the diverse kind and number of other contacts outside academe.

In addition, the role of education in shaping sojourners’ identities is viewed mainly as affiliated with challengers and stresses (Mori, 2000; Shih and Brown, 2000; Zhang and Dixon, 2003; Schmitt, 2003; Misra and Castillo. 2004), but the transformative power of educational process (Martin and Nakayama, 2003) does not seem to get an adequate scholarly attention. Since education expands one’s horizons and stimulates personality development (Dewey, 1974), it also has a significant influence on one’s life objectives and the construction of self that emerges from these purposes (Russel and Chickering, 1984; Gadsden, 1993; Brickhouse, 2001). Consequently, it is noteworthy to learn how the educational experience at American institutions shape understanding of identity and the concept of personhood for international students.
The research questions

This study seeks to explore the following broad research questions:

RQ 1: What are some objectives or motivations for studying internationally, specifically in the U.S.?

RQ 2: How do cross-cultural communication issues contribute to the international students’ objectives of their studies at American universities, located within the geographic borders of the U.S.?

RQ 3: How is international student identity formed and changed upon cultural immersion based on how they “tell their stories” about the U.S. education experiences?

Potentially, answering these questions can contribute to the knowledge of needs and aspirations of international learners, as well the services, orientation and continuing support provided to these students. This enables their voices to emerge and assumes an input to better understanding the value of cultural diversity in the academic environment.

The research questions also allow understanding the unique nature of international education as “different from some other kind of education” (Martin and Nakayama, 1997, p.18). Specifically, it can be assumed that democratic ideas and values conveyed within the American university training have a positive influence on the formation of international students’ identities. Moreover, answering these questions contributes to research in the international education within the specific domain of cross-cultural communication. It also offers some insights into the identity formation of foreign students through their acquisition of the host culture communication patterns.
Finally, these research questions support learning whether or not cross-cultural communication of international students has an impact in their integration into American culture and whether or not international students become bi-cultural, multicultural, or global citizens as the result of their stay in the U.S.
CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

The advantages of the qualitative method

Interviewing international students provides a strong data collection method and research inquiry process, because interviewing allows for in-depth responses, follow-up questions in order to expand information or to seek clarification, and the observation of non-verbal communication during interviewing. Interviewing provides depth and breadth in data collection and potential interpretation.

The qualitative in-depth interview is consistently helpful in answering research question in cross-cultural study (Van der Vijver and Leung, 1997; Ryen, 2003), and thus used for data collection and investigation (Van der Vijver and Leung, 1997; Ryen, 2003). Qualitative interviewing “helps explain how and why culture is created, evolves, and is maintained” ( Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.3). In addition, it has significant advantages over other methods.

Unlike quantitative inquiry, which identifies its analytic categories before the study is undertaken, within the qualitative approach analytic categories are, or can be, defined during the research process (Glaser and Strauss, 1968; McCracken, 1988). Also noteworthy for this study, because it entails communication with international students, and I myself am an international student, are the subjects, or the research participants, could be described as co-researchers ( Orbe, 1998). Such an approach emphasizes the value of data collected within the interviewing, since participants “can be viewed as multidimensional and complex and from a particular social, cultural, and historical circumstance” ( Orbe, 1998, p.38), and the researcher also engages in the narrative
understanding of identity as international student. As a researcher and someone who has a story to tell about being an international student in the U.S., I also anticipate that co-researchers will suggest other significant topics besides those already planned to discussion. Within the general issues of this research project, these additional points will be presented as part of the analysis, shall they arise, where relevant.

In particular, I anticipated interviewing (talking) with the interviewees in three general areas: 1) their motivations for study in the U.S.; 2) their experience of immersion and leaving their home/native countries and 3) various communication concerns, expectation and issues. For example, these three general areas of discussion might bring up the issues of homesickness, their relationships with American students, and their relationship with students of the same nationality, their studies, and what kind of complexities they faced while adjusting to the academic life in the U.S. These complexities can emerge from culture shock, specifically, according to Pedersen (1995), its phases of honeymoon, negotiation and adjustment. The difficulties may also include but not be limited to the language barrier, different educational environment and expectations, financial challenges, loneliness, or other emotional experiences, lack of perceived knowledge about American culture, health issues that result from the change of climate or food choices, and/or other reasons.

Yet another potential group of issues may surface from positive experiences of international students in the U.S. Those comprise feeling of accomplishment and the perceived success (like “finally I got to the U.S”, “finally I obtained American education”, or “I got a job in the U.S.” etc) and appreciation of supportive learning environment on campus. The latter means well-equipped libraries and computer labs,
possibilities to excel in knowledge while attending conferences, invited talks, and presentations, as well as getting internships and/or other trainings, and helpful and respectful attitude of the university professors.

As the data of the interviews showed, other variables also were appreciation of variety of students’ self-governance, advocacy, and other unions together with sports’, arts’, catering, and entertainment facilities on campus. International students admire ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity at the university, making friends on and outside campus, and finding spouses among Americans — as it happened to three participants of this research. Finally, positive experiences also emerge from international students’ exposure to American culture and appreciation of democracy by those who came to the U.S. from totalitarian or post-totalitarian societies.

In addition, the thesis presents data gathering and discussion of international students’ experiences while communicating with the formal bodies like Homeland Security, their university Registrar Offices, International Offices/Departments, and their departments of study. These formal bodies might differ significantly (on the university level) and thus presented significant diversity in narrated student experiences.

Lastly, I asked the interviewees about their thoughts and feelings towards their native communities and home countries after they had now spent some time in America. While this is not the focus of the study, the responses can also provide additional insights about the transformations of the participants’ identities within their time of study or sojourn in the U.S.

This was a very ambitious list of subject areas going into the research, but served as a starting point compared to the numerous other subjects that could potentially emerge.
during the actual interview process. For instance, going into the research data-gathering phase I thought that it might be possible that interviewees from Russia may not be happy with the way their compatriots are portrayed in the Hollywood movies. For some, this may in turn have influenced their experience of living in the U.S., for others it is a known tactic of using stereotypes in popular or institutional culture, which they are also familiar with in their home country. The impossibility of envisioning all the potential topics presented a certain challenge for this research and required focused management of the vast amount of information for a master’s thesis. Therefore, some of the data results were tabled for future scholarly publications. On the other hand, such open ended interviewing also provided more opportunities for defining new categories of study and more depth in the data. In turn, this method allowed for analysis and discussion with more rich and detailed descriptions of the experiences of potential interviewees, and improved understanding of their cultures. Interviewing also opened better prospects of allowing the voices of international students to emerge to larger public sphere, as well as for potential changes in how cross-cultural education can work – more humanely and effectively – if that is what is required as a result of the data.

The objective of detailed description, which is the core of qualitative inquiry, is yet another reason for my preference of this method. While its quantitative counterpart is focused on the collection and analysis of the numerical data in order to comprehend the relationship between categories (Salem, 2008; Allen et al., 2008), qualitative study puts much emphasis on individual’s interpretation of his/her feelings and thoughts (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Consequently, qualitative method enables the researcher’s understanding of the emotional world of the participants (Lindlof, 1995; DiCicco-Bloom
and Crabtree, 2006) through giving attention to “the diverse forms and details of social life” (Lindlof, 1995, p.21). Such an attention enables catching the nuances of the participants’ attitudes (McCracken, 1988). More over, “Qualitative interviews develop listening skills that point out what ideas, themes, or issues to pursue in later questioning” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.7). Therefore, I was consciously aware of the need to be sensitive to the both interviewees’ verbal and nonverbal signs of their eagerness (or reluctance) to discuss some topics. On the other hand, I had to avoid being obtrusive while interviewing: One of the implications of qualitative research is that the investigator “must not engage what is commonly called “active listening” (McCracken, 1988, p.21).

The mentioned advantages of the qualitative method – the focus on the details of participants’ worlds and empowering the researcher through his/her own responses to the observed phenomenon or topic – made this method the most fitting for this study.

**Semi-structured interviews as an instrument of collecting data for this study**

The semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data. This type of qualitative interview appeared to be most rewarding in terms of establishing cooperation with respondents and building trustworthy relationship with them (Wengraf, 2001; Tseng and Newton, 2002). Since semi-structured interviews were conducted with a reasonably open framework (De Verthelyi, 1995), which enabled a focused two-way communication. One more asset of the semi-structured interview is that it allows treating a participant as co-researcher who is an “expert on her or his own life” (Orbe, 1996, p.160) and “multidimensional and complex beings with particular social, cultural, and historical life circumstances” (Orbe, 1998, p.6). The flexible nature of the semi-structured interview
(Volet and Ang, 1998) does not require designing all the questions ahead of time. Rather, the many questions surfaced within an actual dialogue with participants, and they also asked questions of interviewer.

For instance, one of the respondents asked me what minimal GRE score was required when I was entering Western Michigan University. Another participant asked what I planned to do after graduation and how I felt about my chances of employment. Such an approach stimulated my sensitivity to details and nuances of the respondent’s story, because “co-researchers…designate the interactive role that these persons play in shaping research outcomes” (Orbe, 1996, p.160). While doing so, participants not only shared knowledge with the interviewer, but also allowed new knowledge to emerge as a product of collaboration between the researcher and co-researchers. Thus, according to Orbe (1996), I tried to fulfill my task as the investigator to support receptiveness to the issues that co-researchers consider important.

Semi-structured interviews are also praised for being less intrusive to those being interviewed (Wengraf, 2001); the respondents are more apt to speak on sensitive issues within these conversations (Volet and Ang, 1998; Tseng and Newton, 2002). Ultimately, these types of dialogues promoted better understanding of the topic of study by both co-researchers and me. Semi-structured interviews also made it possible for new categories to emerge, since participants’ ideas extended the discussion to the relevant themes and the relationship between these themes. In particular, several students’ responses drew my attention to the theme that certain disciplines can be best or studied only in the U.S. (like Political Science or Native Americans Studies).
One more benefit of semi-structured interview is that it does not require a large sample of interviewees (Marshall, 1996; Wengraf, 2001) and provides “understanding of complex issues relating to human behavior” (Marshall, 1996, p.523), so the project can be manageable, while also contributing to studies about international education, communication practices, and identity.

Possible problems and limitations within qualitative interviewing and the ways of overcoming these limitations

While qualitative interviewing has a number of benefits, several possible risks should be well thought-out and addressed as best as possible before and while conducting a dialogue with a participant.

Being mindful about the objective of the qualitative study, which is not about predicting the participants’ behavior but understanding and hearing them (Lindlof, 1995), helped me avoiding pitfalls. In order to secure the qualitative interview from prejudice or assumption, I tried to suspend my “assumptions about the ways things work and actively solicit ideas and themes from interviewees” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.42). While doing so, I tried to be careful about my reflections, feelings, and ways of wording questions. In particular, I restrained from recalling my own negative experiences in the U.S. while listening to the stories about similar occurrences of my respondents and strategically used this only where I felt it appropriate. This communication tactic was minimally employed. Otherwise, I would push participants to focus only on unpleasant experiences and thus obtain the erroneous results of this research.

To avoid possible pitfalls, the interviewing protocol was prepared ahead of time, and the required procedure of reviewing the protocol by WMU HRSIRB was followed.
After HSIRB’s approval on October 19, 2011 (please, see appendix E), the line of questioning followed. I allowed myself only a few of follow up questions so that interviews had a reasonable time limit.

Additional questions were asked for examples where necessary, since qualitative method does not suggest the role of the researcher as a neutral observer (McCracken, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1995; Atkinson and Coffey, 2003; Burnett et al., 2009).

For instance, within interviewing, signs of eagerness (or reluctance) to discuss some topics were most often articulated non-verbally, through taking a long pause in the conversation, deep sigh, skeptical smile, and avoiding the eye contact with me. The departure from the theme of the inquiry occurred as well. One of the respondents when asked about the example of his negative communication with formal bodies, first replied that he had “to settle up the insurance issue” with his International Students’ organization, then sighed, paused and asked me what my next question was. I chose to ask him one more time about his example of negative communication with formal bodies. The respondent told me that his current insurance “basically makes students to pay more than they should”, and he tried to resolve this issue through participating in students’ self-governance organization.

The respondent’s first reaction was signaling the earlier negative experience of communication with formal bodies. It also showed that for some reason(s) the participant wanted to avoid recalling this experience. Among those reasons could be his feeling of insecurity because of the ongoing conflict with the party, which he feels responsible for making some students pay more than others for tuition and other educational fees.
Another reason could be that the male respondent might have felt uncomfortable while sharing his story with me, a female interviewer, and did not want to produce an impression of being a “complainer”, which is not seen as masculine in some countries from the region where the interviewee came from. There also could be other reasons, unknown to me, that were or were not related to the mentioned story. Thus I asked the student an additional question about how he could evaluate his chances to succeed in that controversy. He answered that “Here, in the United States, I believe that we can make a difference – in contrast to, um, Romania.” In this case, qualitative methodology allowed for further exploration of the complex nuances of this respondent’s experience. This methodology also prompted my next question about how the student could foresee the development of the same controversy in his native country of Romania.

On the contrary, another interviewee often smiled and answered the same question that he never had any negative communication with formal bodies. However, from the beginning of our conversation he looked tense and preferred to say just one- or two short sentences in response. These sentences sounded formalistic; the respondent was not eager disclose detailed stories about his experiences. Formalistic statements can be seen as “normative replies that obscure the way things actually occurred” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.221) and, as derived from this definition, those that provide scarce information and avoid further elaboration on the answer. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) and Adler and Adler (2003) point out, there can be several reasons why participants prefer this way of answering: They can be bored, not willing to make an effort to think through the question, or fear that the revealing certain information can be damaging for them. Trying to understand the reasons why the participant chooses this strategy is the first step
in getting behind formalistic statements (Wengraf, 2001). The next step can be questioning about the issue indirectly or backing off and later following up by reversing the way the researcher approaches the topic (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

In the interviewing process, I have tried several communication strategies to seek more detailed, and thus rich information, without offending the subject. Asking additional questions and changing my way of approaching topics appeared to be the most useful, they resulted in more in depth student’s answers in the second part of the interview.

