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“BIRD IN A CAGE:” EXPLORING TRANSNATIONAL IMMIGRANTS’ IDENTITY
NEGOTIATIONS

by

Ewa Urban

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
School of Communication

Western Michigan University
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“BIRD IN A CAGE:” EXPLORING TRANSNATIONAL IMMIGRANTS’ IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS

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Western Michigan University, 2007

Recent research demonstrates that the experience of contemporary immigrants is largely defined by their continued efforts to maintain symbolic and/or physical connections with their homelands (e.g., Levitt, 1998). This study explored how these transnational connections affect the negotiation of immigrants’ multiple identities. To explore the fluidity and the multilayered nature of transnational identities, the communication theory of identity was utilized as a theoretical lens. This theory allowed for an understanding how immigrants enact salient aspects of their multiple identities across contexts and situations. Phenomenological methodology was used to explore immigrants’ lived experiences and hear their voices both individually and collectively. Seventeen in-depth interviews served as a method through which nine male and eight female immigrants from 16 different countries recollect their lived experiences. Five themes, which unite co-researchers’ experiences while also explicating the diversity among them, emerged through the process of phenomenological reduction and interpretation: (1) inevitable transformation of self, (2) barriers to being authentic, (3) managing issues of belonging and acceptance, (4) negotiating continuity, (5) relationships with, and to, other “others.”

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, where immigration is “at once history and destiny” (Suárez-Orozco, 2000, p. 7), the number of foreign-born individuals amounts to 33.5 million people, which represents almost twelve percent of the country’s population (Current Population Survey, 2004). While nearly ninety percent of all immigrants living in the U.S. until the middle of the twentieth century were of European or Canadian descent, more than half of today’s immigrants come from the Asian and Latin American countries (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). In fact, according to the Current Population Survey, in the year 2003, fifty-three percent of all immigrants residing in the U.S. were born in Latin America, twenty-five percent in Asia, and only fourteen percent in Europe.

The history of U.S. Americans as immigrants has been shaped by four major waves of immigration (Pedraza, 2006). The first wave of immigrants, as Pedraza reported, is defined as the influx of individuals coming from Northern and Western Europe up until the mid-19th century. These immigrants’ motivations to come to this country were of political, religious, and economic nature. That period, however, also witnessed a forced migration of persons from Africa and the subordination of Native Americans (Pedraza, 2006).

The second wave encompasses immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, who arrived at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (Pedraza, 2006). Between the years of 1924 and 1965 – the period referred to as the third wave – migration was mostly internal, with African Americans, Native Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans relocating from the south to the north. Finally, the fourth wave of

immigration, which began in 1965 and has continued to the present day, has seen immigrants mostly from South and Central America and Asia (Pedraza, 2006).

Each of the waves has significantly contributed to the transformation of the U.S. American economic and social landscape (Pedraza, 2006). All immigrant groups have been faced with negative attitudes and fears of those who had settled here before them (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). This idea has been aptly captured by Frankel (2006), who stated:

People hate being the newcomer, the odd person out, and they do all they can to become part of the status quo. Once they've achieved that dubious recognition, they fight like hell to keep anyone else from joining their club, especially anyone who might change the norms of acceptability. (p. 14)

Immigrants' Realities

Foreign-born individuals constitute a group which is extremely diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, language, political loyalties, socioeconomic background, cultural norms, and behavioral patterns. Yet, they are frequently viewed as a homogenous out-group unified by the status of being labeled as “foreign” and “different” (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). Immigrants' distinctive physical features and/or foreign-sounding accents frequently lead to encounters in which they are questioned about the whereabouts of their “home,” the intensity of their longing for home, and the frequency of visits to the country of origin (Rodriguez, 2006). This happens, as Rodriguez noted, regardless of how long immigrants have lived in the country of settlement, and where they feel “home” really is for them. Such questions from host society members complicate immigrants' sense of belonging and acceptance, and signify them as “others” (Hegde, 1998). Although these inquiries may be motivated by host country members' desire to offer testimony to their respect of immigrants' culture,

tradition, and distinctiveness, they may also stem from host society's belief that the "true immigrant has to be different, even if she does not want to be" (Espín, 2006, p. 243).

For many immigrants, the move to the new country does not equate with relinquishing their old identities and assimilating into the mainstream U.S. culture or becoming a "hyphenated American" (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). Instead, most immigrants continue to constantly draw upon the cultural resources of their country of origin while at the same time attempting to effectively function in a society guided by differing values, beliefs, norms, and interaction patterns (Mahalingam, 2006). Thus, immigrants' realities are largely defined by their continual attempts to incorporate dual worldviews into one (Ghosh & Wang, 2003). These attempts at reconciling "here" and "there" are related to immigrants' efforts to remain loyal to their country of origin while at the same time meeting the expectations of the new culture (Pedraza, 2006).

Despite immigrants' experience of simultaneous and continual embeddedness in two cultures, much immigration research has focused on the patterns of adaptation, with the underlying assumption that eventually all immigrants will join the mainstream host society (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). An increasing number of scholars, however, has recently acknowledged that immigrants, both in the past and nowadays, have not always desired to sever their ties with the country of origin (e.g., Falicov, 2005; Foner, 1997). Such interpretation of immigrant realities has led researchers to begin utilizing the concept of transnationalism, which reflects immigrants' continued connections with the homeland without deeming those ties as an anomaly (Baia, 1999).

My Personal Experience

The exploration of transnational identity negotiation is salient to my own experience as an immigrant, who came to the United States from Poland at the age of twenty-six. Through this study, I set out to explore the lived experiences of other immigrants in order to better understand my own, as I move between the worlds of my native culture and that of my new home. The constant simultaneity of the “here and there” as well as the “now and then” permeates my own self and the interactions with those I left behind, and those with whom I communicate in the U.S.

Since I came to the U.S., my interactions have been implicitly or explicitly defined by others’ attempts to have me clearly identify where I belong and where the home is. Almost all my conversations begin with others’ questions where my name and/or accent is from or with their efforts to guess where it is from. My identification as Polish typically comes with others’ expressed assumptions that I know how to cook dishes that U.S. Americans frequently associate with Poland although I may have never even tasted them. I am to serve as an expert on the social, political, and economic realities of my country of origin, and if I do not know and do not do something that is assumed to be inherently Polish, I am jokingly told that I “can’t be Polish.” These interactions are also often accompanied by others’ identifications as second-, third-, fourth-generation immigrant, whose ancestors had come either from Poland or any other European country. While in the U.S., my Polish national identity is stronger than it has ever been. Ironically when I go back to Poland, I am viewed as becoming “too American.”

I have never been comfortable calling myself an immigrant since I have never felt that I actually emigrated from Poland despite physically leaving the country. Although I have created a physical space here which I call my home, I frequently consider my stay here as just temporary and oftentimes think of, or plan for, the return “home.” The fear of re-entry and the awareness of the identity change that has inevitably occurred, however, makes me reluctant to undergo another adaptation process – that into my country of origin.

Since my arrival, I have struggled with the issues of inclusion and assimilation. I have strongly believed that I continue to resist assimilating to the mainstream U.S. culture. Paradoxically, my actions and communicative behaviors seem to point in the direction of intense efforts to belong here. These inconsistencies are frequently due to specific goals that I have for particular interactions and contexts. For instance, motivated by the realities of the job market, where in order to succeed I feel that I need to adopt the expected societal values and behaviors, I tend to assimilate within the larger society in order to avoid being identified and labeled as “different” or “other.” However, in other contexts and situations, such as family or closest friends, especially those left behind in Poland, I find myself constantly emphasizing my uniqueness to preserve values and traditions of my homeland and to “prove” that I have not entirely forgotten who I am.

My insistence on the nourishment of transnational ties is accompanied by the constant feelings of guilt and pain caused by dwindling relational ties with my homeland and those left behind. At the same time, however, I cannot deny the satisfaction I derive from the ability to take advantage of the opportunities in the new country, and learn more about myself and others. Living in a transnational space illuminates the contradictions

that I constantly experience. While others describe me as strong and resilient as I have been able to remove myself from the familiar and the comfortable and enter the unknown, my own perceptions tend to be those of failure and disappointment that I did leave those who count on me being there in times of difficulty.

Rationale

Intercultural encounters within the host country stimulate immigrants' questions about their own worldviews as well as increasing awareness of their national and/or ethnic origin (Ghosh & Wang, 2003). In the context of continued connections with the homeland and the reality of living vicariously in two social worlds, immigrant identity is transformed into one that is transnational and multilocal (Cheng, 2005). The experience of contemporary immigrants, which is largely defined by simultaneous physical and/or symbolic involvement with their country of origin and the host society, has been appropriately described by Rodriguez (2006), who noted:

Identity is really about home. It constitutes where one belongs and to whom one belongs. When nouns and group differences ruled the world, home was easy to identify. In most cases, home was made for us. It was therefore simply assumed. But now with commonly held notions of identity increasingly being displaced by emergent notions that are rich in complexity, fluidity, and diversity, home is becoming much more difficult to locate. (p. 19)

Researchers who have examined contemporary immigrants' experience as intrinsically transnational (and whose work will be discussed in detail in the next chapter) provided invaluable insights into the complexities of immigrant identities. However, little is still known of the communicative experiences of immigrants who live "between" two (or more) worlds and occupy transnational spaces. Immigrants' reality is replete with struggles related to the self-consciousness about their foreign-sounding accent and the pressure to assimilate, which they feel particularly in organizational contexts, such as

work or school (Hegde, 1998). In this regard, it is worthwhile to explore how immigrants, who maintain transnational ties (albeit on varying levels and to varying degrees), negotiate their multiple transnational identities while communicating with host country members and with those left behind in the homeland.

Scholars remain divided as to what constitutes transnational ties. Some attempt to reserve it to frequent and physical contact with the country of origin (e.g., Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999), others devise typologies in order to differentiate between regular and occasional transnational practices (Itzigsohn, Cabral, Medina, & Vázquez, 1999). Yet, recent studies conducted primarily by female researchers, have focused on less tangible transnationalism based on emotions, memories, and identifications (e.g., Pessar & Mahler, 2003). Although immigrants may not engage in physical movement between the host and home countries, they may strive to preserve psychological and emotional ties with the homeland (Burrell, 2003). These symbolic connections, Burrell posited, permeate their everyday lives and affect the enactment of their identities.

Many immigrants desire to identify themselves with a larger group that shares the same national origin, as this provides a sense of continuity and stability (Hegde, 1998). However, Hegde asserted, identities are not fixed in the memories of the past; thus, immigrants continue to recreate who they are during their interactions in the new society. In this regard, identities are inherently multiple as well as simultaneously stable and changing (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). The conceptualization of identity as fluid, rather than stable and fixed, makes it possible to better explicate the lived experiences of immigrants, who are constantly in the process of creating and recreating their identities while attempting to reconcile distinct cultural realities (Hegde, 1998). Such complexity

and the multilayered nature of identity can be best analyzed through the lens of the communication theory of identity, which serves as the framework for this study.

Purpose

Immigrants' lived experience is inevitably filled with contradictions as they attempt to reconcile the demands of two, frequently incompatible, worlds; hence, their consciousness and communicative experiences are replete with identity concerns (Hegde, 1998). Thus, this research is designed to examine how immigrants, who create and live in transnational spaces, enact salient aspects of their multiple identities across contexts and situations. Such exploration is necessary in the context of immigrants' realities, as they are constantly faced with the pressure to decide on who they are, and where their home is (Rodriguez, 2006). As the discussion of transnationalism in the next chapter illustrates, however, these decisions are not effortless – or even necessary – as contemporary immigrants insist on maintaining multiple ties and identities.