However, as the researcher, I was a careful communicator, because I knew that nonverbal appreciation (communicated with smiling, for example) could also be something learned through exposure to American culture, which encourages smiling as a polite way indicating listening or effective communication. This example displays how nuanced interviewing can be. So far, I understood that the participant’s formalistic answers, as well as his repeated smiles signaled either his intention to look positive and thus “Americanized”, or, on the contrary, his feeling of insecurity.

Yet the researcher has to be aware that too much empathy during the interview can result in the distorted picture of the participant’s world (Kvale, 1996; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). So, my task as a researcher was to achieve balance rather than over compassion or pseudo-neutrality while communicating with the international students. In other words, I asked about different aspects of students’ experience and was cautious with my own feelings towards what I heard during the conversation. For instance, when I understood that empathizing with the interviewee’s views makes me too insincere to
perform my duties as an investigator, I tried to self-monitor my communication style during the interviewing (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Myers and Newman, 2006).

Contrary to the mentioned issue, another risk is "reading" the hidden meaning of the respondent's speech or gesture and "play it back" (McCracken, 1988, p.21). Such a strategy can damage the quality of investigation, since the interviewee is encouraged to say what the investigator "prompts" s/he wants to hear from the participant. More over, this strategy can also lead to repeating the same or similar data by the number of participants, and the results of the study will be flawed. For instance, when one of the respondents said that he "wanted to experience the way they are teaching sociology here" I asked him if he already managed to experience this difference. The respondent said, "Well, in majority of classes – yes. However, in some classes I saw what I already experienced in Slovakia." Following this, I asked the student to give me any example. The result was rewarding, because the participant told a detailed story about how the U.S. professors' attentiveness to students' understanding material results in developing their independent way of thinking.

I avoided asking something similar to "Do you mean they teach sociology better in the U.S.?" If I continued building questions in this kind of leading manner, I would violate the rule of nondirection and suggested my terms of the respondent's description of his experience, as derived from McCracken (1988) and Atkinson and Coffey (2003). Instead, I asked to give me an example and thus allowed the participant to express his vision of the world in which he lives.

One more potential challenge of the qualitative interview is that participant can perceive a researcher as not sympathetic. To avoid this, during interviewing I was
mindful about my own cultural assumptions that could affect what or how I ask a question, or responds to an answer (Rosenblatt, 1995; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The qualitative method also considers the researcher’s own cultural background and his/her emotional involvement within the conversation as the essential elements of the process of data collection (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Chew-Graham et al., 2002; Myers and Newman, 2007). Therefore, I believe that my status as an international student from Ukraine was helpful for this research. I found a common ground with my interviewees and felt that was trusted by them as someone with similar experiences. This experience also promoted “ice breaking” between the interviewer and the interviewee. In this research, one of the examples of sharing a similar background with interviewees and me were common problems with taking the Graduate Record Examination test (GRE) in one’s native country as a necessary condition to be enrolled at the U.S. university. For example, as an interviewer, I felt that after saying “I also found GRE difficult to pass” my participants were more open and ready to tell their stories. So, part of the qualitative interview process involved the display of empathy as a means to secure trust and disclosure.

In terms of identity formation, one of the respondent’s statement that “For the native [English] speaker it’s much easier to prepare for GRE… I think it [GRE] does not show my analytical skills” could be interpreted in several ways. For instance, this statement can be understood as “There are unnecessary obstacles for international students to get to the U.S.”, “I am not given equal chances with American students”, or “I am not perceived as possessing an adequate command in English”. All of the mentioned interpretations contribute to understanding the respondent’s identity as “other.”
Because this research is cross-cultural, there was the concern for cross-cultural understanding of the question. This occurred a few times for several reasons: my accent, understanding spoken English by participants, and cross-cultural translation. So in this instance, when one of the respondents declared that he felt more comfortable to answer the second part of the interview in his native language, we switched to Russian. It also happened a few times that my respondents asked me to repeat this or that question, because they could not understand it upon first asking.

As the researcher, I also expected some degree of mistrust from the participants cross-culturally, as some cross-cultural worldviews do not promote disclosure and sharing outside of the family or home culture (Martin and Nakayama, 1997; Kang, 2004; Miyahara, 2004). Specifically, I realized that in the beginning of interviews most of male participants felt reserved while answering questions, unlike it was in cases of their female counterparts. I can explain this by gender differences, as well as Eastern and Central European cultural predisposition about the domineering role of male in the society. Therefore, initially men did not trust me as an interviewer of the gender differences.

I also had to think about my dress code as casual, given that this style of dressing is most characteristic for my respondents and it became one more tool for successful facilitation of the interview. As an interviewer, I did not want to distract someone with clothing, jewelry, makeup or other accoutrement.
CHAPTER VI

CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPANTS’ SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURE

Twelve participants, six male and six female, were recruited for this study using the snowball procedure. The mentioned number as an adequate least quantity of participants was suggested by the previous studies by Gaskell (2000) and Guest et al. (2006). Guest claims that theme saturation is achieved after twelve interviews.

The snowball sample is a technique for developing a research sample “utilizing ‘insider’ knowledge and referral chains among subjects who possess common traits that are of research interest” (Kaplan et al, 1987, p.567).

As an “approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical issues” (Brace-Govan, 2004, p.53), snowball sampling is the most appropriate for this study. This way of sampling is particularly applicable where the research issue is sensitive (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002; Brace-Govan, 2004); it is also essential in cases where the researcher needs to build new contacts (Marshall, 1996).

Participants for this study were accessed through the researcher’s international student acquaintance network. As an alumna of the pre-academic program study for Fulbright international students at Pennsylvanian University in summer 2005, I send e-mail invitations to potential participants through the list-serve of the mentioned program. I recruited five participants for this study through my personal connections with international students; seven other respondents were engaged through the network of the Fulbright program alumni.

When a research subject made contact with me, the project and process was explained. Once this was understood, a time and place for the interview were arranged.
The subjects were also asked if they knew any other international students who might be willing to participate in this study. Two participants appeared to know such people, so I provided my contact information in order to have an introductory conversation about the project. Eventually, the friends of earlier interviewees became participants for this study too.

Candidates had to meet the following criteria in order to be selected: They had to be international undergraduate, graduate Masters/Professional, or graduate PhD students of institutions of higher education, preferably in the Midwest region in order to minimize costs for research travel.

Their countries of origin had to be any of the following: Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria, or those comprising the geographic region of Eastern and Central Europe.

I limited the pool to these countries, since all of them share the historical legacy of being formal parts or satellites of Austro-Hungarian Empire and then the Soviet empire. Thus they have many similarities in terms of social and cultural backgrounds, even if their current political and economic situations differ. Additionally, I came from the same part of the world; this factor is significant for this study, since one of its goals is to understand my own identity.

The students had to reside in the U.S. for no less than an academic year (eight months) in order to be able to provide enough information on their American experience, with at least contiguous eight months of residency. Three students traveled “home” during the summer months to visit family and friends, and I did not see this brief travel as
interrupting their international experience. In fact, it even emphasized their reflections about identity.

Participants were expected to possess a reasonable command of spoken English and be ready to dedicate from one hour to seventy-five minutes of their time for the interview. As it was already mentioned above, one of the participant's English was not sufficient at the moment of the interview, yet this did him disqualify them for this study, since I am fluent in Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish. Historically, at least one of these languages is familiar for the residents of the mentioned countries too. However, English was the preferred language and no materials were produced in languages other than English. The purpose of the study is to gather information on the U.S. experience — in the common language expected and used at such locations.

The following excluded candidates from participating in this study: their countries other than Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian, Polish, Moldavian, Romanian, Czech, Slovakian, and Bulgarian and their residing in the U.S. for less than an academic year. Even though the nationals of other countries may have parallel experiences prior to their coming to the U.S. — for instance, the citizens of Tanzania can go through the same financial hurdles as Moldavians — their cultural backgrounds are too different in order to provide the research with common themes and notions that may emerge within interviews. In the same way, citizens of Western countries that are close to the mentioned region geographically — like Austria, Germany, or Hungary — could not meet the criteria for this research. The mentioned states are advanced economically and have a status of the established long-existing democracies. Therefore, students that came from these
countries most likely do not share similar socio-cultural experiences with their Eastern-
and Central European counterparts.

Residing in the U.S. for less than eight contiguous months was one more
exclusionary criterion, since this is a too brief period to evaluate one’s foreign experience
by him/herself, as well as get immersed into American culture. Within less than a year a
newcomer is usually still going through the “culture shock” or “honey-moon period”,
which can significantly distort his/her idea about the U.S.

The selected participants needed to be ready to dedicate from one hour to seventy-
five minutes of their time for the interview. They also were expected to share their
opinions with the researcher on the following topics: Their adjustment to the life in the
U.S., their assimilation in American culture or separation from this culture. In addition,
they were asked to talk about their insights how the life in the U.S. influences/d their
personalities. Participants’ unwillingness to talk on any of the mentioned themes or
answer certain questions did not disqualify them, however, for this study.

The students of the universities located in Midwest and East and West Coasts
were recruited. Five are PhD candidates; seven are graduate Master’s level students. The
age range of the respondents is between twenty-four and thirty-five years old. Their
countries of citizenship are those of the former Soviet Union, as well as those in Central
European region. Participants’ duration of stay in the U.S. varies from ten months to five
years. Four students have spouses who are American citizens, others are either single or
in committed relationships with people from their countries. Three students arrived to the
U.S. to stay with their parents who have employment here, other six are the recipients of
American scholarships for higher education (Fulbright, Open Society Institute), and the
remaining three applied for studies in the U.S. on their own. Nine participants study humanities disciplines; other three are students in the sciences.

Interviews that lasted from sixty to seventy minutes were audio taped between October-December 2011. Only participants' voices were recorded. After all twelve interviews were collected, they were transcribed. All the records are stored in the safe location; they will be destroyed after three years.

After arranging the time and location for the meeting, each participant was interviewed individually. The location for the interview was negotiated with participants; in two cases interviews were conducted at the participants' places of living, in four cases interviewing was held at the WMU Waldo library in a quiet area. I communicated with six respondents, who reside in the East and West Coasts' universities, via Skype, an online communication medium. I met in person with the rest of participants, whose institutions of higher education are in Midwest.

I read the consent form (appendix F) out loud to the participant and answered any questions before the interview began. Participants were informed that changing their names in the transcriptions and individual data in the text of the actual research results would protect their identity. In particular, names of all the respondents, their ages, and countries of origin were changed. One of the participants preferred that only part of the world from which she came would be disclosed as the former part of the Soviet Union. In the same way, their major areas of study, as well as degree and department were not be identified or mentioned in a more general way such as like “social science” or “the arts.” The degree of disclosing personal data was negotiated individually with each of the participants of this study.
Participants were asked to sign a consent form indicating that they understood the procedures, the research project and confidentiality agreement. The conversations were tape-recorded; the field-notes were taken immediately after the interview. After the interview took place, participants were thanked and provided with handouts containing the list of web-links to the scholarships for students in the U.S., as well as contacts of students’ advocacy organizations at WMU (appendix D). When a student from a different university was recruited, I have made a valid attempt to provide relevant information to that student about his/her home university. This was done in exchange of their time devoted to the interview.

To ensure confidentiality of data and verify the coding procedure, a university professor was first trained in coding interviews and then asked to read the coded texts of the participants’ interviews. He found that a few additional precautions needed to be done in order to protect subjects’ privacy of. In particular, he suggested to change the names of cities visited by the participants within their studies and names and other personal data of people with whom respondents interacted and reported that in their interviews. The necessary measures were undertaken.
CHAPTER VII
CODING AND DATA ANALYSIS

In the framework of the qualitative method, the data analysis organizes the interview “to provide a description of the norms and values that underlie cultural behavior” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.229). Coding is an indispensable part of the qualitative method, since it helps to recognize similar themes and understand the relationship between these themes (Strauss, 1987; Lindlof, 1995). It also promotes deep understanding the interviews, since coding requires two stages of thinking about data: In the first, the researcher compares the material within categories, while in the second s/he compares across categories (Strauss, 1987; Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

In this study, the mechanism of coding was done in the following way: Once coding categories were established, I made a copy of the text and then “mark[ed] each word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, or example that belongs in each coding category” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.241). Such a mechanism helped to identify all the details of the co-researchers’ narratives and coming up with broader understanding of data that the interviews contain.

The coding process began with rereading the transcribed interviews in order to identify potential themes and concepts that both the researcher and co-researcher tried to explore within the interview (Lindlof, 1995; Orbe, 1996). The interviews were read thrice. Following the second reading, data were coded for emergent main themes and establishing comprehensible connection between them. After the coding was done, I put the pseudo-name of each participant in a table with the emergent themes. Subsequent to
the third reading, I marked off the most persistent themes that came out within each interview.

As a result, the sub-themes, which surfaced within main themes and provided explanation to them, were distinguished. While doing so, I pursued several goals: 1) to establish the set of themes that are common to all the respondents, and thus can give me an idea of what factors contribute to international students' identity formation; 2) to see what themes are related to each other, and which of them come out as unique for individual respondent; 3) to make it feasible for me to see how each participant arrived to his/her current feeling of identity.

To be able to concentrate solely on familiarizing myself with the content of each interview, I did not make any notations on the first review of transcripts. This helped me to establish the starting point for coding categories. After the second reading of interviews, I marked off the ideas and themes each time they occurred in the text of conversation. For instance, after the second reading, themes like “perception of the U.S.” or “appreciation of American education” emerged. While doing this, I expected to discover “other themes, concepts, and ideas and designate new coding categories to include them” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.228). In this way, I set up several main coding categories. Then, after the third reading I came up with additional categories, since it usually appears that the significant information from the data does not fit the selected groupings. This happens because the first coding is based on clear statements that are repeated during the interview, while the second coding requires returning back to already coded data, capturing new themes that emerge from the existing ones, as well as eliminating some of the previously noticed themes that can be met once or twice in all the
interviews (Lindlof, 1995). This strategy enabled making a comparison of what interviewees told me, as well as how they understood the concepts that emerged within conversations (Strauss, 1987; Orbe, 1996).

The techniques of recognizing concepts, suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995), were utilized for the data analysis in this study. In particular, it was important to look on the words and phrases that were often repeated by the interviewee, since they indicated the significant idea for the participant.

Vividness of the vocabulary was also helpful in noticing concepts. How colorful the language of the co-researcher is, may tell a lot about his/her lived experience (Strauss, 1987; Spradley, 1979). Therefore, adjectives, metaphors, or hyperbolas can be related to what the co-researcher considers noteworthy in describing his/her world and what can prompt the concept to the researcher. For instance, one of the participants used the phrase “extremely pissed off” to describe her attitude toward rude British men she and her American friend confronted while traveling in Europe. This pointed out “respect to human dignity” as one of the sub-themes within a theme “American values” for this study.

Once I established a connection between concepts and themes, I reexamined the interviews in order to find more evidence or disconfirm that the relationships are supported by the data (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

The remaining portions of the thesis include presentation of the interview findings, analysis and discussion, within the context of the theoretical foundations that I presented in previous chapters.
CHAPTER VIII

RESULTS

Salient themes across the students’ interviews

Among the purposes of this study was to identify international students’ motivations and objectives to study in the U.S., the role that cross-cultural communication issues play in these motivations and objectives, and to learn how international student identity is shaped upon cultural immersion. The analysis is organized based on themes: 1) regularities of the themes across participants are cited and 2) the reported themes appearing to be the most significant to the students interviewed for this study. These themes served as umbrellas for sub-themes. As well as themes themselves, the sub-themes are also presented descending order. The themes are listed in the order that is salient to the participants. Similar or common sub-topics occur within different themes. I arrived at this organizational decision by observing the frequency of emerging of themes in the respondents’ interviews.

The themes are listed in the order that is salient to the participants. I found the following themes and sub-themes:

Table 1. Interview Themes and Sub-themes (Explanations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appreciation of American education</th>
<th>Honest rules of competition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy entry to the U.S. for foreign students</td>
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| Feeling resentment                              | GRE test is biased towards international students  
|                                           | Neglectful or incompetent officers of the formal bodies  
|                                           | Compulsory medical screening                         |
| Becoming global citizen                     | Perceived feeling of cross-cultural identity  
|                                           | Making close friends with both American and international students  
|                                           | Appreciating cultural diversity                      
|                                           | Confidence about finding a job in the U.S. and globally |
| Perception of the U.S.                      | Prosperous                                            
|                                           | Hi-tech country                                       
|                                           | The U.S. varies from state to state                   
|                                           | Large                                                 
|                                           | Urban                                                 
|                                           | Society of shallow culture                            
|                                           | Democracy                                              
|                                           | Selfish society                                       
|                                           | Conservative in terms of religion                     
|                                           | Many obese people                                     |
| Limited opportunities                       | Impossibility of employment after graduation because of visa requirements and/or non-American citizenship |
| Unexpected to see in U.S.                  | Rural areas                                            
|                                           | Unsafe, high criminal records of the neighborhood and/or campus |
|                                           | Lot of poor people                                    
|                                           | Racially and ethnically colored jokes                  |
| Cultural shock                              | Loneliness                                             |
| Crystallization of native identity          | Perceived native identity                              
|                                           | Making friends among native and/or international students from the same with participant’s region |
|                                           | Not celebrating American holidays, only native ones    
|                                           | Feeling uncomfortable in the U.S.                      
|                                           | Not willing to stay in the U.S. for a longer time      |
| Lack of democracy in the U.S.               | Not the same as in E.U. concept of human rights        |
| Different values with a native culture      | Disapproval for young mothers at school                |
In the descending order, the themes that were found to be the most salient for international students are: 1) appreciation of American education, 2) American values, 3) development of character while staying in the U.S., 4) “I do not fit in here” (being different), 5) “how I see Americans”, 6) in-between identity (departing from native, but arriving neither to “Americanized”, nor to “global citizen”), 7) feeling Americanized, 8) feeling of resentment, 9) becoming a global citizen, 10) perception of the U.S., 11) limited opportunities, 12) cultural shock, 13) unexpected to see in the U.S., 14) crystallization of native identity, 15) double standards, 16) different values with a native culture.

Within the theme appreciation of American education there are nine sub-themes. One group of narratives reflects students’ perceptions of American academe as friendly for learners, including those from abroad (honest rules of competition, helpful, cooperative professors, easy entry to the U.S.). The theme also covers students’ expectations from the time spent in the U.S. (feeling accomplished, becoming competitive in the world job-market); enjoyment of possibilities that universities provide (campuses are well equipped for studying, many opportunities for students’ activism), as well as certain unique aspects of studying in the U.S. (some disciplines can be studied best or only in the U.S. (Political Science, Native Americans Studies)).

The sub-theme of helpful, cooperative professors is similar to the sub-theme respect for human dignity (respectful officers/professors) from the different category of American values. In turn, themes of appreciation of American education and American values also look to be related. For instance, appreciation of American education entails students’ understanding of one of the guiding principles of schooling in the U.S., which is
honest competition. This sub-theme sounds in unison with the sub-topic equal opportunities from the theme American values. However, both themes describe different attitudes of respondents. While American values are associated with students’ perceptions of the societal morals in the U.S. (respect for human dignity, equal opportunities, hard work means success, professionalism, democracy), appreciation of American education embraces attitudes towards education.

The next three themes – development of character while staying in the U.S., “I do not fit in here” (being different) and “how I see Americans” – also appeared to be significant in the students’ narratives. Each of the themes occurred in most of participants, even though on the slightly lesser scale than the first two topics. On the first glance, the theme development of character while staying in the U.S. has a single relationship with appreciation of American education; the former is connected with the latter by means of sub-themes of feeling accomplished and feeling confident respectively. However, the relationship between two themes can be perceived as much stronger in terms of logical connection: development of character happened as the result of educational experience in the U.S., as well as appreciating this experience.

The next group of themes focuses on participants’ perceptions of themselves as being different from Americans and how international students view Americans. In-between identity (departing from native, but arriving neither to “Americanized”, nor to “global citizen”) is one more theme that appears among those important for international students, as well as feeling Americanized. Both topics are interrelated and it may seem that there is no clear distinction between them. Nevertheless, in-between identity and feeling Americanized entail vividly different sub-themes. This led to two descriptions
that indicate how students explain their understanding of changes in themselves after studying in the U.S. Both themes occur in the larger half of participants’ stories. It is noteworthy that the other two themes, which also describe the perceived identity-changes – becoming a global citizen and crystallization of native identity –, were reported and discussed by participants as well, yet appeared to be considerably less important than the previously listed topics. Two or three participants or a single subject mentioned the last eight themes in the table. Still, one of these themes, different values with a native culture, even though appearing in a single participant, corresponds to one of the most salient themes “I do not fit in here” (feeling different). The category different values with a native culture was reported by a student, who became a mother for the second time during her studies in the U.S. While in her native country motherhood is praised, as well as supported by the state-run programs. She was surprised that some of her peers pronounced their disapproval while learning about her pregnancy. According to the respondent, her American classmates perceived her as “rather anti-feminist.”

The theme feeling resentment (with perceived bias in academic screenings and administrative procedures) can be viewed as a bridge between noticeably important themes and those of lesser salience. Feeling resentment appeared in 51% of respondents. It can be assumed that feeling resentment might fall under the umbrella of “I don’t fit in here”, but respondents used clearly different wording to express their attitudes towards the mentioned screenings and procedures. According to the narrative theory, the respondents’ language is an important indicator of how they feel about their identities (Louhart and Alyett, 2004; Brown and Rhodes, 2005). In particular, participants reported being “frustrated”, “discriminated”, “nervous”, and “stressed” with some requirements
they had to meet before and after coming to the U.S., thus telling that they felt treated differently, unfairly, or even harmed because of their status of international students. Students' stories about screenings and procedures resulted from their different experiences, not only those related to communications with the formal U.S. bodies. This is noteworthy for this research, which employs narrative investigation as "eliciting stories when trying to understand the point of view and personal experience of one's informants (Mattingly and Lawlor, 2000, p.4). Thus, students' responses made it possible to identify myself as the researcher with experiences of my interviewees and better understand my own identity. These narratives also enabled important themes to surface, as well as distinguishing different factors that contribute to the ways international students understand their identities.

In the next sections, I will report on emergent themes and present the data in a more descriptive manner. Often times the thesis weaves reflection and interpretation along with the report of findings. The discussion and analysis will be provided in chapter eight.

**Appreciation of American education**

Appreciation of American education is the dominant theme found in the interviews. All the respondents repeatedly brought this topic in interview often communicating their answers with the related concepts. The theme emerged with all interviewees during discussion of respondents' academic life and was thus coded as an educational theme. Yet the same topic also surfaced when participants elaborated on their motivations to come to study in the U.S., expectations from their American experiences,
as well as how they feel about developments of their characters. The respondents also talked about the U.S. as being supportive for learners from abroad while answering other questions throughout the interview.

The extensive presence of appreciation of American education across interviews also results from the respondents’ experiences prior to their coming to the U.S. In other words, they already had some awareness about the advantages of American education through media and/or contacts with American students and professors, who came to their native countries. The respondents also got familiarized with standards of American higher education while going through initial procedures of entering graduate Master’s or PhD programs in the U.S. while still in their own countries. The reflections on these procedures, as well as further experiences while in the U.S., were covered in the sub-theme of honest competition as the most prominent for all the participants. It is also important that this sub-theme together with the next one of helpful, cooperative professors is described through contrasting experiences in home countries and in the U.S., even though I never asked my interviewees to provide any comparisons. Below are responses from different participants for several different questions, none of which asked about fair competition or making comparisons.

Borislav’s story is about his previous travel to the U.S. for a brief period influenced his decision to study in the U.S.:

I am from the small town in Slovakia and, honestly, I never believed that one could come to the U.S. and study. But again, I didn’t believe that I can get to the U.S. just for my knowledge and skills, without any connections. I thought that one needs to know somebody and somewhere, you know, to get here. And now, when I came here, I met a lot of people, but most of them come from big cities, like Liubliana, Bratislava, also from other countries, but still from big cities.
Borislav is a good example of **honest competition**, since before he believed that in order to get to American university one has to be from some urban center, as well as have links with somebody powerful. Yet being from the small town and without connections, he got to PhD studies in the U.S., because he was knowledgeable enough to pass the necessary entrance examinations and get admitted to the program.

Christina said in her interview in a response to the question how she defined her communication with American peers in class:

> One thing that is probably better in the United States than in my native country, is honesty, academic honesty. Here nobody never ever cheats or copies anything. I don’t know what was it, but I had... questions, you know, can I look at somebody’s answer sheet. And the answer was “Oh, my God! Never!” But in my native country it’s like “Hey, ok!” Which is not a good thing, and this is something that I’ve learned in the States, that you’ve got to respect your own work.

Even though Christina never pronounces a word “competition”, her example puts it clearly: she likes that students’ knowledge are evaluated based only on their own work and, therefore, being respectful in your work (ownership of it) you are being competitive and honest.

Lidia, a Fulbright student, was asked when she started thinking about studies in the U.S. She replied:

> I could not afford to study in the U.S. on my own; I belong to working class. I’ve heard about Fulbright program when I was a first year student in Moldova. A famous Moldavian writer received Fulbright grant, and I thought “Well, forget it, you know.” And then we got this professor, Fulbright professor, who came to my city. He started talking about Fulbright as a real opportunity... Then a Fulbright officer was having a presentation, and again she was telling that it was very real. So, I just tried.

Lidia explained that initially she believed that only famous people can be rewarded to study in the U.S., and this was impossible for those not prominent.

Nevertheless, the representatives of Fulbright convinced Lidia that this is “a real
opportunity” for people like her. Lidia’s answer also demonstrated that there was a fair competition between applicants for Fulbright grant, no matter of their background and distinction.

All the participants described a smooth procedure of entry to the U.S. once they declared their intention to the American embassies in their countries that they were going to study in the U.S. One of the respondents offered a different example of her travel to the U.S. when she applied for a tourist visa illustrating that students might have priority in the visa process for the U.S. travel:

Well, I had to stay in the line for like... It took six hours, and it was December, and I spend like three hours outside... And it was very depressing feeling... But second time, when I came as a Fulbrighter, everything was very nice, very fast.

Ten out of twelve respondents used examples of their former tutors’ negative attitudes towards students in their native universities to highlight how much the relationship student-professor is different in the U.S. The sub-theme of helpful, cooperative professors was first coded as an outcome of students’ answers to the question of “How would you define your communication with American professors?”. Nevertheless, this sub-theme was also coming into view in responses to other questions, even those not related to interactions with teachers.

Agnieszka said:

Our teachers in Poland try to show how great they are and how miserable you are, a student, or younger teacher if you are studying out. But in the U.S., I felt the equal attitude. So, they respect you as a person, they respect your integrity, they treat you as a person is to be treated.

This comment was in a response to a question about her idea of American education before she came to the U.S. Even though the concept of education obviously entails communication with professors, Agnieszka was not asked specifically about how she
interacts with teachers. Yet her next answer also framed the concept of the positive image of American professors:

He [the mentor] would be an absolutely different professor from what do you expect from professors in Poland. Not formal, not thinking too much about himself, but actually relaxed in a positive meaning, talking jokes but professional. And my teacher of Native language, I think, he was... was spiritually rich, and professionally rich... And all of them have sense of humor.

Agnieska not only emphasizes the gap between students and professors in her native country but also draws attention to professional level of her tutors, as well as their personal traits.

The following sub-themes of campuses are well equipped for studying and many opportunities for student activism were mentioned across all the participants. These sub-categories mainly result from the question about students’ expectations from American education, but the researcher has also found that the sub-theme campuses are well equipped for studying is related to another sub-category of hi-tech country from the less important theme of the perception of the U.S.