As mentioned earlier, many researchers have focused on immigrant adaptation patterns as well as the nature of their transnational connections. Communication scholarship, however, lacks substantial exploration of communicative experiences of immigrants in the context of their negotiations of transnational identities. This study is an endeavor to address this gap in the literature.

The term “transnational immigrant,” used throughout this study, refers to immigrants who have become embedded and rooted in the country in which they have settled, while at the same time they have maintained strong and multiple ties with their homeland (Cheng, 2005). In addition, immigrants, in the context of this study, are defined as foreign-born individuals who have moved to the United States as adults.

The present study utilizes qualitative methods of analysis in order to explore the complexities of the phenomenon. As Burrell (2003) noted, “Being transnational is simultaneously exclusive and voluntary, presenting so many different variables that it would be almost impossible for two people to have the same experience” (p. 332). Thus, an exploration of immigrants’ lived experiences must allow for an understanding of the complexities of immigrant identities (Morrow, 1997). Collier (1998) asked scholars to undertake dialogue with marginalized group members through phenomenological approaches and encouraged them to report their lived experiences. Accordingly, this study uses phenomenology as conceptualized by Merleau-Ponty (1962), Husserl (1962), Lanigan (1979), and Nelson (1989) to gain insights into the experiences of transnational immigrants.

Before exploring the experiences of transnational immigrants, a thorough review of existing literature is needed. Chapter Two will thus revisit scholarship that conceptualized the notion of identity in general, as well as immigrant identity in particular. This will be followed by a review of immigration studies as they have moved away from the assumption that immigrants should strive to assimilate to the mainstream culture. A comprehensive discussion of transnationalism will then be presented in order to better capture the essence of contemporary immigrants’ experiences. Finally, the communication theory of identity will be explicated as a framework guiding the inquiry.

In Chapter Three, I will introduce phenomenological inquiry, which will be utilized as a tool to hear co-researchers’ voices both individually and collectively. Since I have a personal connection to the topic of inquiry, I will undeniably bring my own biases, subjectivity, and values into the research. Phenomenology will allow me to

bracket my own experiences and remain open to those of my co-researchers' in order to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Wertz, 2005).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite relocating to the United States, immigrants continue to function – to varying degrees – in both “home” and “host” cultures (Mahalingam, 2006). Their social positioning affects their psychological well-being as they become “othered” on the basis of their ethnicity, varied experience, and linguistic background (Omeri & Atkins, 2002). Inevitably, the negotiation of immigrant identity is impacted by their experience of in-betweenness and their continuous attempts to combine the past with the present to meet, frequently incompatible, demands of both worlds (Hegde, 1998).

In this chapter, I will first present selected scholarship relating to the concept of identity in general and the formation of immigrants’ identity in particular. Next, I will review the notion of transnationalism, which has been demonstrated to more accurately reflect contemporary immigrants’ realities. Lastly, I will synthesize literature on the communication theory of identity, which will serve as the theoretical lens for the study of immigrants’ negotiation of transnational identity.

Identity

Complexity of Identity

The concept of identity is helpful for exploring how people conceive of themselves, and how they are described by others (Vertovec, 2001). From a psychological perspective, identity is concerned with personal and group identifications, and it represents a cluster of meanings which individuals hold about themselves; these self-definitions affect people’s perceptions about themselves as well as their interactions with others (Cheek & Hogan, 1983). Psychologists tend to conceptualize identity as a

core of who a person is, and as such, identity becomes stable across contexts (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). In fact, as Hecht et al. argued, this perspective describes identity shifts as indicative of a person's psychological imbalance.

Communication researchers have recognized that identities cannot be viewed as fixed, stable, and finished products; instead, they are dynamic, created and recreated in the process of interaction (Collier, 1998). People develop their identities through everyday communication with others within their social group (Ting-Toomey, 2005). As such, Ting-Toomey argued, identity is a “reflective self-conception or self-image that we each derive from our family, gender, cultural, ethnic, and individual socialization process” (p. 212). This notion of identity builds on Mead's (1934) idea that people incorporate the attitudes and responses of others into their self-concept.

Critical scholars, such as Hall (1996), posited that identity is ideologically constructed through social categories such as race, class, gender, and nationality, which deem individuals as different or “other.” Identities, according to Hall, are “never unified ... [but] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (p. 4). Thus, identity must be regarded as diverse, fluid, multiple, and ever-changing, and it cannot be based merely on group membership (Collier, 1998). Hall further argued that identity needs to be considered within the larger historical and socioeconomic context, which takes into account power relations. He maintained that identities of minority groups are defined by the dominant discourse including media representations which essentialize non-dominant identities. Hall's view allows for the development of identity

not through assimilative practices, but rather through the celebration of difference (Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002).

Several communication scholars have focused their inquiry on cultural identity, which has been conceptualized as perceived acceptance into a group with shared practices, worldviews, norms, and interpretations (e.g., Collier, 1998; Kim, 1996; Ting-Toomey, 2005). These researchers asserted that individuals do not define themselves by a single identity (e.g., based on national origin); instead, the intersection of race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, and sexual orientation encompasses the multiplicity of identity and its overlapping nature. Moreover, Collier argued, the salience of particular identities may vary across contexts and interactions. Kim contended that individuals always embrace more than just one social category with which they may identify; in addition the identification with any group is rarely consistent in terms of the intensity of commitment to any of them.

Mendoza, Halualani, and Drzewiecka (2002) posited that identity cannot be viewed merely in terms of individuals' nationality or ethnicity, assumed group membership, shared meanings, or behavioral enactments of shared cultural practices. Instead, they conceptualized identity as "contested terrain of competing interests" (p. 312), where the power relations within the social, historical and political context are of paramount importance. As such, identity is not a "neutral space" but instead a historical and cultural construction that foregrounds "contestations over meaning and signification" (p. 314). Furthermore, they argued that existing models of identity are constraining as they are founded on the assumption that individuals who identify with a specific collectivity based on ethnicity, nationality, gender, etc. enact their identities in a

similar manner. Such a view, in their opinion, obscures the fact that individuals may be more similar to those outside their group membership than those within it.

Immigrant Identity

Duality of immigrant experience. Immigrants' lived experience is defined by their constant symbolic back-and-forth movement between two distinctive cultural worlds (Hegde, 1998). Thus, the formation of their identity is influenced by the exposure to dual worldviews, belief systems, and cultural practices (Mahalingam, 2006). Their experience is constantly affected by their previous life in a culture with distinct values, social relations, and economic realities (Pedraza, 2006). As they come to a new country, they strive to redefine themselves while incorporating their own cultural background with the labels and definitions that others may want to impose on them (Tormala & Deaux, 2006). They often grapple with the meanings of the identities forced on them as they are expected to act as cultural experts in regard to the habits, customs, political and economic realities of their country of origin (Mahalingam, 2006).

Immigrants' new roles, realities, and emotional experiences are frequently dissimilar from what they had anticipated prior to their arrival, which influences their identity formation (Espín, 2006). Their ethnic and/or national identification may be stronger than it was in their country of origin as a response to the complexities of the new and unfamiliar environment, particularly with increased cultural distance and the lack of proficiency in the English language (Nesdale & Mak, 2002). In addition, individual immigrants' attitudes toward retaining their homeland's culture differ and are further impacted by the new society's degree of acceptance, formal policies, and the level of assimilation pressure (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). As they become

marginalized in the country of settlement, they may begin to employ the cultural practices and traditions in which they had not engaged while living in their homeland (Mahalingam, 2006).

Many immigrants constantly struggle to reconcile the need to maintain their distinctive cultural identity with the desire of not being perceived as too different from the mainstream society (Ghosh & Wang, 2003). They are continuously aware of the demands of two separate worlds (Hegde, 1998). Consequently, their interactions are filled with attempts to remain authentic and loyal to the identities of both their homelands and their new homes (Pedraza, 2006). Thus, as Espín (2006) suggested, many immigrants tend to create a public and a private self: Their interactions within the public sphere, such as school or work, are guided by the customs and rules of the host society; however, the privacy of their homes allows them to preserve the behaviors they had developed in their home country, which provides them with a sense of control.

Despite the strong sense of identification with their national origin, immigrants may not feel the need for their background to influence all spheres of their lives in the country of settlement (Nesdale & Mak, 2002). Instead, the salience of their cultural self varies across interactions, relationships, and contexts; moreover its enactment is determined by individuals' relative ability to conceal or emphasize their cultural identities due to others' ascriptions based on physical attributes or accent (Collier, 1998). Thus, as Collier posited, only white immigrants in the U.S. have an option to either downplay or emphasize their national and/or ethnic identity.

Cross-cultural transitions frequently cause individuals to become more cognizant of their own country's values and traditions; yet, interactions with host country members

may make them feel that they are not enacting their cultural identity to a sufficient degree (Ghosh & Wang, 2003). This dichotomy, Ghosh and Wang contended, can facilitate immigrants' desire to foster connections with their country of origin. In addition, the linkages with immigrants' homeland are strengthened, and the resistance to assimilation is reinforced in the context of today's immigration patterns (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). These patterns, as Suárez-Orozco remarked, no longer reflect clearly defined waves of immigrants who have successfully integrated into the U.S. society, but rather an uninterrupted flow of individuals constantly "replenishing" their cultural and social practices.

Language and identity. The experience of living in two cultures and two languages impacts immigrants' interpretation of both the home and host cultures; it sharpens their awareness of the social hierarchies and power relations within the cultures in which they are immersed (Mahalingam, 2006). Acquiring host country's language, cultural values, and behaviors by no means guarantees that an immigrant will become an integral part of the new society, or that an old identity will be easily replaced with a new one (Morrow, 1997). Learning a new language does not involve a mere re-labeling of concepts; instead, it is a process of mastering the art of living in two social worlds and learning one's place in the power structures of the society that speaks the language (Espín, 2006). Similarly, Espín argued, the power structures within immigrant families may also alter as parents, who may experience greater difficulty acquiring language proficiency, must rely on their children as guides in the new world.

The popular belief among host country members is that immigrants must learn and use the language of the mainstream society in return for the benefits they gain by

living in the new country (Morrow, 1997). Such attitudes, however, often limit immigrants' self-expression and force them to surrender their linguistic identity which has signified their sense of belonging and national identity (Jones, 2001).

Learning to function in a new language constitutes one of the most significant and difficult experiences for new immigrants (Espín, 2006). The forced immersion in the new language, Espín contended, is closely related to identity transformation as immigrants lose their old linguistic community and strive to become part of a new and unfamiliar one. She further argued that living in a new language may be perceived by immigrants as a threat to their identity and an indication that they are detached from their true emotions. This is often accompanied by the fear that they are psychologically moving further away from those left behind, and that they may not eventually return to their country; therefore, they may resist acquiring a new language (Morrow, 1997). Paradoxically, while having to function in a new language may hinder immigrants' self-expression, the new language may also serve as a tool that can help them to "create a new self" and provide a means of expression unavailable in the mother tongue (Espín, 2006, p. 248).