There also is the relationship between sub-themes of feeling accomplished and becoming competitive in the world job-market from appreciation of American education and the theme of development of character. This category includes becoming mature while staying in the U.S. and feeling confident. The mentioned sub-themes relate to respondents’ personal evaluations after obtaining education and degrees at American universities, at the same time as the sub-theme of becoming competitive in the world job-market describes confidence of the future professional. While reflecting on the perceived changes how the subjects described their selves, nine respondents used language that
connected the concepts of personal development and education. For instance, Borislav
described how he sees himself in terms of his experience as an international student:

When it comes to professional experience, I am very glad that I am here. I got a
perfect opportunity of doing what I like to do. I have all the material and
informational resources available. And when it comes to professional and
spiritual... Here I got a better understanding that a lot of things in my life indeed
depend on me... I never was that motivated person as I have become within last
four or five years [in the U.S].

Borislav definitely links his educational experience with changes in himself uniting
“professional” and “spiritual” in one sentence. His example illustrates that the theme of
education is related to how students see themselves both as learners and individualities.

The final sub-theme of some disciplines can be studied best or only in the U.S.
was reported by eleven participants. The respondents stress not only the high quality of
American higher education but also the uniqueness of knowledge and skills gained
through their studies.

Anastasia said about her internship with NATO when asked about her motivation
to seek education from the university in the U.S.:

I had an opportunity to participate in the crisis simulation with NATO joined staff,
with real military men, and lot of NGOs’ members representing crisis somewhere,
it was very exciting. And another simulation was NATO Council on crisis
decisions, decision-making simulation. It was amazing.

The interviews also indicated that students perceive American education as both
enriching their knowledge and stimulating their personalities development. Their
narratives describe positive perceptions of American education through intra- and inter-
personal communication (Sfard and Prusak, 2005), since in order to highlight a contrast
between the higher education in the U.S. and their native countries the participants also
recalled stories about their studies at home. This difference entails diverse core values
that can be viewed as the guiding principles for the U.S. and students' native educations. For instance, while comparing professors’ attitudes towards students in the U.S. and at home, all the respondents emphasized feeling respected by their American tutors that was not always the case during communication with their native professors. Together with other variables, this perceived difference brought out the second important theme for this study, which is American values.

American values

As illustrated in the previous section, the analysis established ways that education is related to the sense of identity or personhood. The research also indicates that the themes are interrelated. American values communicate with both appreciation of American education and development of character while staying in the U.S. through different aspects of American values. The theme itself was coded as emergent from answers to the question about students’ idea about the U.S. before they came here. Through answering different questions, including those not pertaining the procedures of entry to the U.S. and education, all respondents reported respect for human dignity as the most persistent sub-theme.

When asked how she viewed American people, Anastasia responded in her interview:

There is no gap between students and professors, which I really like. And it’s more like friendly relationship..., a lot of points of view on one topic, and you are free to express your opinion, and, actually, everybody will... respect your opinion.

Respondents underline friendly and respectful attitude while recounting experiences about their interactions with professors and officers of the formal bodies.
However, the sub-theme of respect for human dignity surfaced not only in these stories.

While telling about their interactions with professors and officers of the formal bodies most of the respondents underline friendly and respectful attitude of these people. However, the sub-theme of respect for human dignity surfaced not only in these stories.

In her narrative, Christina used an example of the TV-show in her native country when asked how often she watches American TV:

There’s this lady, who’s giving health advices. She had a visitor on her show, she said her story. And this lady says “I could be a dumb idiot like you, but I know better, and you should listen.” And the girl..., the visitor, she’s like “Yes, you are right.” Instead of like, you know… Here it is impossible to say like this.

Christina describes the rudeness of the native anchorwoman meaning the contrast between the way the visitor on the show is treated and how she might be treated if the show alike was produced by American TV.

Natalia said in her interview when asked to elaborate on her previous statement “here people can do more with less”:

I’ve seen a video online – a guy was born, he is a preacher now, and it just really strikes me, you know, he was born without hands, without arms. He is brilliant mentally; no hands and no legs, just a body. And he does have one foot just attached to his body – can you imagine that? And so he, this person, got his MBA… I think, this is the great video for the students to come for kind of put things in prospective and compare things.

Even though Natalia tells about this man in the seemingly unconnected context that the video was “really amazing”, across her interview she often relates to her experiences in her home country. Natalia points out on differences with the U.S and later mentions that if that man was born in her native country he, most probably, would stay home for his whole life. In her country people with impairments are excluded from almost all spheres
of life. Thus far, Natalia’s story exemplifies and connects two sub-themes of respect to human dignity and equal opportunities.

Mariush connected two sub-themes as well when asked to what degree he thinks he has equal chances with American students to get employed after graduation:

I think, it will be fairly equal, and I think it will be any problem with me getting the opportunities that American students have. I think, this is mainly attributed to the fact that right now I don’t feel, or never felt before any discrimination. And I don’t think there will be a case in future.

For Mariush the absence of discrimination means both respecting him as a man, as well as providing him the same opportunities as his American counterparts have.

The sub-theme of equal opportunities is interrelated with hard work means success, ten participants listed this sub-category when answering what their American experience meant to them. Nine respondents also reported this sub-theme in relation to their chances of employment in the U.S., as well as answering what they would do if had an opportunity to remain in the U.S. permanently.

Natalia said in her interview responding to the question about her perception of the U.S. before coming here:

I knew that people have difficulties here and money does not grow on trees. But I still believe in that – if you work hard, of course, you will succeed.

Natalia’s perceived confidence can be explained by her personal successful experience: she applied to the PhD studies at the U.S. university on her own, was accepted, and got a position of the graduate assistant at her school soon after she was enrolled. While at school, Natalia met her American spouse. Thus, her believe in “American dream” – “if you work hard, of course, you will succeed” is rooted in positive experiences while in the U.S. (Jones, 2003; Lambert, 1956; McKay, 2009).
According to the respondents, respect to human dignity is connected with equal opportunities and gaining success in life if one works hard, which are the core values of American society. The sub-theme of equal opportunities also connects American values with appreciation of American education through the aspect of honest competition.

From the interviews, the theme American values appeared as the result of students’ personal reflections transformed into public issues (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003). For instance, when Natalia tells about the video that impressed her, it can be inferred that she projects her perception on the broader themes (respect to human dignity and equal opportunities). Similar to Christina, Natalia brings a new character into her story, crafting a narrative performance that lets her express her attitude (appreciation of American values) by describing experiences of others (Mattingly and Lawlor, 2000; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003).

It is worth mentioning that all the participants represent Caucasian race, which can be viewed as one of the factors of why their reflections on American values correspond with the views of privileged classes in the U.S. (while middle or upper classes). The respondents’ race does not bring them challenges in the U.S.; unlike it happens, for instance, in case of American black students or international students from African and Middle Eastern countries. In addition, the respondents perceive their experiences in the U.S. as “better” if compared to the similar ones in their native countries. This leads to the presence of element of privilege in their narratives. Finally, the international students, who came to the U.S. as the recipients of educational scholarships may feel “obliged” to express positive vision of American values as those shared by the advantaged classes.
Contrary to the American values, the theme development of character while staying in the U.S. is not focused on experiences of other characters. This category describes students’ perceptions of their new selves after they spend some time in the U.S.

**Development of character while staying in the U.S.**

Since I have already described above the relationship between the sub-categories feeling accomplished and feeling confident and the theme appreciation of American education, in this section I will explain the remaining three sub-themes of the development of personality while staying in the U.S. These are becoming better person, expanding cultural horizons, and gaining cross-cultural skills (tolerance, appreciation of other cultures). The mentioned sub-themes resulted from students’ answers to questions about what their American experiences mean to them and how they find American food.

Alina was asked to evaluate her experience as an international student. She responded saying:

Since I met my international friends, I know much more about other countries, I am more interested in world news now, because it means to me more now. When I hear news from Italy, it’s more personal to me now, because I have Italian friends. I also, I think, became more adaptable. I am not so scared if I’ll have to be in a new environment, where I don’t know anybody... But what is the most [important] thing... I think... I became more tolerant, more flexible.

Alina is a good example of expanding cultural horizons and becoming better person. She never mentions any of these phrases, yet she makes it evident that American studies increased her area of interests and developed some of her personal traits. It is important that Alina mentions her awareness about these changes in herself in the end of her second year of studies. She admits that was different in the beginning:

At first I was kind of hostile to the U.S., I didn’t like the U.S., and then I was
more open... And even in terms of food..., in the beginning I didn’t like it and just cooked it Russian all the time, and then, by the end of the first year I enjoyed [American food]... Even in grocery store I enjoyed buying stuff that we didn’t have in Russia, broccoli or something like that they eat more in the U.S.

In the similar way, Oksana admits some transformations that she noticed in herself after a year at American university:

Well, one year later it felt a little bit better. I mean, after one year of staying here. I think it is important that I am trying to understand another culture and I am trying to adjust myself to this. I think, I am trying to open new people to me, and I hope this will help me to understand them.

In the remaining part of her interview, Oksana acknowledges that she “is not very sociable” and that she does not feel comfortable in the U.S. Within her academic program Oksana did not make any American friends, she maintains social contacts with students from her geographical region. She also said that she does not “love this country” and reported having many negative communication experiences in the U.S.

Oksana’s case exemplifies previous findings that individuals, who lack social skills and are generally not satisfied with their lives also find it difficult to adjust to the new culture (Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Martin and Nakayama, 1997; Kim, 2001; Bennett and Bennett, 2004). Nevertheless, Oksana also reported making some progress in understanding the U.S. culture “after one year” in the U.S., confirming other findings that during adjustment to the American environment, international students change their attitudes towards the host environment (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Gudykunst, 1977; Martin et al., 1994; Oetzel, 1998).

This respondent also adds that the time she spent in the U.S. made her more open, which corresponds with the study The Adjustment of Sojourners (Furnham, 1987).
Furnham highlights personal development as one of the outcomes of sojourners’ studying abroad.

From the narratives, all participants feel that their educational experience in the U.S. contributed to the development of their characters and made them interested not only in American but also other cultures as well. However, the number of other aspects of the U.S. host environment made students realize the difference between their native and American culture. This feeling of difference is described by the next theme “I do not fit in here” (being different).

“I do not fit in here” (being different)

The theme resulted for the most part from respondents’ descriptions of their first months in the U.S. (nine participants). Seven respondents reported the sub-topics of this theme while reflecting on their second, as well as the following years of staying in the U.S. These sub-topics are making friends with other international students rather than with Americans, not feeling that American holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving) are holidays and not driving (a car) and feeling deprived of certain opportunities this brings. The name of the theme is a quote from Lidia’s interview, who described her memories of the first semester in the U.S. with a phrase “In the beginning I felt like I do not fit in here.”

The stories students told responding to the questions about their first impression about the U.S., their attitudes towards American holidays, making new friends in the U.S., their communications with American peers and other international students, as well
as their most valued acquaintances in the U.S provided the material for coding the theme “I do not fit in here”.

All twelve respondents said that they made their first friends in the U.S. among the international students from their own or from different parts of the world, but not among the U.S. students. This is yet one more validation of the co-culture theory (Orbe, 1998), as well as it corresponds with the outcomes of studies by Mori (2000), Leki (2001), and Laguerre (2006). These scholars argue that sojourners are more likely to socialize within their own ethnic or national group within the beginning of their studies in the U.S. Issues like feeling of loneliness and lack of support from American students are among those contributing to this kind of socializing. Anastasia said in her interview:

We [Russian students] found that we have something in common with other international students. Because we had homesickness, they had homesickness as well. We were trying to adjust to this culture, they were trying too. Students from Europe, from Eastern Europe, from Middle East, and from Brazil as well, we were friends with, and we found common language very easily. And, probably, we communicated with each other more than with Americans. We had... a lot more to share with them... than [with] American students. We didn’t watch that type of shows they did... Sometimes they were laughing at something, and you don’t even understand what they are laughing at. And they didn’t seem to explain you things, the joke or something like that.

Anastasia demonstrated that these were common issues that made her seek communication with other international students rather than with Americans, as well as the absence of familiar topics with the U.S. students. She did not say anything about dissimilarity between herself and American peers, yet the concept of difference emerges from her answer.

In the similar way, Lidia described why first she could not make friends with Americans:
I did not know how to make friends and also I stopped understanding what people really want when they speak... So I was, um, I found that I could not really make close friends, because it was just people don't communicate the way I communicate.

The attitude towards American holidays appeared to be one more element of feeling different from Americans. Christina, who stays in the U.S. with her parents for about five years already, said:

Even though we celebrated Thanksgivings here, honestly, I still don't know what it is about..., pilgrims and stuff... Yeah, we celebrate it, but I don't really believe in it. But still make a turkey, and still eat the turkey.

Though Christina says that she celebrates the Thanksgiving, she still does not relate to it as a holiday. Later in the interview she declares that she does not feel belonging to American culture, since it is not native for her.

For Borislaw, American holidays are also one of the aspects that he feels different from his American friends. However, in his interview he acknowledged that he made a few American friends by the end of the second year of his studies:

I can come, for instance, attend the Halloween party, but I don't wear costume. For me it is just... I want to be among people, I want to go and communicate with them, but I don't celebrate how Americans do. Traditionally, I have yearned to our Slovak traditional holidays.

Borislaw emphasized that he wanted to communicate with Americans, yet still did not feel the spirit of Halloween, unlike he feels towards his native holidays.

Not driving (a car) and feeling deprived of certain opportunities this brings also is a significant sub-theme reported by ten participants. Respondents used words of "deprived", "not enjoying [long walking] at all", "inconvenient", "overwhelmed", "upset", and "shocking" to describe how they felt after arriving to their schools and
discovering that they cannot reach many places without a car. This contributed to their perception of themselves as being different.

Natalia responded in her interview while responding about her first impression from the U.S.:

Here everybody drives, and I didn’t have a car. It was a big shock for me, it was really, really stressful, that I could not drive. So, I could not get anywhere. Especially, when you have to carry all your books, and your laptop, and you don’t know where the traffic goes, whereas in Russia you have a shuttle mini-bus at every corner.