The non-native accent, which immigrants can hardly control, defines their marginalized social location (Omeri & Atkins, 2002). Interestingly, Jones (2001) found that immigrants from England tend to devise strategies to eschew Americanization of their speech and make conscious efforts to maintain their native accent. Their actions, as Jones maintained, can be attributed to the fact that British accent, although foreign, is met with a great deal of respect in the United States. Even when one's British speech is not understood, their accent is still admired – a perk that non-native English speakers

typically do not enjoy. Jones posited that for both native and non-native English speakers, language and accent are equated with their national identities that they struggle to preserve. For English immigrants, however, accent can be a convenient manipulation tool used in everyday interactions to gain advantage and highlight or downplay their identity. Non-native English speakers, on the other hand, do not have this capability, and they constantly feel that they need to make a conscious effort to get rid of their foreign-sounding accent as it emphasizes their less advantaged social position (Jones, 2001).

Toward Transnationalism

In the following section, I will revisit the literature pertaining to the models of immigrant adjustment. Such a review will illuminate the limitations of the existing models of assimilation and acculturation which have been used as frameworks through which immigrant experiences were studied. Following this, I will explicate the concept of transnationalism, which has been demonstrated to more accurately reflect the realities of contemporary immigrants.

Immigrant Adjustment Patterns

Assimilation demands. Early studies of immigration, notwithstanding their various emphases, were based on the assumption that immigrants' success in the new country largely depends on their ability to fully adopt the host country's mainstream culture (Pedraza, 2006). The process of assimilation was perceived as natural, nonreversible, continuous, and unidirectional (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). Such views inevitably resulted in marginalizing the experiences of cultural "others" and essentializing their identity (Mahalingam, 2006). Research exploring immigrant experience focused on the patterns of adaptation or exclusion within the host society

(Vertovec, 2001) and the process of acculturation and incorporation of immigrants into either the mainstream society or ethnic communities within their new countries (Itzigsohn, Cabral, Medina, & Vázquez, 1999). Such scholarship presumed that newcomers' adaptation was a function of their ability and willingness to learn and accept interaction patterns of the country of settlement, consequently ignoring the realities of hegemonic structures which systematically marginalize "the other" (Hegde, 1998).

Assimilation, a term often used interchangeably with acculturation (Suárez-Orozco, 2000), was conceptualized as "the gradual incorporation into the new society via the adaptation of the customs and values of that society with a simultaneous relinquishment or modification of traditional customs and values of the sending society" (Murphy, 2006, p. 80). In this context, immigration was seen as a push and pull process, which caused people to abandon one culture and fully immerse in another (Baia, 1999). Such views were reflected by popular models of immigrant adjustment patterns: Anglo-conformity, melting pot, and cultural pluralism (Gordon, 1964). Anglo-conformity has been defined as the replacement of immigrants' ancestral culture with that of the new society. The melting pot model conveys an idea that, with time, all immigrants will blend within the mainstream culture. Cultural pluralism assumes that immigrants will preserve their culture of origin; yet they will become fully embedded in the larger context of the U.S. American society. Assimilation approaches, as Gordon posited, would lead to immigrants' economic success and social mobility. Gordon also differentiated between cultural and structural assimilation. Cultural assimilation, sometimes referred to as acculturation (Suárez-Orozco, 2000), implies immigrants' adoption of cultural patterns, language, values, and behaviors. Structural assimilation, on the other hand, denotes a full

integration and participation in the opportunity structure in the host society's educational, occupational, political, and social institutions (Pedraza, 2006).

Rapid assimilation equated immigrants' success with the erosion of their ethnic identity; yet, it was believed to ensure immigrants' psychological adjustment and promote their mental health (Murphy, 2006). The conviction that immigrants need to abandon their connections with the homeland and eventually erase memories associated with it was widespread among social sciences researchers, who focused on exploring the factors that facilitated or hindered assimilation (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995).

Acculturation model. Some scholars did acknowledge that immigrants do not neatly progress from separation to assimilation, and that the replacement of the culture of origin with that of the new country may not be the only strategy they select (Murphy, 2006). Acculturation models, such as that of Berry (1990; 1992) were designed to explicate the process of selection of the approach in accordance with the desired interaction outcomes. Berry's model has frequently served as a lens through which the process of immigrants' identity negotiation has been viewed (Phinney et al., 2001).

According to Berry (1990; 1992), individuals adopt one of the four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization, based on two dimensions – maintenance of the heritage culture and the adaptation to the new culture. Thus, immigrants who desire to simultaneously maintain the key elements of their culture and adopt aspects of the culture of the country of settlement are said to adopt the integration approach and develop an integrated identity. This orientation is frequently referred to as biculturalism (Kim, Lujan, & Dixon, 1998). The development of an integrated identity is facilitated in host society settings where an immigrant group has

visibly incorporated aspects of their culture into the country of settlement (Phinney et al., 2001).

Berry's model further suggests that those who absorb the host country's mainstream culture in an attempt to become its integral part, while at the same time losing their own culture, adopt the assimilation approach and develop an assimilated identity. Immigrants who desire to maintain their original culture while rejecting that of the country of settlement choose the separation strategy (Berry, 1992). This orientation is often selected by immigrants since the reality of being perceived in a unified stereotypical manner motivates them to enact a positive self identity (Mahalingam, 2006). When immigrants are not encouraged or permitted to preserve their culture, they may feel that their strategy selection is limited to that of assimilation or separation (Phinney et al., 2001). Finally, individuals opting to adopt the marginalization strategy reject both cultures, which results in alienation and loss of identity (Kim et al., 1998).

Berry's (1992) research indicated that integration may be the preferred strategy in the process of immigrant adaptation, as it allows them to maintain and live by the values and standards of both the host and home countries. However, Phinney et al. (2001) argued that the approach adopted by immigrants is influenced by their individual preferences for ethnic identity preservation, official policies, and the attitudes of the dominant society toward immigrants. Accepting attitudes toward immigrants and allowing them to adapt to the new society at their own pace, as Phinney and colleagues posited, positively affect their psychological well-being.

Limitations of assimilation models. Recent scholarship has acknowledged that existing models of assimilation and acculturation fail to reflect today's patterns of

immigrants' adaptation and involvement (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999; Schiller et al., 1995; Suárez-Orozco, 2000). The assimilationist approach to immigrant adaptation is largely limited by the current patterns of immigration, which differ from the manner in which previous immigrant groups had been incorporated into the U.S. American society (Murphy, 2006). Research suggests that immigrants' assimilation/integration does not necessarily guarantee their acceptance into the host society (Morrow, 1997; Nasdale & Mak, 2003). In fact, assimilation may be accompanied by greater discrimination, which subsequently increases adjustment difficulties (Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2002).

One of the major limitations of the models of assimilation is the fact that they are based on the assumption that individuals can control their environment, and that their adaptation process will be successful as long as they remain open to the new culture (Hegde, 1998). This view, however, as Hegde argued, ignores the hegemonic structures within which individuals are embedded, and it discounts the "politics of in-between" inherent in immigrant experience (p. 36).

The model of the United States as the melting pot has reflected the widespread views that immigrants ought to abandon their connections with the country of origin, and that they should relinquish the memories associated with it (Schiller et al., 1995). Consequently, as Schiller and her colleagues asserted, scholars obscured the fact that many immigrants have always strived to maintain ties with their ancestral culture which continued to influence its members. Even the immigrants who have achieved a level of assimilation in their new place of settlement persist on having political, economic, and social impact in their countries of origin (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). In this regard, Schiller et al. maintained, research has supported the dominant discourse that immigrants should

work toward becoming an integral part of the larger society with their loyalties rooted in the country of residence. In addition, models of assimilation largely focused on the influence that the host society has on the newcomers and the change that immigrants must undergo while adapting to the life in the new country; this perspective ignored the reality that the incoming populations similarly contribute to the alteration of the receiving country (Kivisto, 2001).

To acknowledge the realities of contemporary immigrants, numerous researchers have begun to focus their inquiry on the concept of transnationalism. This new focal point acknowledges that the experience of migration extends beyond the individuals who have left their homelands to those who have stayed behind and those who are yet to come; thus forming real and imagined interconnections of space and time (Falicov, 2005).

Transnationalism

Explication of the concept. The concept of transnationalism, which focuses on modern-day immigrants' participation in multiple social, political, economic, and cultural realities, has attracted scholars' attention since the 1990s (Kivisto, 2001). Earlier immigration studies had largely ignored the fact that immigrants have always maintained various degrees of connections with their homelands – the experience that had been silenced by the dominant conviction of the need for immigrants to cease to look back and instead focus on the future (Falicov, 2005). The nourishment of close ties with the country of origin had been viewed as an early temporary stage in immigrant assimilation, which – if it did not end – was perceived as an anomaly (Baia, 1999). Moreover, immigrants' move to the host country as well as their occasional return to the homeland

was usually viewed as permanent (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). Evidence demonstrates, however, that even the immigrants who come to the United States with a clear intention to stay here permanently, do go back to their country of origin (Margolis, 1995).

Some scholars (e.g., Schiller et al., 1995) argued that in the past immigrants were more likely to break off the ties with their country of origin. Those moving to a new country today, however, tend to create a social world consisting of aspects of both host and home societies. This reality, as Schiller et al. asserted, necessitates a new term “transmigrant.” Transmigrants differ from sojourners as the former do settle in the new country and participate in its economy and political institutions (Schiller et al., 1995). At the same time, however, they maintain physical and/or symbolic ties with their country of origin and oftentimes impact the ideas, beliefs, and institutions of their homeland (Levitt, 1998).

As the scale and complexity of the phenomenon of having dual lives continues to increase, the notion of transnationalism appears useful in capturing the experience of today’s immigrants (Portes et al., 1999). Contemporary immigrants do not abandon their old identities for the sake of assimilating; instead, they choose to simultaneously live in two (or more) cultures and construct bicultural identities; this often means integrating multiple, often diametrically distinct cultures into one social world (Pedraza, 2006).

Although immigrants have almost always maintained connections with their country of origin (Vertovec, 2001), their embeddedness in two cultures has been largely facilitated (although not caused) by the recent developments in modern transportation and communication technologies such as affordable telephone connections, fax, and the Internet (Cheng, 2005). Transnational practices emerged in the context of the relations

between labor and resources generated by global capitalism (Itzigsohn et al., 1999). They have been further intensified by immigrants' increasing role in the economies and politics of their homeland coupled with their social and political marginalization within the host countries (Levitt, 1998). Transnationalism is undoubtedly a response to immigrants being either unwilling or unable to become incorporated into the mainstream culture of the receiving country (Schiller et al., 1995).

Scholars had assumed that the rewards of the immigrant experience lie in becoming part of the mainstream middle-class, white European American Protestant culture, which was to serve as the point of reference in the process of assimilation (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). However, as Suárez-Orozco asserted, the constant flow of individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds, combined with the social segregation between the immigrants of color from the white middle class, makes the point of reference for many newly arrived immigrants not the mainstream society but other individuals of the same ethnicity or nationality. Thus, transnationalism appears as a helpful concept that can assist in exploring how national identities are maintained and readjusted in a multicultural context of the receiving society (Baia, 1999).

Attempts at refining the concept. Ever since transnationalism appeared on researchers' agendas, it has stimulated discussion whether it is indeed a new notion that requires theoretical conceptualization (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). Some scholars have attempted to dispute its utility (e.g., Kivisto, 2001) or delimit and refine its definition (e.g., Portes et al., 1999); however, most researchers agree that immigrants' experience needs to be explored in the context of their new realities, and that the impact of migration

can only be understood if both sides of the border are taken into account (e.g., Levitt, 2001).

Despite significant research on immigrants' transnational practices, the concept remains ambiguous, and its value challenged. For instance, Kivisto (2001) contends that it should be regarded as a form of assimilation rather than an alternative to it. He builds his argument on the belief that immigrants do not live in two worlds simultaneously. Instead, they work on acculturating to the host society, where they focus most of their time and energies. At the same time, they are engaged in nourishing transnational ties with their country of origin. Although transnational ties are often presented as new phenomena, they have always been part of immigrants' experience as they maintained their cultural norms and values in order to be able to return home after a period of sojourn (Kivisto, 2001). This idea is encapsulated in the oldest type of transnationalism – diaspora – the concept which originally denoted the forced dispersion of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians who maintained real and imagined linkages with their communities while facing hostility from the countries of residence (Levitt, 2001).

Some scholars have insisted that immigrant experience has always been intrinsically transnational (e.g., Foner, 1997). Others have argued that modern-day transnational patterns are distinct from those in the past; the emotional ties between the two countries are stronger than ever before (e.g., Pedraza, 2006). Yet, some researchers wished to reserve the concept of transnationalism exclusively to “occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders” and consequently cautioned against treating occasional contact with the country of origin as transnationalism (e.g., Portes et al., 1999, p. 219). These scholars attempted

to delimit the notion to frequent public and tangible practices such as political and business activities as well as transferring funds to assist with the development of immigrants' homelands or hometowns. Portes and his colleagues further argued that it is only appropriate to refer to practices as transnational if they occur among a significant percentage of immigrants and if these practices persist over time. As such, they maintained, not all immigrants are transnationals; in fact, the concept becomes limited to those who either possess significant financial resources to maintain physical connections and/or those whose country of settlement is relatively close to their homeland.

An increasing number of researchers contends, however, that the concept of transnationalism should not ignore sporadic and more informal behaviors such as occasional travel, infrequent participation in economic or political activities in the country of origin (Itzigsohn et al., 1999), and psychological connections (Burrell, 2003). Burrell used the notion of "banal transnationalism" to refer to activities which do not necessarily involve physical movement between the host and home countries. Instead, transnational ties can be based on memories and manifested in the ongoing interest in the homeland, strong identification with it, and intense emotional attachment. Such ties permeate all aspects of transmigrants' everyday lives even though they may not be tangible or visible. Moreover, Burrell posited, transnationalism can be "sporadic and infrequent, something that can be taken up and put down again, depending on the mood and circumstances of the migrant and the nature of the migration" (p. 333). Similarly, Pessar and Mahler (2003) asserted that many immigrants may not engage in any objectively measured transnational activities such as involvement in transnational organizations or financial remittances. Instead, transnational connections can exist on the

level of “thoughts, visions, and fantasies” (p. 818), and they can be called upon when needed or desired.

To provide structure to immigrants’ numerous and heterogeneous practices, Itzigsohn and colleagues (1999) constructed typologies of transnationalism. They differentiated between “narrow” and “broad” transnational practices, both of which involve the country of origin and the host country as the points of reference. Narrow transnational practices refer to political, economic, social, and cultural activities requiring frequent movement, regular personal participation, and a high level of institutionalization. Such involvement encompasses entrepreneurial efforts in both home and host countries or political activism in the U.S. branches of home country’s political parties.

Broad transnationalism, on the other hand, suggests both material and symbolic practices (such as the construction of values and identities) involving infrequent physical movement between two countries, low institutionalization, and sporadic personal involvement. Some of the broad transnational practices include occasional sending of remittances to family members who remained in the home country, building houses in the homeland with an intention to retire there, or an interest in homeland’s politics during elections (Itzigsohn et al., 1999).

Although in the past many immigrants did maintain ties with their homeland, they were unable to do it to the extent possible today (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). Moreover, today’s migrants find it either impossible or undesirable to fully integrate into one society (Schiller et al., 1995). The ability to actually and/or vicariously participate in the emotional, intellectual, social, economic, and political realities of those they had left

behind makes contemporary immigrants' experience qualitatively different as they can live their lives both in the past and in the present; this amalgamation of multiple worlds significantly impacts their sense of self (Pedraza, 2006).

Factors encouraging transnational identities. Recognizing that transnationalism may not be a completely new phenomenon, Pedraza (2006) contended that it is distinct from that practiced by immigrants of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. She suggested that this change is due to the advances in transportation and communication technologies, which facilitate more frequent, immediate, regular, and closer connections with the country of origin. These developments, Pedraza argued, have also changed the dynamics of transnational activities.

Other factors that have contributed to the maintenance of transnational connections include dual nationality provisions allowed by immigrants' home countries, the development of the global economy, a greater acceptance of pluralism and multiculturalism in the United States, and an increasing number of more affluent newcomers (Foner, 1997). Moreover, globalization has allowed individuals who may be planning to emigrate to get socialized into the future host country's values through the exposure to the media and interactions with other immigrants (Levitt, 2001).

Many immigrants live with a hope to eventually return to their homeland in order to enjoy an opportunity to experience the privileged social status that they are perceived to have acquired while living in the U.S. (Itzigsohn et al., 1999). Mahler (2002) remarked that although immigrants may benefit from higher financial rewards in the host country than it would be possible in their homeland, they often do not experience the same social prestige and acceptance within the established elites of the host country. In

this context, she argued, transnational involvement may provide future opportunities to regain the desired social standing.

While the strength of transnational ties is largely influenced by immigrants' desire to continue their relationships in the country of origin, it is also impacted by the level of acceptance and inclusion encountered in the host country (Pedraza, 2006). Many immigrants' experience is largely defined by their insistence on adhering to the idea that, after a period of sojourn, they will return to their homeland; this frequently deferred or unrealized dream promotes transnational connections, and it is cultivated due to the sense of isolation and otherness in the host country (Margolis, 1995).

Frequently, immigrants are faced with negative attitudes and beliefs that they constitute a threat to the host country's social balance and a competition for its scarce economic resources (Omeri & Atkins, 2002). These xenophobic feelings often stem from the fear that immigrants negatively impact the wages of native employees, the belief that low-skilled foreign workers are redundant in the knowledge-based economy, and the conviction that they take advantage of the public services to which they do not sufficiently contribute. These fears seem to be founded on the uncertainty whether newly-arrived immigrants will assimilate, or rather redefine the meaning of being a U.S. American (Suárez-Orozco, 2000).

Apart from the implicit or explicit anti-immigrant attitudes, the process of immigrant adaptation and their economic opportunities are clearly affected by the reality of racial and class segregation and the quality of the neighborhoods and schools to which they are constrained (Pedraza, 2006). These individuals continue to face unfair treatment and discriminatory attitudes based on race, ethnicity, language ability, or accent (Goto et

al., 2002). Thus, it can no longer be taken for granted that immigrants' situation will improve with time, hard work, and the adoption of host culture values and behaviors (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). In fact, as Goto et al. asserted, immigrants' assimilation, increased contact within the mainstream society, and economic success do not necessarily guarantee success. In addition, immigrants' educational and professional credentials earned abroad are frequently discounted, which leads to underemployment and lower earnings (Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006). Moreover, Esses and colleagues contended that organizations' inability to correctly assess the value of skills acquired abroad combined with their belief of insurmountable cultural differentness continue to allow employers to use the "lack of fit" argument during the hiring or promotion process.

Costs and benefits of transnational identities. Recent research stresses that immigrants' sense of belonging can no longer be perceived as a dichotomy between here and there, but rather as simultaneous attachments to multiple homelands (Cheng, 2005). Many immigrants are not uprooted individuals directing their energies toward assimilating into the new country but rather transmigrants "whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state" (Schiller et al., 1995, p. 48). Some scholars believe that the maintenance of transnational connections does not preclude assimilation; in fact, immigrants' transnational and assimilative practices coexist and interact with gender, race, social class, experiences of xenophobia and discrimination to form multiple and flexible identities (Falicov, 2005). During interactions, individuals switch between their numerous identities according to situational constraints and desired outcomes (Ghosh & Wang, 2003).

In this regard, Cheng (2005) asserted that frequent physical and symbolic travels between the host country and the country of origin do not weaken the sense of belonging but rather transform it to one that is transnational and multilocal. Aranda (2003) highlighted the importance of transnationally maintained social networks for immigrants' adjustment and their feeling of belonging, and she demonstrated that for many immigrants the weakening of these ties constitutes a source of struggle and suffering. Other researchers, however, recounted experiences of transmigrants who feel alienated and "othered" both within the host country and among their co-nationals when they return to their homeland (Ghosh & Wang, 2003; Hegde, 1998).

Yet, some scholars argued that the connection with the life left behind and the maintenance of social and familial relationships in the country of origin can significantly assuage the stress and the feeling of alienation associated with adjusting to living in a new country (e.g., Portes et al., 1999). It can provide a sense of comfort and security by making immigrants feel that they have a place to go back to if their experience in the host country turns out unsatisfactory (Murphy, 2006). Immigrants may choose to cultivate their ties by traveling "back home," providing goods and money to those left behind, helping their relatives to visit them in the United States, or locally seeking out goods and services which will allow them to preserve traditional customs (Foner, 1997). Some maintain transnational connections by seeking out other co-nationals within the host country and form relationships just on the basis of the common cultural background (Ghosh & Wang, 2003).

Although the bond with, and emotional support from, the loved ones "back home" can contribute to immigrants' psychological well-being and the preservation of ethnic

and/or national identity, such contact may also cause immigrants to adopt a sojourner status and lead to the feelings of “frustrating nostalgia” and depression (Murphy, 2006, p. 84). Immigrants with homes in two countries may constantly be experiencing loss and homesickness always missing the home from which they are far away (Ghosh & Wang, 2003). The salutary effect of transnational ties that are frequently founded on, or maintained, through imagination and memory may also be limited since the connections are typically occasional rather than constituting part of daily interactions (Falicov, 2005).

The creation of transnational spaces may also serve as a strategy that helps immigrants navigate the social, economic, and political climate in the United States that tends to marginalize and alienate them (Portes et al., 1999). The feeling of alienation can be especially potent among recent immigrant groups since “we love immigrants at a safe historical distance but are much more ambivalent about those joining us now” (Suárez-Orozco, 2000, p. 7). Immigrants’ multiple loyalties increase host country members’ anxiety and fear toward foreign-born individuals as long as the multicentered connections between people and places are ignored or misinterpreted (Cheng, 2005).

Transnationalism and gender. Many female scholars (e.g., Aranda, 2003; Espín, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Pessar & Mahler 2003), who emphasize that gender identities are socially constructed and fluid rather than fixed, have advocated for exploring how gender relations impact immigrants’ realities. They observed that, although both immigrant men and women frequently engage in supporting their families and communities in their homeland, the nature of these activities varies across gender lines (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). For instance, women adopt less visible roles such as preparing parcels to be sent to the homeland, while men’s involvement tends to be more

public and status-oriented such as decision making and the implementation of the projects (Burrell, 2003). Similarly, male transmigrants may engage in transnational behaviors that will facilitate their return to the homeland, where they can enjoy a higher social status; women, on the other hand, tend to be more focused on ensuring that their families are settled in the host country (Mahler, 2002).

A growing body of research recognizes immigrants' transnational practices that extend beyond the exchange of money, goods, and tangible resources to connections founded on ideas, attitudes, behaviors, values, and beliefs (e.g., Aranda, 2003; Levitt, 1998; Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). These scholars asserted that many immigrants, particularly females, engage in "subjective" transnationalism which does not involve physical movement but rather an exchange of psychosocial resources through phone conversations.