Natalia demonstrated that she was not like “everybody” in the U.S., as well as the system of public transportation in her country is unlike she saw in the U.S. Natalia’s answer can also be perceived as an indication of different living standards in the U.S. and her native country. While owning a car in the U.S. is a necessity, in Russia those representing the working class (like Natalia’s family) usually cannot afford this.

It can be understood from the answers of other participants, who reported the theme of not driving (a car) and feeling deprived of certain opportunities that this issue is common for the cities where there universities are located. Unlike it is in big centers (New York or Chicago), where the system of public transportation is well developed. This observation prompts the insight about limited financial opportunities of those respondents, who pay for their education on their own, since they cannot afford studying and accommodation in big cities. The same observation also communicates information that educational programs that provide scholarships for international students try to place the recipients of grants in less expensive universities. This insight was proved by Anastasia, who reported that initially she planned to study at “one of those brand
universities, like Georgetown or Yale”, but ended at the mid-size university in the Midwest, since the officers of her program “try to find schools for us that do not charge too much for studies.”

The data of the interviews provide understanding that students’ think about themselves as different first of all because of their limited or absent communications with Americans. One more factor that facilitates feeling different results from the dissimilarity between the life-styles in the U.S. and students’ home countries.

The next theme continues explaining students’ feeling of difference. However, this category entails participants’ perceptions of the representatives of the U.S. host culture.

“How I see Americans”

The theme “how I see Americans” describes what respondents think about America and American people, whom they also encountered through popular culture and media, as well as through their previous travels to the U.S. One of the respondents stayed in the U.S. for more than a year with her parents, when she was a teenager; two respondents previously traveled to the U.S. as tourists; and three other students visited the country in the frame-works of the short-temned educational grants. The theme “how I see Americans” was coded after I studied the responses to the interview questions about the respondents’ idea about the U.S. before coming here, their first impressions of the U.S., communication with American peers in class, perception of the American campus culture, and what would the respondents do if they had an option to remain in the U.S. permanently.
The theme involves nine sub-categories of polite and smiling, helpful, hospitable, diversity of cultures, not easy to make friends with, cold or hostile to foreigners, lacking knowledge about the rest of the world/self-centered, young people are not mature enough for their age. All of the listed sub-themes indicate that participants applied for membership categorization (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003) while explaining their perceptions of Americans. “Membership categories are resources, with which people do reasoning” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p.401) and affiliate more or less strongly connected activities with the objects of description (Hester, 1997; Baker, 2004). “How people describe things and how they reason about them are pragmatic selections from a range of possibilities” (Baker, 2004, p.164) are also the means of producing identities. Therefore, how the international students see Americans also provides an insight about the participants’ selves.

The category how I see Americans may seem to cover the same information that considerably less important theme does, which is the idea of the U.S. However, there is a difference between two themes, which made it possible to code them as two separate categories. The idea of the U.S. is mainly associated with the students’ answers about how they viewed the U.S. before coming here, including stereotypes and images of the U.S. created by media. The theme how I see Americans resulted from students’ descriptions of their lived experiences in America. Besides, when respondents discussed their idea of the U.S. before they saw it, a fewer sub-topics emerged than in cases when participants described their perception of American culture after they were exposed to it.

From the data of the interview, I found that how I see Americans also entails the concept of difference, which is central for “I do not fit in here”. Yet in case of the how I
see Americans the concept of difference is not so explicit. This concept also expresses some additional aspects, which are not covered in “I do not fit in here”.

All the respondents highlight that American way of being polite is not only verbal, but non-verbal as well (smiling). Eight out of twelve students reported that such a way of communication is something that is not often seen in their native cultures.

Natalia’s narrative about her first impression of the U.S. highlights both verbal and non-verbal politeness of Americans:

I liked the people, I liked the attitude, I liked people being opened and talking to me, and, you know, opening doors to me and smiling. Which is really different from Eastern Europe where people are more aggressive, you know, in daily situations, and they may be rude to you in the traffic...

Natalia uses the word “different” to point out dissimilarity between cultures in Eastern Europe and the U.S. It also can be inferred from her answer that she feels to be closer to American culture rather than to her native: “I liked the attitude [in the U.S.]”

The sub-theme helpful emerged from respondents’ descriptions of their interactions with professors and officers at the formal bodies. Ten participants reported mainly positive communications with professors and officers.

The sub-category hospitable was reported by nine participants; it refers to their experiences of celebrating holidays with Americans. It is noteworthy that in all cases participants were first invited not by their friends, but by those with whom they made close friendships later; by the classmates with whom they had good relationships, yet did not become close friends; or by those with whom they had just formal relationships.

Agnieszka responded in her interview:

I think the interesting experience was the celebration of Thanksgiving with Native American people. And the family of the teacher, native lawyer, he is a Native lawyer and the teacher of law. So, he invited me for Thanksgiving,
because he said like, "Oh, you know, you are an international student, and that's... sad to be lonely on Thanksgiving."

When asked about their first impressions about the U.S. and how they find American food, the majority of respondents reported the sub-theme of diversity of cultures. Diversity also pertained the domain of higher education. For instance, Mikhay said in his interview:

This university is famous for international staff; we have professors from Europe, from Middle East, from Asia and America. So, we have different prospective.

Mikhay is an example that diversity is an important characteristic of the U.S. not only in terms of physical presence of bearers of various cultures at school but also in terms of enabling different views to be heard and shared.

The sub-themes not easy to make friends with and cold or hostile to foreigners seem to report the same meaning, nevertheless, they relate to different experiences of students. Not easy to make friends with appeared in ten respondents. Cold or hostile to foreigners was reported in six participants, yet occurred across their interviews for a few times in each conversation. While the sub-theme not easy to make friends with is affiliated mainly with general impression produced by Americans before and after the students' coming to the U.S., the sub-category cold or hostile to foreigners describes cases of interactions with American peers. For example, Alina said in her interview:

My idea is that Americans are very friendly and helpful, and very polite, but not easy to become very close with.

Oksana responded when asked about her communication with American peers:

The main shock I had when I was entering classroom... I was taught to say "Hello!" But then nobody responded to my "hello." And I was very embarrassed and uncomfortable. And the interesting thing [is] that along these studies nothing
Christina recalled the period of time when she attended the high school in the U.S.:

They [peers] did not expect me to know English, which I did, and they were speaking mean things about me in front of me thinking that I don’t understand. It was like “Dude, she’s in front of you!”, and another girl said “No, she does not understand.”

The instances of Alina, Oksana, and Christina describe different grades of the perceived distance while communicating with American students. Nevertheless, these examples also give an insight that international students are thought as different by their American counterparts too.

The sub-theme lacking knowledge about the rest of the world/self-centered was first coded when there was a direct reference to how international students view Americans. Most of participants talked particularly about their peers from school. Among those, four participants also shared their impressions of American TV and reported that news were mainly local, while the rest of the world was not covered at all.

Alina said in her interview:

And sometimes that shocked me, because they [Americans] don’t know something about Western Europe or something else, but it’s also because they are so far from other parts of the world. In Ukraine we know Western Europe better than in the U.S. because we have this geo-political situation.... But to some extent I found that they... [are] a bit more ignorant in terms of international learning.

Mariush responded:

In the United States, the first thing that you notice is that you have no idea what is going on around the world. Whether it has to be news, or movies, or music, arts, sports... I feel like the TV in America is mainly focused on America, that’s not like in Poland. In Poland you will have European news, and you have American news, and you have music from all over the world on the music channels.
Alina’s and Mariush’s examples demonstrate their view of Americans as focused on their country and not knowledgeable enough about other countries. According to these students, this happens because of Americans’ lack of interest to the issues outside the U.S.

However, such a perception of Americans through the lens of the television consumption can also be explained by the simple fact that international students do not have much time to view TV, as well as they do not spend money for cable or satellite channels. Particularly during the first year of their studies, students are busy with their schooling and other issues. Besides, four mentioned participants also reported that they view television not on the regular basis, but rather from time to time.

The final sub-theme young people are not mature enough for their age surfaced when there was a direct reference to respondents’ negative perceptions of the U.S. campus culture. Seven participants reported that they disliked the relaxed dress-style of American undergraduate students who wear pajamas pants to school. Two participants also added that they found undergraduates “not serious”, “not mature enough”, and “partying to much.”

Alexandr said in his interview:

I went to the football game recently and my experience was rather negative. Because of the cheers – they were not up to higher education standards, I would say. They were rather distasteful.

Besides viewing American students negatively in this description, Alexandr’s example also gives an assumption about difference. One can insight from his answer that those attending the higher school are expected to be “up to the standards”, like Alexandr used to see students in his native country.
From the interviews, I found both positive and negative perceptions of Americans by international students. Positive perceptions occur more frequently than negative ones, yet the difference in occurrence is not large. In both cases, the respondents attribute certain activities and features to categorizing Americans. This membership categorization (Hester, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003; Baker, 2004) resulted from identifying Americans with the popular images before visiting the U.S. and those reinforced by media while already in the U.S. (polite and smiling, diversity of cultures, lacking knowledge about the rest of the world/self-centered). The same categorization was also an outcome of communication experiences in the U.S. (not easy to make friends with, helpful, hospitable).

It can be inferred that while the participants provided reasons of their perceptions of Americans, they also categorized themselves as having dissimilar identities with those representing the host environment. The next sections will explain how the subjects of this research arrived to the feelings of their new selves.

**In-between identity (departing from native, but arriving neither to “feeling Americanized”, nor to the “global citizen”)**

When asked how they feel about their identities after they studied in the U.S., seven out of twelve participants reported feeling unclear. The question itself emerged as following from “What does your American experience mean to you?” Participants were asked do they feel that they crystallized their national identities, became Americanized or became global citizens, none of the listed, other?

Seven respondents stated that they departed from their native identities and felt “Americanized” in some aspects of their personalities, yet are not sure that arrived to any
definite vision of who they became. Six out of twelve students also said that their feelings of native identities are still strong in them, though they are definitely not the same as were before the beginning of studies in the U.S. Most of the same respondents with the perceived in-between identity also reported sub-categories that belong to the next theme of feeling Americanized. In three respondents that felt Americanized the sub-themes pertaining the category of global citizen emerged as well.

In-between identity includes the sub-categories perceived feeling of hybrid identity, making rather some connections with Americans, but not friends; making good friends with international students; celebrating American holidays, but “just because they invited me”, willing to have a job in the U.S., but only temporarily. The data of the interviews show that the sub-category perceived feeling of hybrid identity also appeared from answers to the same questions, which produced information for the themes feeling Americanized, global citizen, and crystallization of native identity. However, in cases of these three themes other sub-categories were more persistent.

Christina responded when asked about her perceived identity after studying in the U.S.:

When I go there [to the native country] for a month or two, I went on my streets, to my church, to see my class-mates, but then the gray reality adds. You wanna to go back to the States, to “the land of plenty”, “the home of free”... Yeah, that’s something that I like from here, and it’s more pleasant. But still, I do feel like I am confused in my identity... I am 23 years old and have a bright future but I don’t perceive myself an American and I don’t perceive myself as native of my country.

Christina is an instance of sentimental bond with her home country, yet also acknowledging better chances for her future outside the native land. Earlier in the interview she told about her feeling of “identity crisis”, since her American and
Ukrainian parts still struggle in Christina. Based on the previous findings (Ogan, 2001; Logan et al., 2002), Christina can be seen as a bi-cultural person, who acquired both her native and American identities, yet neither of them dominates. Given that she stays in the U.S. for five years, is fluent in five languages, and travels around the world extensively every summer, there is a probability that Christina will arrive to the cross-cultural identity. According to the literature, factors like those pertinent Christina’s case can result in this type of identity (Gudykunst, 1977; Gudykunst and Kim, 1992; Ogan, 2001).

Lidia is a different example of being concerned rather about her personhood than feeling related to any particular culture. She said in her interview when asked what she would like to add to her responses:

I don’t mean to become American! I come here, I get experience here, and I became very different person – before I came here and after I lived in the U.S. But it’s just like I don’t feel a need to even identify myself with Americans...I want to self-identify myself, and this is important for me. But I don’t feel I want to be either identified with anyone else in terms of my relationship to Moldavians, Americans...

Lidia highlights that she perceives changes in herself, yet neither her native, nor American identity appear on the clearly enough scale so that she would like affiliate with any of them.

Anastasia is yet one more instance of in-between identity. She told that she felt departed from her native identity in the second year of her studies. Upon arrival to the U.S., she rented a house with people from her native country, feeling a need for the intra-ethnic communication (Leki, 2000; Mori, 2001). Yet she wanted to gain a better command in English, decided “not to create one more little Russia here” and later moved in with American roommates. By the end of her internship she was concerned about the
"reverse cultural shock" that she was sure to inevitably experience after returning back to Russia:

When nobody smiles to you, nobody trying to be polite, and it's not that good... Here, in the United States, I for sure accepted some part of American identity. I am... kind of hybrid, hybrid of American and my own identity, because I realized it's a way better... to live your life, when you are open, you are friendly.

Anastasia's example of in-between identity entails concepts of departure from Russian identity in terms of being open, friendly, and respectful as characteristics that she attributes to Americans. Anastasia acknowledges feeling distanced from her previous self and adopting some parts of American identity. As it can be inferred from Anastasia's answer, she does not feel an inner conflict between two identities, since each of them contributed to her new "hybrid identity."

The data of the interviews show that in-between identity appeared to be the most persistent across all the interviews. This was suggested by the previous literature on the development of hybrid identity (Phinney and Onwughalu, 1996; Gudykunst and Kim, 1998). Scholars explained that, depending on the number of cross-cultural contacts, sojourners are likely to feel weakening their connections with the native culture and perceive themselves partially affiliated with the host culture during first years of their stay in the host-land.

Another category, feeling Americanized, seems to be repeating the in-between identity, yet both themes differ in terms of how the respondents describe the perceived changes in their selves.
Feeling Americanized

Six respondents reported that they feel Americanized as the result of their studies in the U.S. This theme entails sub-categories of adopting behavioral and value patterns of Americans (keeping smile, being optimistic, dressing casual), making close friends with Americans, willing to have a job in the U.S. and stay longer, enjoying celebration of American holidays in the same way as native holidays.

Alexandr responded:

I am pretty much Americanized by now... I mean I dress differently now. More informally – that’s it. Um... I live an American life...right now.

Though Alexandr did not elaborate on what he meant by “pretty much Americanized” and “American life”, he still is an example of adopting American behavioral pattern, (dressing casually). Earlier in the interview he also said that among his friends of different nationalities there is one “good American friend”. These relationships perhaps explain his identity shift, whereas others who remained more independent or did not make close relationships with American students were more apt to identify more with their native country (Mori, 2000), like it happened in case of Oksana, whose example will be described below.

Mariush had a similar to Alexandr’s response::

I felt one morning that most likely if I’d be able to move to Poland for good, I would not be able to live there normally. I’d have to go through the huge change and transition but to adjust to Polish culture. It’s a home, actually, but now I am more American than Polish... not in the sense like ancestral, but cultural sense. Now it is easier to say for me that I am from Florida as opposed to say that I am from Poland.

Mariush is a clear example of arriving to feeling Americanized identity, even though he understands that “Poland is home.” Earlier in the interview he reported making “really good friends” among American students, as well as among international students. He is
confident that he would find a job in the U.S. after graduating from the university. Mariush also reported that his family “started celebrating Thanksgiving just like American families do.”

Natalia said in her interview when asked how she feels about her identity:

I would say, definitely Americanized. I don’t know about global citizenship, I wouldn’t stretch it that far. But I can tell you, I feel like... it’s [identity] more broadened, it’s much wider, it’s more open...

Natalia’s example demonstrates arrival of her identify towards feeling Americanized. Though she does not mention anything about departure from her native self, yet is quite confident when states about expanding horizons of her previous identity and embracing American identity.

From the interviews, the there is a small difference between occurrences of in-between and feeling Americanized themes, which means that respondents do not have clear definitions of their identities. This also illustrates that the narratives on both themes were shaped through different sets of the participants’ experiences and feelings towards their home-land (native countries) and host-land (the U.S.), as well as their different ways of acculturation in the U.S. (Kim, 2001; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003; Bradford, 2005).

**Feeling resentment**

The theme feeling resentment came up mainly from responses to questions about requirements and procedures that students had to go through before coming to the U.S. and what they felt about these requirements and procedures. Yet this category also surfaced from students’ reflections on their communications with American formal bodies. In slightly more than a half of respondents the sub-themes of negative feelings in
reaction to the GRE test, medical screenings, incompetent or neglectful officers, and security checks emerged.

Standardized testing and bias in university entry standards were commented on by Oksana and Alina:

If we are talking about the exams, ... the main exam I felt uncomfortable, it was GRE. I really felt very bad about this exam, because I don't think that American people know the answers to these [GRE] questions.

It [GRE] seemed to me a bit unreasonable. It seemed to me discriminating... For the native [English] speaker it's much easier to prepare for GRE... I think it does not show my analytical skills. I am saying especially for me, because I am a teacher of English and study linguistics.

Other aspects that caused negative reactions from students were cases of neglectful or incompetent approach of the officers of formal American bodies, as well as unnecessary security checks.

Dushan commented:

Sometimes when I am traveling... to Slovakia for just a couple of days for my professional commitments there [in Slovakia], and sometimes the immigration [officer] is asking so many questions... that you feel not comfortable with them... I... feel like they suspect me of doing something bad.

From the interviews, six out of twelve participants reported feeling negative towards the GRE test. Five out of twelve told about bad experiences with security officers and those representing International Offices at their universities. Two respondents said they felt discriminated while having to go through compulsory medical screenings.
Becoming a global citizen and crystallization of the native identity

Even though becoming a global citizen and crystallization of native identity appeared to be significantly minor themes across the interviews, they remain important to students' identity, because they are extreme ends of identity change. While becoming a global citizen can be understood as the result of the successful cross-cultural transition, crystallization of native identity can be viewed as an absence of perceived significant changes in one's cultural identity (Ying and Liese, 1994).

Four out of twelve respondents reported they feel Americanized, yet changes in their identities mean embracing other cultures as well. They also made it apparent within their interviews that they feel positive about these changes. These students might exemplify the momentum are toward global citizen, seen as "a demonstrated ability to act with a global mindset based on an application of values, ethics, identity, social justice perspective, intercultural skills, and sense of responsibility" (Brigham, 2011).

Borislav illustrates this when reflecting about his self-identity after two years in the U.S.:

If smiling means "being Americanized" – so, let it be, consider me Americanized. I think that any culture... has its own pluses and minuses, and to take pluses from different cultures, there's nothing bad about that. Being Slovak but understanding problems of my nation, my culture, I'll be happy to take pluses not only from American culture, but also Japanese or other. This is a fusion of cultures... Here the diversity is, here the choice is.

Even though Borislav states that he is Slovak, he also demonstrates openness and appreciation of other cultures. Earlier in the interview he mentioned about making "lot of friends" among people from different parts of the world and said that he feels confident about getting employed both in the U.S. or "any other country".

Oksana presents a different example. She consciously wanted to maintain her
native identity and not undergo significant change, as explained by Benjamin (1997).

Benjamin argues that when Mexican children spoke Spanish in language arts and science assignments groups at South Alamo school, this served “to unify them but also keep others out” (Benjamin, 1997, p.26). Therefore, Mexican children were more apt to socialize inside their own group and thus were likely to maintain their native identity without changes, even though their school is English-speaking. In line with these findings, Oksana recounted that she socializes in the U.S. mostly with a few people, who speak her native language. In addition, she said in her interview:

"I think that I preserved my native identity, because this is what I am trying to preserve. But at the same time I do see how it’s getting more difficult the more I am staying here. And it’s not that I am talking more to my friends here, but I do see that I lose some connections back home. And my connections back home were part of my identity... But... a part of this American identity... I don’t think that I took something [from it] at this moment."

Oksana demonstrates that she is concerned about saving her native self. She also said in her interview that she has friends at the university, yet all of them are from the same region where her country is located. All the sub-themes that fall under the umbrella of crystallization of native identity (perceived native identity, making friends among native and/or international students from the same with participant’s region, not celebrating American holidays, only native ones, feeling uncomfortable in the U.S., not willing to stay in the U.S. for a longer time) also emerged only across Oksana’s interview.

As in most interviews, other themes emerged that were not specifically part of this study. The interviews produced a lot of data, and the themes that were identified as being outside the scope of this particular research project. However, they contributed to this study by providing links between themes. These minimal themes were only present in
one or two participants’ answers, and they are not confirmed throughout the interviews. I also found that individual participants reveal various themes. For instance, they may resent security officers yet appreciate help of the representatives of International Offices at their universities. The same students may express dissatisfaction with American peers as “not easy to make friends with”, yet also report having the best American friends that they met at school.

Students consistently viewed education as the factor that not only brings and develops such personal traits as motivation and openness, but also contributes to their perceived identities in the cultural sense.
CHAPTER IX

DISCUSSION: HOW THE STUDENTS' NARRATIVES HELP TO ANSWER RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN THIS STUDY

Research questions

This part of the discussion covers how the analysis of interviews answers the research questions stated below. Cultural Contracts theory (Jackson, 2002) and Narrative theory (Labov and Waletzky, 2003; Journet et al, 2011) are utilized as those providing theoretical foundation for understanding how students transformed their identities as the after their communication experiences in the U.S. Specifically, the costs and benefits resulting from communication, as they are perceived and recounted by the respondents (Cultural Contracts theory), intra- and inter-personal communication issues, as well as the language used by respondents to reflect on their experiences (Narrative theory) are seen as indicators of the international students' objectives to study in the U.S. and also as factors that participated in transforming their identities. It is noteworthy that both theoretical foundations share an important commonality of individuals' communication with their selves as a tool for better understanding of the respondents' narratives (Sfard and Prusak, 2005). Such a commonality contributes to broader explanations of findings of this study.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are some objectives or motivations for studying internationally, specifically in the U.S.?

2. How do cross-cultural communication issues contribute to the international students' objectives of their studies at American universities, located within the geographic borders of the U.S.?
3. How is international student identity formed and changed upon cultural immersion?

In this study, the reputation of American universities as the institutions with the highest standards in the world is the primary motive for international learners to study in the U.S. Students view American education as a pre-requisite for the future success in life and becoming accomplished professionals. They also appreciate facilities for learning provided by the U.S. universities, like well-equipped computer-labs, libraries etc.

Participants also make a distinction with their native countries and state that the same quality of learning as they expected to see and enjoyed in the U.S. is hardly achievable at their schools at home. Thus, one more motive to obtain a degree in the U.S. was to become more advanced in the disciplines, which participants already studied in their native countries. Moreover, in some cases the mentioned advancement was possible only under condition of coming to study in the U.S. For instance, Mikhay, the student of International Studies, said that in his country International Studies is taught “like philosophy, you can’t really see how you can use it to explain some political situation”. Since Mikhay wanted to gain practical knowledge, he selected to study in the U.S.

For Agnieshka, a student of Native American Studies, coming to the U.S. meant rewriting her PhD thesis and cancellation of a previous version that she already produced in her native country. She explained this change by a unique opportunity to explore Native American culture through communication with Native American professors. This communication brought new insights into her study and enriched the thesis with a better understanding of Native Americans’ cultural traditions.
Gaining one more degree appeared to be one more significant objective to study in the U.S. Participants, who were majoring in English in their home countries strived for broader prospective. As Natalia put it, “I felt there is a ceiling in the language study that I hit.” Thus, she applied the PhD program in Education at the U.S. university.

Among other motives was expanding of cultural horizons, and studying in the U.S. was also seen as a perfect opportunity to learn about life in the different part of the world.

Since all students are from post-communist countries, I expected that the majority of respondents would also list exploring the U.S. as a democracy to be their motive for studying here. Yet only two participants, both students of humanities, stated that to see how democracy works was among their objectives for coming to the U.S. Two students reported that they do not think that America is following the principles of democracy. One of the respondents, Oksana, arrived to this conclusion after she spent a year in the U.S. Another respondent, Dushan, said that his studies in the U.S. reinforced his opinion, which he had before coming here, about the U.S. following different concept of human rights from the same adopted in European Union. This respondent, Dushan, gave the following example:

We take it very seriously in the EU when it comes to human rights. Here, in the U.S., they… call it “civil liberties” and they, actually, apply to the U.S. citizens, but when it comes to… the human rights of people from abroad, non-U.S. citizens, they are more flexible... Especially, when it comes to such areas as Iraq or Afghanistan, they would send there the U.S. drones. Using drones and killing some people, it’s like more human rights, they would say, then if like going with some conventional, kinetic force and causing more collateral damage. So, they are very flexible to human rights. Whereas in Europe you would not allow for such a thing.

As the analysis shows, democracy appeared to be the sub-theme of minor significance that emerged across interviews.
The results of the study also demonstrate that students' perception of American societal morals like respect for dignity, equal opportunities, and hard work as affiliated with future success emerges from their communications within their studies. This perception contributes to international students' objectives of their studies in the U.S.

The mentioned values are communicated to students mainly through their interactions with professors and officers of the formal bodies, and, as respondents point out, they do not often meet such a way of communication in their home countries. Eventually, eleven respondents reported that they would like to have a job in the U.S. after graduation, as well as globally, even though their visa requirements oblige them to return home after completion of studies. As one of the respondents expressed it, “I would like to live in the country (meaning the U.S.), where I would feel myself empowered and able to use my potential.”

Four out of eleven participants said that they want to work in the U.S. but only “for some time” and would make their decisions regarding further stay depending on situations. As I understood from the interviews, the perceived cultural differences with Americans prevent students from willing to stay in the U.S. permanently. In particular, the respondents’ narratives reflect their transition from being initially overwhelmed with the perceived difference between their native countries and the U.S., acceptance of this difference and even acquiring “American” as part of their identity, yet also resisting full affiliation with “American” (Carter-Todd, 2011).

Anastasia illustrates her transition from the naïve stage, characterized by her choice to familiarize herself with American life (Carter-Todd, 2011), when she says:

It was stressful for me, because it was something new... I couldn’t even imagine
the life, which was expecting for me for the next two years. Opening a bank account was a shock for me. First I didn’t know how to cross the road – I didn’t know that you have to push the button to cross the road!

Anastasia’s narrative then moves to a more active acceptance of America:

I was curious to learn more about American culture... I realized that in the United States you... see the world from different prospective, and it was very interesting to see that.

Anastasia’s narrative shows that despite her initial stress she wanted to reconcile herself with the difference between her native Russia and the U.S. As the result, she later acquired “American” as part of her identity:

I would say, my studies in the U.S., it’s a treasure – in terms of education, in terms of knowledge, in terms of experience... [Now] I feel myself a little bit less Russian than the rest of Russians... Here, in the United States, I for sure accepted some part of American identity.

However, Anastasia resists affiliating herself fully with the mentioned identity:

I feel... I am not like them [Americans], I am from the different part of the world, from the different culture.

It is not accidentally that the respondent uses the word “different” twice. Here Anastasia rejects the possibility of being “like Americans” highlighting geographical and cultural distance between herself and Americans.

Cross-cultural communication contributed not only to career-goals, but other objectives as well. Gaining a better command in English and closer familiarity with American culture emerged as a new motivation for nine participants. The same respondents also reported that communication with other international students caused them to learn more about other cultures, including of those countries that respondents did not hear about before. This is consistent with Carlson (1990), who studies experiences of American undergraduate students at European universities and found that “a low level of
interaction with fellow American students correlated positively with international learning... [and] integration into the host culture” (1990, p.78).