Gender roles impact men's and women's options in terms of the nature of transnational ties, including access to, and the frequency of, their trips back to the homeland (Pessar & Mahler, 2003). Thus, for women, less tangible emotional connections "form an integral layer of [their] social embeddedness, one that complements their local lives by providing them with the tools to construct a sense of belonging and, in so doing, making settlement more bearable" (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006, p. 341). Viruell-Fuentes contended that the emotional support that female immigrants receive from those in the country of origin is instrumental in dealing with the difficult issues of settlement in the new country (e.g., constant longing for home). She added that women's transnational experience is largely defined by the caretaking work they continue to provide to their siblings or parents "back home," albeit mostly on an emotional level.

For many female immigrants, the irreconcilable desire to be in both places simultaneously in order to reap professional and economic benefits from immigration while at the same time ensuring closeness and providing care to relatives left behind constitutes a significant source of stress (Aranda, 2003). Consequently, the costs and benefits associated with transnationalism are also gendered; while immigrant women may greatly benefit from transnational involvement, their level of stress is heightened by their gendered role of a caretaker (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). Thus, it is quite rare that women conceive of immigration as a liberating experience (Morrow, 1997). As access to resources, opportunities, and social networks tends to be limited for female immigrants, they struggle with the feelings of alienation, which can only be alleviated seemingly by emotional involvement with those “back home” (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006).

Female immigrants constantly struggle with societal pressures to adhere to the gender roles of both the country of origin and the host society (Espín, 2006). The situation of “transnational mothers” is particularly difficult in this context (Hondegneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997, p. 567). In order to provide the best future for their children, they leave them behind in their homeland to engage in paid domestic work in the United States. This mothering arrangement, however, is not socially accepted either in the country of origin or settlement, where the expectation is that children will reside with their own mothers. Such a mothering pattern, which is increasingly common among immigrant women of color, highlights gendered social and emotional costs of transnationalism (Hondegneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

Impact of transnational ties on the homeland. Some scholars have explored how immigrants’ transnational connections affect immigrants’ homelands and individuals who

have stayed behind (e.g., Levitt, 1998; Vertovec, 2001). Transmigrants' countries of origin oftentimes significantly benefit from the financial and social resources acquired through this relationship (Vertovec, 2001). As Vertovec suggested, the money sent "back home" not only supports families but may also contribute to community development with enterprises that support health and sports facilities, water systems, or places of worship. Despite its salutary effect on the sending countries, Vertovec posited, transnationalism may at the same time contribute to the creation of new status hierarchies and economic dependence.

Transnational involvement of those who emigrated frequently impacts the ideas, beliefs, and values of their co-nationals in the countries of origin, which may lead to a progressive change of gender relations, educational institutions, and professional landscape (Levitt, 1998). As such, transnational ties are instrumental in the formation, maintenance, and negotiation of collective identities both in the sending and receiving societies (Vertovec, 2001).

Transnationalism and second-generation of immigrants. Many researchers (e.g., Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Portes et al., 1999; Louie, 2006; Viruell-Fuentes, 2006; Wolf, 2002) have explored transnationalism as it extends beyond the first generation of immigrants. These scholars posited that children of immigrants maintain symbolic connections with their parents' homeland even though they may have never visited it. Ancestral culture, which constitutes a place "to return to through the imagination" (p. 369) is frequently used as a point of reference and the basis for evaluating the appropriateness of behavior (Wolf, 2002).

Interestingly, Louie (2006) found that the extension of transnational practices and transnational identities to the second generation may be contingent upon individuals' socioeconomic status and the nature of intergenerational communication. Thus, Louie's Chinese participants, whose families and communities lacked the financial resources to go back and forth between the United States and China, experienced a sense of foreignness to the traditions of their parents. These second-generation immigrants did not maintain the language of their ancestors, and resisted the authoritarian model of parenting dominant within their families. Although they did consider themselves as Chinese, used ethnic media, and engaged in ancestral worship, they strived to differentiate themselves from immigrants. Dominican respondents, on the other hand, whose intergenerational communication was characterized as more open, and who managed to maintain the language of their immigrant parents, identified strongly with the Dominican culture as well as other immigrants. Notwithstanding their socioeconomic standing, they strengthened their connections with the parents' country of origin by frequent back-and-forth movement.

As the foregoing review of literature illustrates, transnationalism refers to a wide range of behaviors. It includes frequent and regular travel between the host and home countries, little physical movement of those who constantly utilize both countries' material and symbolic resources, as well as living in a transnationalized social space that involves no actual movement. In this regard, transnational practices make it impossible to perceive the process of identity and collectivity formation as taking place within geographic or national boundaries (Itzigsohn et al., 1999). Instead, immigrants living within transnational social fields construct their identities while continually being

exposed to multiple sets of cultural values, social expectations, patterns of behavior and interaction (Levitt, 2001). In order to provide a theoretical framework through which the negotiation of transnational immigrants' multiple identities can be examined, a review of the communication theory of identity follows.

Communication Theory of Identity

Origins and Primary Authors

The communication theory of identity (CTI) advances the understanding of the relationship between communication and identity by conceptualizing identity as an intrinsically communicative process instead of regarding it as the mere product of interaction (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). Hecht, Jackson, and Ribeau (2003) contended that identity is “a transaction in which messages and values are exchanged” (p. 230). Jackson (2002) further noted that “it would be nice to think that as we speak we are simply exchanging information, but even in casual contact with others, we are constantly exchanging codes of personhood, worldview, indeed our identities” (p. 359).

The theory originated from research focused on African American and Mexican American cultures and ethnic identities (e.g., Hecht, Ribeau, & Alberts, 1989). This initial line of research examined African Americans' and Mexican Americans' communicative patterns (e.g., Hecht, Ribeau, & Sedano, 1990), and it emerged out of the need to elucidate the key role of communication in identity negotiation (Hecht, et al., 1993).

The primary author of the theory, Michael Hecht, and his colleagues centered the development of the communication theory of identity on the assumption that culture and communication are inextricably interwoven – the former exists because it is constantly

enacted, while enactments have meanings only in cultural contexts (Hecht et al., 1993). According to the theory originators, cultures inevitably ensue from historical and social contexts, and they are generated and perpetuated through the expression of self (Hecht et al., 2003).

The communication theory of identity incorporated the classical views of self with modern and postmodern approaches, resulting in a multilayered notion of identity (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005). These researchers conceptualized identity as the interpenetration of polarity advocated by the Greek perspectives on self, holism inherent in African and Asian standpoints, African harmony, Asian collectivism, Greek individualism, modern stability, and postmodern multiplicity and volatility of identities. Such a view of identity elucidates its inherent complexity, its simultaneously enduring and situational nature, as well as its individual and social aspects (Hecht et al., 2003).

CTI is also rooted in social identity theory and identity theory, which presuppose the interconnectedness and interdependence of the individual and the society (Hecht et al., 2005). Social identity theory proposes that individuals assume social identities through their group memberships, which in turn impact their attitudes and behaviors toward their own and other social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Identity theory, on the other hand, focuses on the social roles that individuals have internalized through the interaction within their social networks, and which they are expected to enact in order to reflect their group memberships (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Although the scholarship of social identity and identity theory researchers largely contributed to the formulation of the basic assumptions of CTI, these perspectives did not view communication as central in the interplay between the individual and the society. As such, exploring identity

through a communicative lens is one of the major contributions of Hecht and his colleagues' theory (Hecht et al., 1993; Hecht et al., 2003).

Assumptions of CTI

The communication theory of identity has been built on ten basic assumptions (Hecht et al., 2005). First, identities have individual, enacted, relational, and communal properties. These are frequently referred to as layers or frames, and they will be explicated in the next section. The second assumption on which Hecht and colleagues founded their theory postulates that identities are simultaneously enduring and changing. The researchers explained that "although the core of identity may be constant, its expression may change [and] these changes then manifest themselves in pressure to change the core" (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 235).

The third assumption of CTI states that identities are expressed at affective, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual levels. The fourth assumption is that identities are enacted in everyday interactions, and they have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. It is not only the topic of the conversation but also the relationship between the interactants that is salient to identity negotiation (Hecht et al., 2003).

Hecht and colleagues (2005) further suggested that identities involve both subjective and ascribed meaning, which constitutes the fifth assumption of CTI. As will be explained in the next section, individuals' identities are shaped not only by their own self-definitions but also by internalizing views that others hold about them.

Sixth, identities are codes expressed in conversations, and they define membership in communities. As Hecht and colleagues (2003) asserted, "identity is a

code for being. It provides the means for understanding self, interaction, relationships, and society by defining the nature of self and social life” (p. 231).

Hecht et al.’s (2005) seventh assumption refers to identities being communicated by means of core symbols and labels. Labels provide insight into the distinct meanings, norms, values, and beliefs that individuals assign to each of the labels, consequently enlightening with which communal identity they associate (Witteborn, 2004).

The eighth assumption of CTI conveys the idea that identities prescribe the modes for appropriate and effective communication. In other words, “identity is enacted in social interaction, and the conditions of interaction influence identity enactments” (Golden, Niles, & Hecht, 1998, p. 64). This notion is related to the ninth assumption, which states that identity impacts interaction by shaping expectations and motivating behavior.

The last assumption of CTI postulates that identities emerge through relationships with others, and they are communicated through social roles, behaviors, and symbols. These key assumptions will be further explicated in the next section in the context of the fundamental ideas and terms of the communication theory of identity.

Fundamental Ideas and Terms

According to CTI, identity is a naturally communicative and relational phenomenon – communication builds, sustains, and transforms identity, while at the same time identity is expressed through communication (Hecht et al., 2003). In the process of interaction, individuals internalize the prescriptions of social roles as their identities, and concurrently communicatively express these identities as social behavior (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

The multidimensional and holistic nature of identity is expressed in the major assumption of CTI that identity is located in four interconnected layers: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht et al., 2003). The theory originators posited that the personal level of identity encompasses individuals' self-concepts or self-definitions, which are partially constructed from the messages received from relational others. These self-cognitions provide clues as to how individuals view themselves in general as well as in specific contexts and situations. Furthermore, self-concepts delineate expectations and motivate behaviors (Hecht et al., 1993).

The enacted frame reflects the idea that identities are communicatively manifested during social interactions, which reflects one of the assumptions of CTI that identities are emergent and communicated either directly or indirectly through social roles, behaviors, and symbols (Hecht et al., 2003). This frame treats self as a performance and makes communication the location of identity (Hecht et al., 2005). As such, "communication is fundamentally about being – rather than, as is commonly described, conceptualized, and theorized in mainstream communication studies, processes of meaning making, or even processes of message production, consumption, and negotiation" (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 6). Viewing communication as emergent, as Rodriguez asserted, conceptualizes communication as something that people can potentially experience and embody, not only what they actually understand and express.

The relational layer explicates how identities emerge in reference to others, and how they are mutually constructed and negotiated through relationships (Hecht et al., 2003). There are three aspects of this frame. Firstly, individuals reflect upon themselves in terms of the people with whom they interact, which contributes to the ongoing

alteration of their identity. Furthermore, identity enactments are largely impacted by other's ascriptions and views of the individual. Secondly, people gain their identities through relationships with others, including their friendships, romantic partners, or family members. Thirdly, relationships themselves, such as married couples, constitute units of identity (Hecht et al., 2005).