For some participants communication that took place mainly within their school environment promoted a desire to explore American life outside campus. For instance, Anastasia applied for one-year internship because, as she said, her scholarship program made her “living like in green house with everything ready”, like monthly allowance and tuition coverage. Yet Anastasia wanted “to know real life” in the U.S. According to Anastasia, this one more year made it possible for her to experience the same life as her American counterparts live, taking care about different issues on her own and without financial support from the outside.

One more possible motive was never articulated across the interviews but was prompted by my insight. Since four participants have American spouses, it can be assumed that their objective is to stay in the U.S. permanently rather than return back to their countries. This is an immigration-related and sensitive issue, so I did not feel positive about asking these participants directly whether or not they prefer to remain in the U.S. because of personal reasons that emerged during their studies. Besides, one of the participants asked me not to talk about the spouse-related issues before the beginning of the interview. This might be a research topic for future study, however at this time personal reasons (relationships, family, etc.) was outside the scope of this study.

The analysis showed that duration of studying in the U.S. is not necessarily a factor when it comes to arriving to a new sense or expression of identity. Even though, as it can be assumed, the longer students are exposed to another culture, the more chances are that they will embrace this culture. Nevertheless, Christina, who stays in the U.S. for
five years, said that now she experiences "the identity crisis". Oksana, who has been in the U.S. two years, reported a strong feeling of her native identity. Mikhay, who is near the end of his fourth year at an American university, says that he feels to be more Romanian than American. These respondents also shared the common features of not celebrating American holidays and not liking food in the U.S., even though they admit diversity of cuisines in this country.

However, nine out of twelve respondents' narrative stories included some changes in their selves, like acquiring American and/or other identities to different extents. The data of the interviews show that within their studies in the U.S. these nine participants recounted making significantly more connections with Americans and international students. In addition, five participants reported making American and other international friends inside and also outside their schools. Not surprisingly, that among those five students, in three of them the sub-categories pertaining global citizenship are met the most often. This can be seen as an indication that relationships change depending how students assimilate or change their identity, or how they feel about that change. For instance, one student experienced several themes at once describing his/her new sense of identity.

Students said that they perceived changes in their selves beginning at the early part of their second year in the U.S. For instance, Alina and Anastasia reported that they both felt rather strong about their native identities in the beginning of their studies. By the end of the first year in the U.S., each of young women decided to move in with American friends from their schools, because they wanted to improve their English and get more
chances of exposure to American culture. After moving in with Americans, Alina also started watching American TV. As well as Alina, Anastasia also reported making good friends among international students but being “just friendly” with American peers. Each student extended her staying in the U.S. upon graduation to fulfill internships with American organizations. During her post-graduate training, Alina mainly socialized with people from Western Europe, while Anastasia communicated with Americans. Finally, Alina’s story of her self indicated in-between identity, while Anastasia is closer to feeling Americanized.

Borislav’s narrative signals cultural immersion and arriving to the new identity of the global citizen. He recounted that “learning English really well” was one of his top priorities, and he tried “to create maximum of English-speaking environments” around himself. Borislav is appreciative of cross-cultural connections that he made in the U.S. and feels that was influenced by different cultures. Among other instances, he admits that he learned how to cook Mexican food and it is interesting for him to communicate with people from “Kenya, Turkey, Italy, France, America, Russia, China, India, Granada – lots of countries”, whom he met on campus and outside his university.

Oksana is a different example of how limited socializing with persons from other cultures prevents cultural immersion and contributes to preserving native identity. Oksana said that she celebrates only holidays of her country in the U.S. and while doing so, invites people from the same with her state geographical region. In her narrative, she recounted feeling different from Americans, whom she thinks to be “self-centered.” Her communication with Americans is mainly through contacts with her professors and officers of the formal bodies.
The listed examples show that cultural immersion is a significant instrument in changing student identity, since it enables identification with the host culture (Taylor, 1994; Fong and Chuang, 2004; Carter-Tod, 2011). They also demonstrate that positive cases of cross-cultural communication promote appreciation of other cultures in international students and leads to the development of the new sense of self (Mattingly and Lawlor, 2000; Onwumechili, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2005; Jackson, 2010).

**Appreciation of American education as the significant finding**

From the analysis of transcripts, there were diverse themes found throughout the interviews. The most prominent theme that arose from the analysis was appreciation of American education. The most important finding of this study is the emergent theme of transformative power of international education in terms of its role in personal growth and shaping cultural identities. Students related educational experience in the U.S. to stimulation of positive traits in their characters, such as openness, motivation, respect for different opinions, tolerance, as well as to development of cross-cultural appreciation and creating new ways to see themselves and talk about their identities. In narrative responses, students connect their communication experiences in the U.S. with expanding personal, cultural, and professional horizons. This is consistent with previous findings of Altbach (1991), Furnham (1998), Davis and Cho (2005), Altbach (2010).

Most of the participants relate their education in the U.S. to their feelings of maturity and the perceived ability to be competitive with their American counterparts. As it can be inferred from the respondents' narratives, appreciation of American education is also affiliated with their life-changing experience, as well as a chance to
apply knowledge gained at an American university globally. In addition, the theme appreciation of American education is related to the idea of bringing positive changes in students’ native countries, once they return there after completing their education in the U.S. Though this was not a focus of this study, but perhaps in some instances American education can also be seen as promoting leadership skills in international students.

Another theme of American values also appeared to be important for this study, though not as prominently as appreciation of American education. It is noteworthy that “value” is not a wide concept in this study – while the foreign students attached to “certain” values, – there are also others that are not indicated. Thus far, students expressed attachment to certain values in this country, which they perceive as the core ones in American society.

**Cultural contracts among international students**

From the narratives, international students are more opt to signing quasi-completed contracts. Such a contract enables individual to feel their identities partially valued (Jackson, 2002). This type of cultural contracts appears to strongly correspond with how students perceived their new selves after cultural immersion. By “signing” quasi-completes contracts students could preserve parts of their cultural worldviews without fear of penalty (Jackson, 2002; Jackson, 2008). In cases of the participants, this penalty could mean problematic acculturation, as well as limited communication with Americans. For instance, Anastasia said that she was surprised to meet among her peers those that still held the cold-war stereotypes about Russians, yet she did not say that she tried to argue with that people. Most probably, Anastasia perceived that the “costs” of such an argument would be higher for her than the perceived “benefits”, and therefore
she did not express her disagreement with stereotypical thinking. However, in this way her Russian identity remained partially valued. Anastasia’s example shows that quasi-completed agreement is being discussed when an individual feels the need to shift identities temporarily at school to make others comfortable (Jackson, 2002; Onwumechili et al., 2003). Quasi-completed agreement appeared to be the most persistent among the participants of this study.

One more form of contract in this research appeared not to be covered by the theory. This is a refusal to “sign” any of the listed contracts (pre-negotiated, quasi-completed, and co-created), as proved by the example of Oksana, who preferred to preserve her identity without changes. Though she agreed to come to the U.S. and go through the required entry procedures and, as Oksana acknowledged, she felt that to some extent she was influenced by American culture. Oksana’s avoidance of cross-cultural learning and sharing presents some alternative kind of the contract – she chooses to counter cultural immersion while also being partially immersed. These data provide a new insight into the theory and expands its area of inquiry.

Eventually, this study contributes to the understanding of Cultural Contracts theory. In particular, the results show that refusal to sign any of the existing contracts can be viewed as yet one more “contract”, which is not covered by the theory. As Oksana’s case demonstrates, the person, who prefers this type of relationship with the host culture, either restrains from evaluating potential costs and benefits of the existing contracts, or s/he evaluates possible costs as too high, and possible benefits as too insignificant for his/her identity validation. Based on the results of this study, refusal to “sign” pre-
negotiated, quasi-completed, or co-created contract can be affiliated with crystallization of the native identity.

Other kinds of international students' identities identified in this study provide some insights about how Cultural Contracts theory could explain the perceived shifts in the participants' selves. For instance, Borislav is an example of global citizen. As it can be inferred from his narratives, initially and because of the limited command in English, he was more apt to "sign" ready-to-sign and quasi-completed contracts. Yet his circle of American and international friends increased, and Borislav developed cross-cultural skills. He notices, most probably, that his new acquaintances are interested in him as a bearer of Slovak native culture in the same or the similar way as Borislav was open to their cultures. This leads to the conclusion that in the second year of his studies this student felt his identity respected by others and was "signing" co-created contracts more often than ready-to-sign and quasi-completed agreements. In turn, Borislav's awareness about his identity as being valued by new friends contributed to expanding his self beyond the borders of his native, as well as the host American culture. Eventually, Borislav acquired the global citizen identity. His case indicates mobility through various contracts based on numerous variables such as the duration of time in a different country, command of the native language, and contact with other foreigners and American students.

Oksana's and Borislav's cases indicate that there is a relationship between one's predisposition towards the host culture, as well as his/her personal traits, and the selection of contract "to sign". While Oksana chose a limited exposure to American culture and not socialize with Americans, Borislav was willing to learn more...
about the U.S. and make new contacts here. Finally, he had better chances for “signing” mutual validation contracts.

Other kinds of international students’ identities – in-between and feeling Americanized – if projected on Cultural Contracts theory make it possible to establish a connection between sojourners’ negotiations about their identities and the contracts they select to sign. In particular, Cristina’s (in-between identity) and Natalia’s (feeling Americanized) stories show that these students arrived to new perceptions of their identities through different sets of experiences. Yet, as can be understood from the narratives of both women, they were often signing quasi-completed contracts. While Christina traveled to her home country during her studies, Natalia stayed in the U.S. where she has also created a family with American citizen. Both students admit their departures from native identities, as well as certain degree of dissatisfaction with the host American environment. Specifically, Natalia does not like the system of public transportation in the U.S. in her Midwest location, while Christina shares several stories about the perceived distance between herself and American peers. However, while reflecting on their communication experiences in the U.S., Christina and Natalia often described situations where their native identities were partially valued. Thus, it can be understood that both students were more likely to sign quasi-completed contracts.

Consequently, this study contributes to better understanding of Cultural Contracts theory through establishing the relationship between sojourners’ identities and the informal agreements they sign during communications with the host culture. The study also notes that there may exist additional contracts, as well as the importance of mobility across contract, depending on different variable.
CHAPTER X

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Limitations of the study

It is nearly impossible to do "everything" in one research project, therefore this project does have some limitations, which became visible during the project and analysis of narrative data. Among the limitations of this study is a lack of diversity in terms of participants' backgrounds, since half of them are the recipients of American scholarships for obtaining higher education. This status allowed them to avoid many complexities connected with an entry to the U.S., since the programs and providers of the scholarships, assume the burden of preparing the necessary paper-work and other related procedures.

International scholarship programs are also prospective financial sponsors for students. Thus the enrollment process of scholarship students differs from non-scholarship participants, who had to prove their financial eligibility to U.S. formal bodies, as well as independently prepare the necessary documentation. This factor communicates some lack of homogeneity of the pool of the participants.

In some instances this might explain divergent responses from the interviewees, specifically those pertaining to communication with formal bodies and how this affects their attitudes and experiences, and thus their identity formation.

In addition, since I am an alumna of the Fulbright International Educational Exchange Program, and recruited many of the research subjects through informal networks within this program, it is possible that an apriori trust existed with these subjects. The Fulbright students' intra-group solidarity helped me to establish
cooperation with some interviewees. Careful self-monitoring during the interviewing and analysis stages of research was maintained to minimize misinterpretation or assumption of narrative responses.

Another limitation is my unconscious bias as the researcher and a human Instrument. This may be indicated in this case because I share the same cultural background and similar cross-cultural experiences with participants. Starting the study, I thought this to be a positive variable because I would more easily communicate with these students (language, shared background), but in a few cases I noticed how I could unintentionally “prompt” my subjects answers or reactions by, for instance, intonation in which the question was asked. Additionally, my interpretation of how they said something or what they said is also influenced by my own identity changes and formations. This requires careful self-monitoring during the research interviewing, and self reflection during the analysis of the data. Therefore, my intent to practice self-reflexivity and mindfulness about my unconscious bias (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Urban, 2007; Urban and Orbe, 2007; 2009; Pitts, 2009) prevented me from imposing my own assumptions in most of the cases.

The third limitation is that I did not make inquiries about the perceived changes in identities of those participants, who have American spouses. These inquiries could potentially provide rich material for the study of identity in this research but was not part of my interview protocol. I learned about participants’ American spouses in the course of interviews and questions about their personal relationships were not planned in the interview protocol, so I preferred avoiding them.

The fourth limitation is a lack of questions that concern the role of social media in
formation of students' identities in the interview protocol. Even though all of my respondents are from the developing countries, most of them did not have the access to the Internet at home before coming to the U.S., and their families back at native countries currently do not have this access too. Most of the respondents are also from the working-class families.

The region students come perhaps makes a significant difference on their exposure to such communication technologies, and more attention should be given to the Internet communication as an issue in identity formation. This is an area for future research.

Value of research and future trends in international student communication studies

Before conducting this research, I knew that education was an important and often a life-changing opportunity for people. Discovering that education was such a substantial influence in the formation of and change in students’ identities surprised me, even though I knew that education communicates the best of human morals. Before the research collection and analysis, I did not anticipate that education was capable to make significant changes in one’s native identity. Moreover, in some cases it promoted a strong affiliation with a different culture or cultures. These findings are significant for me, because the research adds to the literature in the following considerable ways:

Understanding identity formation: a) how students recount stories about their identities communicates about their identities; b) both perceived and unconscious communication experiences are factors in students’ identities formation; c) students’ identities rarely are stable constructions, rather, they are subjects of fluctuation; d)
students' selves can comprise several identities.

Understanding the role of international (American) education in identity formation: a) international education participates in development of personhood, promoting such traits as openness, tolerance, and appreciation of other cultures; b) international education is affiliated with succeeding in life; c) international education associates mainly with positive life experiences, like expanding horizons, making friends globally, familiarizing with new cultures.

Understanding that the amount of time spent by the sojourner abroad is not a significant variable in promoting changes students' identities. Rather, these are personal traits, which together with educational experience, add to the new feeling of self.