The communal frame points to a group of people or a particular community bonded by a collective memory as the locus of identity (Hecht et al., 2003). The community has its own identity, and it illustrates the joint identities of the individuals who associate with it (Golden, Niles, & Hecht, 1998). Thus, identities arise from group associations and social networks (Hecht et al., 2005). Labels, rituals, artifacts, and communicative practices are frequently used by a collective to assert and convey group identities and provide frames of reference for its members (Witteborn, 2004).

Such an explication of identity reflects its individual, social, and communal attributes as well as its both stable and alterable nature (Hecht et al., 2003). CTI proposes that identities constitute codes which are communicated in conversations, and which characterize the connection with a community (Hecht et al., 1993). The four frames of identity are always interpenetrated and never separate; one's personal identity, for example, cannot be considered without the context of the relational, enacted, and communal layers (Hecht et al., 2005). Although the frames coexist and cooperate in the composition of a person's identity, they do not always work in accord; instead they may contradict or compete with one another revealing inevitable identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004). For instance, the identity that the community or the relational partner ascribes to an individual may contradict his or her sense of self-being (Hecht et al., 2002).

Existing CTI Research

In the following section, I will review studies where communication theory of identity has been utilized as a framework guiding the inquiry. First, I will discuss research exploring how ethnic labels are used to describe ethnic identity. Next, I will revisit studies referring to the interpenetration of the four layers of identity. Following this, I will briefly describe new directions that researchers identified as opportunities for expanding the communication theory of identity.

Ethnic labels and ethnic identity. Initially CTI was used as a foundation to explore how people utilize labels while depicting their cultures and ethnic identities, what meanings they ascribe to these labels, how communication expresses identity, and how the salience of one's ethnic identity is enacted during interethnic encounters (e.g., Hecht et al., 1993; Larkey & Hecht, 1995). While examining the meanings of the labels most widely used by African Americans, Larkey and Hecht found that the label "African American" had much stronger implications of political activism than the ethnic label "Black." Furthermore, Larkey and Hecht's cross-cultural comparison of African Americans and European Americans also revealed that the salience of ethnic identity is not equally strong for all groups, and it does not function uniformly across interethnic boundaries. Similar conclusions in regard to the notion that ethnic labels function as meaningful symbols of identity were revealed by the studies investigating ethnic similarities and differences among African American, Mexican American, and European American youth in their resistance to drugs (Hecht, Trost, Bator, & MacKinnon, 1997; Marsiglia, Kulis, & Hecht, 2001). Researchers pursuing this line of work continue to acknowledge the salience of social categories that can function as core identity symbols

(Witteborn, 2004). At the same time, however, they emphasize the multilayered character of identity and recognize the impracticality of homogenizing ethnic group labels (Hecht et al., 2005).

Interesting conclusions regarding the communication of group membership through identity labels were reached by Witteborn (2004). Her study explored the enactment of the communal frame of identity among Arab women living in the United States before and after the events of September 11th, 2001. Witteborn's analysis revealed that the label *Arab* before September 11th emphasized the communal identity unifying all individuals of Arab descent regardless of their nationality. Shared language and core cultural values regarding family relationships were inherent in this ethnic identity label. Although the participants did use the national labels such as Palestinian, Egyptian, or Lebanese to describe themselves before September 11th, the frequency of their usage significantly rose after the tragedy, which allowed the women to accentuate their unique backgrounds. By conveying their communal identities in this manner, they emphasized their distinct national identities to verbalize the lack of uniformity of the Arab identity and to defy the stereotypes of the realities in which all Arab women are assumed to function.

Communication theory of identity also has served as an interpretive framework for cultural identity negotiation research (Hecht et al., 2003). This includes Jackson's (1999) work on core symbols, codes, and prescriptions that African Americans and European Americans use to define themselves communally through conversation. Jackson's work extends one of Hecht's core assumptions that identity is negotiated, and he develops a new theoretical approach – cultural contracts theory. This perspective

centralizes culture in the process of identity negotiation by considering the different types of identity contracts that every individual inevitably signs while interacting with others (Jackson, 2002). These contracts serve to “preserve, protect, and define the self” and include non-negotiable, partially negotiable, and completely negotiable agreements (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 241).

Interpenetration of identity layers/ identity gaps. An extensive line of CTI research involves the interpenetration and the salience of the four layers of identity (e.g., Golden et al., 1998; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Hecht & Faulkner, 2000; Hecht et al., 2002; Marsiglia & Hecht, 1999). These studies examined the identity layers collectively in order to discover how they influence one another. Hecht et al. (2003) conceptualized such interpenetration of frames as identity negotiations. Golden and his colleagues, for instance, explored how Jewish Americans constantly create and negotiate their unique identities by revealing and concealing their Jewishness. This is accomplished through varying situational and contextual salience of either the personal, communal, relational, or enacted layer of identity. Similarly, Marsiglia and Hecht demonstrated how the interaction between the communal and personal gendered Jewish identity is expressed in core symbols, labels, and behaviors.

The possibility of closeting of self was also the focus of Hecht and Faulkner’s (2000) as well as Hecht et al.’s (2002) studies, which further revealed the complexity and the varying levels of centrality or importance of Jewish identity in specific situations and relationships. These studies manifested that the decisions regarding the concealment or disclosure of the communal identity are largely based on the potential ramifications of the selected enactments.

The examination of identity negotiation among first-generation college students also demonstrates the varying levels of the salience of group membership (Orbe, 2004). Orbe observed that the centrality of identity of first-generation college students interacted with the demographics of the campuses, the participants' race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and age, as well as other situational factors. Notably, the study revealed that first-generation college students do not have a strong sense of communal identity.

The interpenetration and the contradictions between any four identity frames were conceptualized as identity gaps in Jung and Hecht's (2004) research. These authors specifically focused on the gaps between personal and relational layers as well as between personal and enacted layers; however, they encouraged others to explore the discrepancies among and between all the other identity levels to further explicate the dynamic nature of self. Jung and Hecht's study emphasized the frequent divergence between individuals' self-concepts and the views that others hold for them as well as the contradictions of one's self-definition and its interactional expression. Taken together, the line of research focused on the interplay of identities demonstrates that all the four identity layers are always present and interpenetrated. This interpenetration inherently occurs although one or two frames of identity may be more salient than others in different contexts and situations (Hecht et al., 2005).

New contexts for CTI. Researchers continue to expand the application of the ideas encompassed in CTI beyond the study of ethnic identities from which the framework originated (Hecht et al., 2005). One of the new directions for CTI involves the construction of illness identities through communicative events and transformations of

patients' self (e.g., Kundrat & Nussbaum, 2003). Hecht et al. (2005) also suggested that the rapid development of computer-mediated communication calls for new applications of CTI in the contexts where individuals' identities are not as easily discerned by interactants and therefore can be enacted in a manner that individuals see fit in certain situations, contexts, and relationships. It appears that the negotiation of transnational identities is another productive context where the interpenetration of multiple identity dimensions can be effectively explored.

Research Question

This chapter reviewed the literature pertaining to immigrant experience and the formation of their identities. The studies on transnationalism discussed therein illustrate the uniqueness of the realities of contemporary immigrants, who constantly draw from experiences they have gathered in more than one social world. As such, many modern-day immigrants negotiate their multiple identities within the social worlds that cross physical and emotional borders (Vertovec, 2001).

Since transnationalism allows viewing immigrants' identities as flexible, it necessitates the examination of the ways in which the multiple identities are manipulated or enacted in different contexts and situations (Mahler, 2002). In this regard, communication theory of identity appears to be the most appropriate theoretical framework through which the intricacies of complex and fluid transnational immigrant identities can be explicated. As the notion of transnationalism deemphasizes geographical connections (Levitt, 2001), it provides new opportunities for the exploration of individual, relational, enacted, and communal identities as explicated in the communication theory of identity.

The four layers of self collectively provide guidance for appropriate and effective communication (Hecht et al., 2005). They underscore the role of societal prescriptions of conduct – as individuals define their specific identities, they receive implicit clues as to how they should act (Hecht et al., 2003). Since immigrants are continuously struggling to incorporate salient aspects of their multicultural selves (Hegde, 1998), the communication theory of identity seems particularly appropriate as a lens through which the negotiation of transnational immigrant identity can be examined. Hence, the research question asked in this study is:

RQ1: How do transnational immigrants communicatively negotiate the multiple dimensions of their identities?

The following chapter details the methodology and methods that were utilized to arrive at the answers to the research question.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological inquiry served as the methodology which allowed for an inductive exploration of the complexities of transnational immigrants' lived experiences. As Burrell (2003) asserted, no two people experience transnationalism in the same manner; thus, a qualitative approach is necessary to gain insights into the similarities and differences of transnational identity negotiations. Phenomenology, as the "theory of the unique" (van Manen, 1990, p. 6) undoubtedly illuminated the heterogeneity and distinctiveness of immigrants' realities by presenting them with an opportunity to voice their communicative lived experiences in an unconstrained manner (Nelson, 1989). By increasing awareness of "the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted" (van Manen, 1990, p. 8), such an inductive methodology revealed the subtleties of the nature of transnational ties and the nuances of identity enactments (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). Phenomenology allowed for capturing the meaning of the everyday experience of being an immigrant as it is lived by those individuals (Omeri & Atkins, 2002). This chapter details the key concepts and assumptions of phenomenological inquiry, and it explicates how phenomenology was utilized to explore the lived experiences of immigrants.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is simultaneously a philosophy of conscious experience and a qualitative methodology that serves to rigorously describe, thematize, and interpret the meanings of the taken-for-grantedness of the world (Nelson, 1989). Phenomenology, or the study of lived experience or phenomena (van Manen, 1990), was originally developed

by Husserl, and continued in the works of Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Wertz, 2005). Wertz argued that phenomenology originated as a reaction to the dehumanization prevalent among researchers in psychology. He further stated that this methodology recognizes and respects persons' viewpoints and provides an opportunity to capture insights into first-person experience and the distinctiveness of human behavior. In the field of communication, scholars such as Nelson, Deetz, Lanigan, and Orbe have used phenomenology to gain deeper understanding of their co-researchers' lived experiences and to honor the multiplicity of perspectives found within the life-world (Orbe, 2000).

Van Manen (1990) described phenomenology as the study of the world as it is experienced pre-reflectively, prior to our conscious categorizations and conceptualizations. Phenomenologists strive to explore "prescientific life-world" as it presents itself to consciousness and as it is "encountered in everyday affairs" (Wertz, 2005, p. 168). As such, van Manen noted, this approach to research allows for an intimate understanding of what phenomena mean and how they are experienced. The primary question that phenomenologists attempt to answer is "What is this or that kind of experience like?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). In this regard, phenomenological research is the study of essences of a shared experience (Husserl, 1962). It allows for an understanding of a phenomenon as it is seen through the eyes of the persons who have lived it (Patton, 2002). The ultimate goal of phenomenology is to return to the world as we immediately experience it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Underlying Assumptions of Phenomenology

Van Manen (1990) delineated several key assumptions on which phenomenological research is based. First, phenomenology does not accept a possibility of an objective researcher (Giorgi, 1994). Qualitative researchers inevitably bring their personal assumptions, beliefs, and opinions into their research as they are immersed in the world (Lanigan, 1979). However, they must be free of value judgments in order to fully focus on the meaning of the situations as they are provided by co-researchers' experience (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, phenomenologists need to acknowledge and state their position by bracketing it (Wertz, 2005). Husserl (1962) argued that scholars must also set aside their scientific assumptions to gain access to the phenomena as they are lived and exist prior to scientific knowledge; they have to refrain from beginning their inquiry with a set of preconceived assumptions. However, while analyzing the lived experiences of other persons, researchers recollect their own experiences and reflect on those of others in order to capture the meanings of co-researchers' lived world (Wertz, 2005). Thus, the quality of phenomenological research relies on the researcher's ability to "set aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

This idea is related to the second assumption on which phenomenological inquiry is based: research does not begin with preconceived notions and expectations of what needs to be revealed (Lanigan, 1979). In this sense, phenomenology is "discovery oriented; it wants to find out what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced" (van Manen, 1990, p. 29). As such, it is an inductive approach, where a

researcher strives to apprehend the situation without first making predictions about it (Patton, 2002). The researcher does not predetermine the reality; instead, she describes it as it is perceived by research participants (Giorgi, 1994).

The third assumption of phenomenological inquiry conveys the idea that researchers need to garner “descriptive lived experiences to which the person gives consciousness” (p. 607) and study them in an open and unconstrained manner (Orbe, 2000). This is possible through the processes of bracketing and free imaginative variation (which will be described later in the chapter). An important characteristic of phenomenology is that ambiguity is not to be avoided; on the contrary, it is considered valuable, productive, and necessary in the process of inquiry (Lanigan, 1979).

The fourth assumption on which phenomenology is centered refers to our inherent need to constantly desire to know more about the world and the way we experience it (van Manen, 1990). Thus, van Manen argued, researchers’ need to remain attentive to details even though they may appear inconsequential and are typically taken for granted. Phenomenology does not constitute grasping the obvious and the explicit; instead, the researcher needs to read between the lines to obtain a deeper understanding of co-researchers’ lived experience (Wertz, 2005). Such an approach embraces the life-world in its entirety as opposed to only what can be easily observed (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). That which is not easily observable and may have been “forgotten through sedimentation of our awareness of ourselves in everyday life” (p. 224) has to be accessed through detailed descriptions of lived experience and described by a phenomenologist (Nelson, 1989).

The fifth assumption of phenomenology refers to the fact that this approach is not concerned with studying subjects or individuals; instead, it is the study of persons – such choice of vocabulary emphasizes the distinctive social positioning of each human being (van Manen, 1990). Persons, according to van Manen, have consciousness, and they act purposefully. Similarly, those who participate in research are not referred to as merely participants or subjects but rather co-researchers who partake in discovering the knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Such a conceptualization expresses the importance of their active participation and involvement throughout the process, and it allows for sensitivity toward the uniqueness of others; it also centralizes co-researchers' role during the entire research process (Orbe, 2000). This premise conveys one of the fundamental ideas of phenomenology that it is not only the context and experience that is central to knowing, but also “the knower is a large part of what is known” (Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005, p. 1265). Phenomenology, unlike traditional empiricism, allows or even encourages the researcher to disclose to co-researchers, as such an approach frequently elicits richer descriptions (Nelson, 1989).

Lastly, phenomenologists do not work with data, which is considered to be collected from study participants and analyzed with a predetermined agenda in mind (Lanigan, 1979). Instead, phenomenological research involves *capta*, which is viewed as something that has been “taken from experience and allows people to assign meaning to themselves” (Orbe, 2000, p. 608). While data is concerned with hypotheses, *capta* refers to conscious experience (Lanigan, 1979). As such, phenomenology allows co-researchers to speak in their own voices without the researcher modifying their experience (van Manen, 1990).

Three Stages of Phenomenological Inquiry

Phenomenology involves a synergistic three-stage process: gathering descriptions of lived experiences (description), reviewing these descriptions in order to reveal essential themes (reduction of capta), and discovering how the essential themes collectively reflect the quintessence of the phenomenon (interpretation) (Nelson, 1989). These three phases, as Nelson posited, are interdependent, intertwined, and not merely summative, and researcher's account of the phenomena is never composed in a linear manner. She further argued that no two phenomenological studies will proceed in exactly the same fashion; instead, the procedures are uniquely determined by the phenomenon under study.

Phenomenological descriptions. Phenomenological descriptions must begin with researchers reflecting on their own experience and acknowledging their subjectivity toward the phenomenon under study; this allows them to remain open to their co-researchers life-worlds (Wertz, 2005). Thus, a researcher engaging in a phenomenological inquiry needs to articulate and then bracket his or her biases, assumptions, and prior knowledge of the phenomenon, as explained earlier in the chapter (Husserl, 1962).

In order to focus on the phenomenon “as it reveals itself to the experiencing subject in all its concreteness and particularly” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 10), descriptions of experiential meanings must be garnered directly from co-researchers as they disclose the essence of the phenomena (Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005). According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological research is empirical, and it commences from concrete experiential capta gathered through a variety of methods, including in-depth interviews,

focus groups, and critical incidents. These methods and the utilization of open-ended questions allow co-researchers to freely express their experiences and meanings they assign to them (Patton, 2002). As van Manen stated, “phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience – is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience” (p. 27).

Phenomenological reduction. The goal of the second stage of phenomenology is to determine the essential parts of the capta (Lanigan, 1979). It is where the researcher starts to organize the text into preliminary themes (Moustakas, 1994). This step begins with co-researchers’ descriptions being reduced to a written transcript (Nelson, 1989). Nelson argued that the process of transcription is crucial as it increases the researcher’s awareness of the phenomenon as described by co-researchers. In addition, it allows the researcher to re-live the interview with all its meanings as expressed not only through words but through the intensity of voices (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

During the process of phenomenological reduction, transcripts are first read openly without the research focus in mind (Giorgi, 1994). Such a review of descriptions allows for capturing co-researchers’ meaning in a broad context (Wertz, 2005) and “opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 92).

Having reacquainted herself with the descriptions, the researcher re-reads each transcript individually and independently while highlighting “words, phrases, and recollections that emerge as essential in the lived experiences of the co-researchers” (Orbe, 2000, p. 615). The preliminary themes that will have emerged during the initial reading and re-reading of the transcripts need to be further reviewed in order to eliminate

repetitiveness, overlap, and redundancy (Moustakas, 1994). To arrive at the definition of the phenomenon, the researcher must utilize imaginative free variation, which involves imaging the existence of the phenomenon without a particular theme (Nelson, 1989). As van Manen (1990) explained, the researcher must ask herself questions such as, “Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon? Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?” (p. 107).

Imaginative free variation provides rigor in getting to the essence of phenomena, as it allows distinguishing between their fundamental and incidental features (Husserl, 1962). As such, this step is indispensable in the process of reduction since it helps determine “what parts of the experience are truly part of our consciousness and which parts are merely assumed” (Lanigan, 1979, p. 7).

The technique of imaginative free variation enables the researcher to determine specific characteristics that are essential for the existence of the phenomenon, and whose absence would not render it what it is (van Manen, 1990). It makes it possible for a pattern of experience and the shape of the phenomenon to emerge by contextualizing “various features of the phenomenon within the whole, and [allowing] for comparison and contrast” (Nelson, 1989, p. 235). Although the ultimate goal of phenomenology is to grasp the essence of the phenomenon, it must be acknowledged that a complete reduction of the lived experience is impossible (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Phenomenological interpretation. The third phase of phenomenology – interpretation – “attempts to understand the meaning which links the phenomenon under investigation with consciousness” (Nelson, 1989, p. 236). Its goal is to discover the

meanings that were not immediately evident during description and reduction – “the meaning as the person lived it” (Lanigan, 1979, p. 40). In order to do so, the researcher disposes of the themes which are not fundamental in order to arrive at the essential meaning that will express the core of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

The ultimate objective of phenomenological interpretation consists in the emergence of a revelatory phrase – a central idea that interrelates essential themes and captures the essence of the phenomenon (Nelson, 1989). This “seemingly unimportant phrase/utterance can be [is] the preconscious, prereflective meaning used by the respondent” (Nelson, 1989, p. 236). The revelatory phrase emerges as a result of “hyper-reflection,” which involves reinterpreting initial themes in order to arrive at the meanings that transcend what co-researchers explicitly stated (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

It is important to note that phenomenologists do not attempt to make claims about the universality of an experience; instead, they attempt to capture its richness and uniqueness, and may seek generality within a specific context (Wertz, 2005). As such, thematization allows capturing the differentiations within a co-researcher’s account as well as differentiations among co-researchers (Nelson, 1989). Thus, a researcher must take heed to explicate both commonality and distinctiveness of human experience (Orbe, 2000). In this regard, phenomenology appears particularly suitable for articulating the diverse experiences of immigrants.

The objective of the three steps of description, reduction, and interpretation is to grasp the essential meaning of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1999). In this study, phenomenology serves as a tool to reveal the essence of immigrants’ lived experience. In order to achieve this goal, the experiential descriptions of co-researchers were examined

to ultimately arrive at the understanding of transnational immigrants' identity negotiations. The interpretation offered here is merely one possibility, as a single interpretation of a phenomenon never exists (Van Manen, 1990). What follows is a detailed description of how phenomenological description, reduction, and interpretation were accomplished.

Methods

This study used in-depth interviews, a method frequently utilized by phenomenologists, to gather rich descriptions of co-researchers' lived experiences (Patton, 2002). Before I discuss this method in detail, I will first describe the co-researchers and the process utilized to invite them to participate in the study.

Co-researchers

Co-researchers participating in this study included eight women and nine men who emigrated from their homelands at the age of 18 or later during their adult lives (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). Although I had planned to ask 15-20 people to participate in the study, phenomenological research does not specify in advance what number of co-researchers is necessary to gain insights into the phenomenon under study. Instead, the quality of the capta and the value of the findings as it relates to the research question, determined when saturation had been achieved and no additional participants needed to be recruited (Wertz, 2005). Thus, having conducted 17 in-depth interviews, I proceeded to capta reduction and interpretation.

The co-researchers asked to participate in this study are fluent in their native language as well as being able to communicate effectively in English, which allowed for conducting interviews in English (Stone, Gomez, Hotzoglou, & Lipnitsky, 2005). To

explore a variety of perspectives, co-researchers in this study came from countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas. Specifically, interviewees included women from Australia, Guatemala, Ghana, India, Japan, Romania, South Africa, and Sri Lanka; and men from French speaking region of Canada, Germany, India, Iceland, Jordan, Korea, Nepal, Norway, and Poland. Their educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their age, varied. Since scholars have not reached consensus on the boundaries of transnationalism, the co-researchers were not asked about their engagement in transnational activities prior to the commencement of the study (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). Instead, their accounts of lived experiences revealed how they create and live within transnational spaces.

Participation in the research was voluntary and confidential. Individuals willing to participate in the study were initially identified among my personal network. As Nelson (1989) asserted, the existence of a prior relationship between the researcher and participants promotes trust, openness, sharing, and ultimately the quality of data. Thus, I first sought co-researchers among my acquaintances who are immigrants. I briefly described the study to them, provided them with the written consent document, which they had an opportunity to review, and encouraged them to ask questions. I utilized a phone script included in Appendix B to invite this initial group of co-researchers to share their experiences during an interview.

The snowballing technique was further used to find other immigrants from various countries (Burrell, 2003, Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). Thus, I asked all the co-researchers after each interview if they know anyone else whose participation I may request. At that time, I proceeded to call these potential participants. Before they were

asked to make a decision whether or not they would like to take part in the study, I first briefly described the study to them and gave them an opportunity to review the written consent document and ask questions.