Understanding the role of American formal institutions as those having both positive and negative impact in international students' identity formation.

Understanding that the country a person comes from potentially influences how this persons changes as the result of studying abroad. Specifically, levels of media technology development, as well as English language command appeared to be related to identity formation in this study.

Yet another finding pertains my own feeling of self. Before starting analysis for this study, I considered myself to be a global citizen. I thought that I could perceive myself like this, since within the last few years I traveled extensively around the world, was exposed to diverse cultures, and also acquire a dual citizenship. However, after completing this research I realized that I fall in the category of feeling Americanized, which is a meaningful self on a continuum that perhaps is constantly in fluctuation, depending on where I am and whom I am with at that time.
The next result also appeared unexpectedly in the research outcomes. This is an insignificance of theme of “democracy” as one of the emerging themes in the analysis of interviews. I went into the research valuing democracy and the rights and privileges it provides to citizens, especially considering my background in Ukraine, which is still an emerging Democracy. Understanding mechanisms that sustain democratic regime was one of my personal goals that motivated me to apply for American higher education back in 2004. Coming from a former Soviet Union region, this is part of my “native” identity, and I projected that it would be important for other international students. However, democracy appeared to be among the minor variables in this research. To me democracy and personhood are inextricably linked, to others, this may not be so relevant.

This research is important not only for me personally and professionally; it potentially benefits others, who are interested in how communication participates in shaping selves and understanding values. The study also provides insights about the role of international education in the lives of learners from abroad and gives their American hosts observations from international students. In many instances, especially to formal institutions and organizations, international students are seen as one ‘homogenous’ group. Yet there are vast differences in our home region, languages, experiences of travel, education and such. Therefore, these distinctions need to be clearly a part of orientation at universities – of both the visiting student and those who work with and educate them. Furthermore, the research offers several future trends for international students communication studies. In particular, what is the role of modern communication technologies, like the Internet, social media and other communication networking technologies such as Skype in shaping international students’ identities before and after
their coming to the foreign university? While the existing scholarship is focused mainly on the impact of the resources like Facebook and Twitter in development of political and/or democratic self (Wim and Van De Donk, 2004; Aslund and McFaul, 2005; Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian, 2011; Al Sharekh, 2011), the issue of the global citizen and/or other identity of the young international learner remains to be underexplored. Considering the issues of globalization, the recent rapid shifts of political regimes in developing countries, and the constant progress of communication technologies, this is a promising area of the communication inquiry.

Another trend concerns considering the importance of gender differences during qualitative interviewing. Specifically, in the course of this research I observed that female interviewees are more open and willing to share than most of their male counterparts. Women are also more disposed to tell more detailed stories about their experiences to a female interviewer. The future research could offer some insights on how the social, psychological, and role barriers between the interviewer and the interviewee of different genders could be diminished particularly, when both interviewer and the interviewee come from the culture that enhances patriarchal status in the society.

Future research could also cover the issue of foreign language proficiency in the domain of sojourners' identity formation. How learning English (or other foreign language) conveys acceptance (or not) different culture by those exposed to this culture is yet one more domain of international communication that waits for its investigators. Yet one more area to explore is how motives to study abroad, which are not directly articulated by the international students can be recognized and understood by researchers of socio-linguistic or communication studies.
Finally, the analysis of the way that humans have of dynamic change – understanding that change is important if we are to be effective communicators and attempt to listen to the words of others and analyze them as part of our profession – seems to be the promising area of future studies of the identity. Specifically, when identity is viewed as the “dynamic self”, that “does not just reflect on-going behavior but instead mediates and regulates this behavior. In this sense the self-concept has been viewed as dynamic-as active, forceful, and capable of change (Marcus and Wurf, 1987, p.299).
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ENDNOTES

1. According to the Western Michigan University Sindecuse Health Center, beginning fall of 2005, international students that arrived within the past five years from countries where tuberculosis (TB) is endemic, were required TB screening. The American College Health Association (http://www.acha.org/) makes these determinations based on information from the World Health Organization (http://www.who.int/en/) and the Centers for Disease Control (http://www.cdc.gov/).

2. After the authorities rigged the first round of the presidential elections in November 2004, Ukrainian citizens protested against the fraudulent results through participation in the mass demonstrations in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, and all over the country. Specifically, the outcomes of the exit polls showed the overwhelming support of the opposition candidate Victor Yuschenko, while the voters obviously less favored the incumbents’ nominee Victor Yanukovych. However, after all votes were counted, Yanukovych was officially declared the winner of the campaign.

Despite lacking access to mass media, supporters of democratic change utilized the web resources for recruiting volunteers, raising funds, organizing campaigns, and garnering the sympathy of the global democratic community (Kyj, 2006). In particular, Ukrainian diasporas in Western countries organized protests in front of Ukrainian embassies; they demanded cancellation of the rigged elections and scheduling the new vote. These actions launched worldwide interest and support to the Orange revolution. The events in Kyiv became the top-news in the international mainstream media, while citizens of different countries expressed in through online messages their admiration to the peaceful democratic transition in Ukraine.
3. Founded in 1919, the Institute of International Education (IIE) is a private nonprofit organization leading in the international exchange of students. In collaboration with governments, foundations and other sponsors, IIE creates programs of study and training for students, educators and professionals from all sectors. Among others, these programs include the flagship Fulbright Program and Gilman Scholarships administered for the U.S. Department of State. IIE also conducts policy research, provides resources on international exchange opportunities and offers support to scholars in danger.

Annually, IIE publishers its reports that reflect statistical data on students from foreign countries, who come to study in the U.S. Though figures vary from country to country, generally the number of international students increases every year (http://www.iie.org/en/Who-We-Are/Annual-Report/IIE-Annual-Report-Archive#00s).

4. In 2000, the only condition for obtaining visitor's visa for Ukrainian finalists of the U.S. educational programs was to submit a visa application; the applicants did not have to schedule an interview at the U.S. consulate in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. Yet in 2005 the interview was mandatory for students and visiting scholars too. Scholars had also submit the list of their publications as well as documents that verified their scientific achievements. Together with other visitors, the mentioned applicants were required to provide contacts of three native references (non-relatives), who could confirm the applicants' identities. In addition, proofs of financial stability (the bank statements) were mandatory for those students that did not participate in the educational programs administered by the U.S. State Department. Scholars also had to submit letters from their employers confirming the applicants' job positions and guaranteeing that these positions would be secured for them upon coming back from the U.S. Students who renewed their
visas, also had to provide official transcripts from their universities' Offices of the Registrar.

Since April 2011, those renewing their student visas could do this without scheduling an interview: Under the condition they did not violate their previous visa status and were never denied visas, they could FedEx their passports to American embassies.
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol (approved October 19, 2011 by Western Michigan University Human Subjects Internal Review Board)

1. Can you state your name and spell it out loud?

2. What is your age?

3. Where do you hold citizenship?

4. What do you study at your university and tell me why you decided on this area of study in the U.S.?

5. Can you define your idea about the U.S. before coming here? In terms of education, the culture, the people? Where would you study? When did that start for you?

5. Have you traveled to the U.S. before your studies? Did that influence your desire to study here?

6. What were some of the requirements and preparations that you needed to complete before coming to the U.S.? What were your feelings about these requirements and preparations?

7. Can you tell me the story of when you first came to the United States, focusing on your feelings, attitudes, and reactions?

8. Where do you stay in the U.S. with the member(s) of your family, friends from your country? or on your own? Did you know them before coming to the U.S.?

9. What was your motivation for obtaining degree from the university in the U.S.?

10. Did your initial plans undergo any changes after you began your studies? And if so, how?

11. If you had an option to remain in the U.S. permanently, what would you do? Why?
12. Tell me the story on how do you celebrate any American holidays? And/or any of your native holidays?

14. Have you made new friends here? Can you tell me the story about your most valued acquaintance in the U.S.?

15. How would you define your communication with your American peers in class? With your professors? With other international students?

16. Can you tell me the story about your most positive communication experience with American formal bodies, like Home Land Security, Social Security, WMU International Office, other?

17. Can you tell me the story about your most negative communication experience with American formal bodies, like Home Land Security, Social Security, WMU International Office, other?

18. Can you describe your perception of the American campus culture? Is there anything that you like/dislike in it?

19. What stories do you tell your family/friends at your native country while describing your stay here? What information do you prefer not to tell them?

20. How do you see yourself today, in terms of your experience as an international student? What does your American experience mean to you?

21. Is there anything that I did not ask you yet and you would like to share?
Dear Fulbrighters!

Particularly those of you, who are currently enrolled at the U.S. universities for at least a year and whose native countries are Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria. I am Lyudmyla Pustelnyk, an alumna of 2005-2007 (Ukraine), and I currently conduct a research on the role that American experience of international students plays in shaping the ways international students communicate about their understanding of self (identity) and how this understanding is influenced and changes within their studies in the United States. I need your help for this study. You will make a significant contribution if kindly let me interview you. I guarantee confidentiality to everything you'll tell me. Please, consider participating even if you think that your studying in the U.S. does not influence you at all!

Interested? Please, reply to this message by sending e-mail to lpustelnyk@yahoo.com or lyudmyla.pustelnyk@wmich.edu and learn more about “Nevermericans?”: How Communication Issues Shape the Perceptions of Self and the Perceptions of American Identity Among the International Students.

Thank you! Looking forward to hear from you soon.
APPENDIX C

Recruitment script

Good morning/afternoon. I am Lyudmyla Pustelnyk, a graduate student from the School of Communication at Western Michigan University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that inquires how international students communicate about their understanding of self (identity) and how this understanding is influenced and changes within their studies in the United States. This recruitment is open to those who stay in the U.S. for at least nine contiguous months and whose native countries are one of the following: Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria. If you chose to participate, please contact me at lpustelnyk@yahoo.com or lyudmyla.pustelnyk@wmich.edu. Participants will interviewed individually once the time and location of the interview will be arranged. Participants’ information will be kept confidential.

Before deciding whether or not you would like to participate, you will have an opportunity to read a consent document and ask questions. Please keep in mind that participation is strictly voluntary and it will not in any way affect you in any way.
APPENDIX D

Handout with the list of Scholarships and WMU Advocacy Organizations
(active links as of October 19, 2011)

- $10,000 Scholarship Zone Scholarship: Open to all students.
  DEADLINES: Every 15 days.
  http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=I1_CcclOMy8
  mbl258LhJza

  * Dale E. Fridell Memorial Scholarships: Open to all students.
    DEADLINES: January 14th, May 1st, July 14th, October 14th
    http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=vUv9ykHqraP
    pGrM64bJ6Bw

  * Mesothelioma Memorial Scholarships: Open to all students.
    DEADLINES: February 15th, May 31st, August 15th, November 15th
    http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=uFM4PTJM2k.
    XQq1MXGnMHg

  * Recession Relief Scholarship: Open to all students.
    DEADLINES: February 28th, June 15th, August 31st, November 30th
    http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=XwNM0LPAN
    .5gqw8qFhaPCA

  * SFM Nursing Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring nursing students.
    DEADLINES: January 14th, May 1st, July 14th, October 14th
    http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=vescqk2Ehluu
    bceFUedgTQ

  * SFM Teacher Scholarships: Open to teachers and students who are planning to
    become teachers.
    DEADLINES: January 14th, May 1st, July 14th, October 14th
    http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=vescqk2Ehluu
    bceFUedgTQ

  * SFM Minority Scholarships: Open to students of color.
    DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th
    http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=GftzqvWP4pm
    3rc1ZGxlCIg

  * SFM Liberal Arts Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring students of the
    liberal arts.
    DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th
    http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=JPHZCdn3kiP
    oBdPm10UcYA
* SFM Business Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring students in business-related programs of study. DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=2K0UhM5uOgDF6vH_ktCrLQ

* SFM Engineering Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring engineering students. DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=PnHYnB0uGKVNcF0PQSpaQ

* SFM Law Enforcement Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring law enforcement students. DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=EQxHVFr_9977q1tMYj9bmg

* SFM Law School Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring law students. DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=uWR13iiIR.cULQfzrLDQ

* SFM Media & Communications Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring students of media & communications. DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=_WaoGKn7KfE8Scfwnbd7Kw

* SFM Medical Professionals Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring medical professionals, including nurses. DEADLINES: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, November 30th http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=7lUCuDQrXGExYxrXq66TaQ

* SFM Science Scholarships: Open to current or aspiring students of physical, natural or biological sciences (social science majors may not apply). DEADLINES: January 14th, May 1st, July 14th, October 14th http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=5Lgj0&m=1n6TCV8_HcoeJj&b=vvcRNybgDPW663Em_vLILw

*The Komen College Scholarship program to students who have lost a parent to breast cancer. http://www.komenswmichigan.org/grants/college-scholarships/
WMU Student Advocacy and Counseling Organizations:

University Ombudsman:
2104 Sangren Hall
(269) 387-0718 Fax (269) 387-0716
ombudsman@wmich.edu
penelope.schellenberg@wmich.edu
http://www.wmich.edu/ombudsman/

Graduate Student Advisory Committee:
260 W. Walwood Hall
269.387.8207 Fax: 269.387.8232
http://www.wmich.edu/gsac/

University Counseling and Testing Center
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo MI 49008-5323 USA
(269) 387-1850 | (269) 387-1884 Fax
cindy.town@wmich.edu

The Center for Counseling and Psychological Services
Room 3109, Sangren Hall
Western Michigan University
(269) 387-5105 | (269) 387-5090 Fax
http://www.wmich.edu/coe/ccp/clinics/
cecp-info@wmich.edu

The Kalamazoo Gay Lesbian Resource Center
629, Pioneer Str. Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(269) 369-4234
http://www.kglrc.org/
Appendix E

HSIRB approval letter

Date: October 19, 2011

To: Jennifer Machiorlatti, Principal Investigator
Lyudmyla Pustelnky, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Victoria Janson, Interim Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 11-10-11

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Nevermericans?": How Communication Issues Shape the Perceptions of Self and the Perceptions of American Identity among the International Students" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: October 19, 2012