I also utilized my personal network of “non-immigrants” who are employed at various settings (for-profit organizations including local restaurants, as well as universities and schools) to identify potential study participants. The script included in Appendix B served as the initial message that I delivered to these individuals either verbally or via email, depending on our typical medium of communication. Before any of those individuals agreed to participate in the study, they had an opportunity to read the consent document and ask questions.

In addition, I contacted local church communities, companies, and the office of English as a second language at a local university. I asked representatives of these institutions for permission to post a flyer that briefly describes the research and invites immigrants to volunteer for the study (Appendix C). The individuals who were interested in learning more about what the study involves and who expressed willingness to be interviewed were encouraged to contact me either via phone or email. At that time, I described the study to them, provided them with the written consent document and an opportunity to ask questions before they made a decision whether or not they would like to participate in an interview. Such a comprehensive approach to co-researcher recruitment ensured that a variety of immigrants’ perspectives were encompassed within the study.

Gathering Phenomenological Descriptions

Phenomenology asks a question of “what it is like to have a certain experience?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 45), and it requires that researchers provide participants with a descriptive task with only a general focus toward the phenomenon under study (Wertz, 2005). This approach ensures co-researchers’ openness while describing the complexity and the nuances of the phenomenon, which would be impossible to achieve if participants were to answer a closed set of predetermined questions (Anderson & Jack, 1991). In order to gain access to the prereflexive experience of co-researchers’ life world, they need to be asked for very detailed descriptions of concrete events and situations instead of offering their hypotheses, opinions, explanations, interpretations, or generalizations of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Such detailed descriptions of situations, Wertz asserted, “provide data that transcend even what the participants themselves think or know about the topic” (p. 171).

In order to garner rich, detailed narratives about immigrants’ lived experiences in the United States, I asked co-researchers open-ended questions during in-depth interviews (Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). This allowed for the explication of the complexity of immigrants’ life-world from their own viewpoint (Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005).

In-depth interview process. In-depth interviews are the most widely used method for collecting capta (Patton, 2002). They make it possible for the co-researchers to express what is salient to them, in their own voices, and in a spontaneous and flexible manner (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Such an approach assures that co-researchers’ perspectives are articulated (Nelson, 1989), and that the depth and detail of experience is explicated (Patton, 2002). In order to effectively collect narrators’ experiences, the

researcher must suspend the process of analysis and fully commit herself to listening (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

Interviews were conducted in English, in a venue that ensured co-researchers' privacy and confidentiality. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and it was tape-recorded. Before the onset of each interview, I explained the purpose of the interview and asked co-researchers to sign a consent form (Appendix D). I also asked their permission to tape-record the interview.

In order to encourage co-researchers to share their stories, I adopted a conversational approach to interviewing, where both the researcher and co-researchers share their stories and ask questions (Nelson, 1989). This invited co-researchers to share their experiences as completely and honestly as they desired without probing them to delve into topics they did not want to talk about (Anderson & Jack, 1991). The researcher's role during an interview is that of promoting freedom and refraining from imposing her personal expectations on co-researchers (Patton, 2002).

As van Manen (1990) asserted, in phenomenological research, it is impossible to offer a ready-made set of questions which would likely reflect a predetermined point of view. Therefore, I utilized a topical protocol outlining the general topic of the essence of immigrant experience as well as a few hypothetical questions which I asked when the conversation stopped (Appendix F). Patton (2002) contended that the order and the wording of the questions outlined in the protocol need to be adapted to each individual interviewee. Although the topical protocol was used to begin interviews and to ensure that all relevant topics were discussed, ultimately co-researchers' accounts determined the salient issues that needed to be explored (Patton, 2002). Such an approach ensured

that the interviews were focused while at the same time allowing co-researchers' flexibility and in-depth descriptions. In order to ensure that the interviewees were providing prereflexive experiences instead of generalizations of experiences, I followed up with questions such as "Can you give a specific example?" or "What was it like?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 68).

As Patton (2002) suggested, interviews should begin with questions that ask for fairly straightforward descriptions. Thus, each interview began with a general question regarding co-researcher's length of stay in the United States, his or her country of origin, and their decision to emigrate. These introductory questions were followed by a broad open question (Anderson & Jack, 1991) asking co-researchers to describe, in as much detail as possible, a specific experience, relationship, or set of incidents, either negative or positive that best symbolize their experience as an immigrant. The interview protocol, as explicated in Appendix F, contains follow-up questions in order to touch upon issues that may not have been spontaneously brought up by the interviewees.

Analyses of Capta

As described earlier in the chapter, the capta gathered through in-depth interviews during the process of phenomenological description subsequently underwent phenomenological reduction and interpretation. In order to complete these three stages of phenomenology, I first transcribed each tape upon the completion of the interviews. As Nelson (1989) suggested, it is imperative that the researcher is personally involved in transcription as it provides an opportunity to re-live the capta.

The second stage of phenomenological inquiry – reduction – started as I transcribed the capta. Reduction allowed for the organization of the text into preliminary

or paradigmatic themes. This process involved reading the text several times and reflecting upon what phrases or statements appeared as especially revealing about the experience that was being described (van Manen, 1990).

Thus, I first read each transcript individually without making any notations or highlights, which provided me with an opportunity to re-acquaint myself with the capta. (Moustakas, 1994). Second, I reviewed the capta again by reading the transcripts again while highlighting important words and phrases that appeared essential to the phenomenon. Each transcript was bracketed before the same process started with the next transcript (Orbe, 2000). Third, I utilized free imaginative variation to reveal essential themes of immigrants' lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Free imaginative variation involved imagining the existence of the phenomenon without a particular theme, which allowed for the elimination of all the themes that were interconnected, incidental, or redundant. Such a process further reduced paradigmatic themes and ultimately led to the emergence of syntagmatic or essential themes that united the experience of co-researchers while at the same time recognizing the uniqueness of these experiences (Wertz, 2005).

Finally, during the third stage of phenomenological inquiry – interpretation – a revelatory phrase, which interrelated the essential themes and captured the essence of the phenomenon, emerged. This was possible through the process of hyper-reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Thus, I re-read and critically examined all the transcripts and themes that emerged during phenomenological reduction. It was crucial for me not only to “go back to the speech of the respondents, but also go beyond those already speaking significations” (Nelson, 1989, p. 237). The process of interpretation explicated how the

essential themes are interconnected and provided insights into the phenomenon of what it means to be an immigrant in the United States.

While this chapter focused on detailing the process of phenomenological description, reduction, and interpretation, the following two chapters will explicate how I arrived at the themes that emerged during the analysis of co-researchers' voices in order to represent the essence of their lived experience.

CHAPTER IV

THEMATIZING LIVED EXPERIENCES

Chapter Three detailed the three interdependent steps involved in phenomenological inquiry: description, reduction, and interpretation. It outlined the process of gathering descriptions of lived experiences from eight women and nine men who immigrated to the United States as adults from 16 different countries¹. The following chapter centers on phenomenological reduction and the explication of the essential themes that emerged from capta gathered during 17 individual in-depth interviews.

Upon the completion of each interview, I transcribed co-researchers' comments, which ultimately resulted in 142 pages of capta. Through the reading, re-reading, and reflection on the capta, the transcribed text was reduced into 18 preliminary themes, including: (1) challenges and rewards of interactions with U.S. Americans, (2) relationships with other foreign-born individuals, (3) organizational climate as a facilitator or barrier to belonging, (4) generalized negative perceptions of U.S. Americans vs. positive experiences in everyday interactions with individuals, (5) expectations vs. reality, (6) immigrant children and their identity struggles, (7) difficulties with connecting spiritually, (8) challenges related to leaving the country of origin, (9) getting used to aspects of the host country vs. changing oneself to fit in, (10) challenges caused by a non-native accent, (11) distinctiveness of immigrant experience, (12) feeling foreign in the host country and in the country of origin, (13) others' vs. co-researchers' perceptions of themselves, (14) necessity to restructure one's personal and professional

¹ The countries from which co-researchers immigrated included Australia, French speaking region of Canada, Germany, Guatemala, Ghana, India, Iceland, Japan, Jordan, Korea, Nepal, Norway, Poland, Romania, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.

life, (15) United States as a safe haven, (16) importance of connections with the country of origin, (17) level of comfort with the language and culture of the host country, (18) a place to call home.

Subsequently, free imaginative variation was utilized in order to reveal essential themes of immigrants' lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Free imaginative variation involved imagining the existence of the phenomenon without a particular theme, which allowed for the elimination of all the themes that were interconnected, incidental, or redundant. Such a process further reduced paradigmatic themes and ultimately led to the emergence of syntagmatic, or essential, themes that unite the experience of co-researchers while at the same time recognizing the uniqueness of these experiences (Wertz, 2005). The five essential themes, which will be explicated in this chapter, include (1) inevitable transformation of self, (2) barriers to being authentic, (3) managing issues of belonging and acceptance, (4) negotiating continuity, (5) relationships with, and to, other "others."

It is important to note that the following themes are not an attempt at generalizing the experience of all immigrants living in the United States. These themes, however, do resonate throughout the narratives of all co-researchers. As van Manen (1990) stated, "phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experience, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (p. 90).

In this study, co-researchers' backgrounds vary greatly in terms of their age, religion/spirituality, accent, proficiency in English, level of comfort with cultural differences, marital status, education, profession, the number of years they have spent in

the United States, the age at which they came to the U.S., the degree and sources of exposure to U.S. American culture prior to their arrival, motivations for immigration, as well as race and gender. Despite these diverse backgrounds, the experiences expressed through the essential themes resonate throughout co-researchers' descriptions. These themes convey the commonalities of interviewees' lived realities; simultaneously they attempt to capture a variety of ways in which each person expresses them based on his or her unique situation.

What follows is an explication of each of the five essential themes and their connection to the research question asked in this study: How do transnational immigrants communicatively negotiate the multiple dimensions of their identities? The headings within the chapter, which represent the essential themes, are followed by the descriptions and verbatim comments from co-researchers to capture the voices of all immigrants interviewed for this project by demonstrating both the commonality and diversity among them.

Inevitable Transformation of Self

What connects all co-researchers' experiences is the motif of an inevitable transformation of self. Throughout the interviews, immigrants allude to, or directly express, how they have changed since they moved to the United States, even if it is frequently difficult for them to accept some aspects of the new culture as an integral part of their values and behaviors. Although it may seem that the co-researchers have only altered how certain behaviors are enacted in the new country while retaining their "old self," it appears that the change of personal self has inevitably occurred. This is particularly evident in the descriptions of the struggles that co-researchers have

experienced while interacting with the people in the country of origin. The following narrative of a 50-year old woman born in Japan exemplifies this experience:

Right now I have assimilated to this country so much, [but] American individualism [still] strikes me, because I come from Japan where the society is very, very communal, still, even though it's becoming less and less so, but it's still much more family unit, company unit, neighborhood. The community is much closer, where here it's very much on your own. And I like it in a way, and I don't like it. So when I go to Japan, I'm like, "That's too much hassle," whereas when I'm here I'm like, "God, this is such a lonely place!" And my sense of U.S. being a lonely place has in some ways intensified, but it's not like it bothers me so much. It's just that I'm more used to it, but I look around and say, "People really are lonely here."

Changes in Communication Behaviors

Interestingly enough, many co-researchers insist that they have not altered their behaviors to "fit in"; instead, they have become unconsciously accustomed to the new environment and its demands. At the same time, however, immigrants' narratives are filled with descriptions of the changes that have inadvertently occurred in their behavior and communication patterns. This is the case both among the people who have lived in the U.S. for several years and those who have been here for a few decades. For instance, one 30-year old woman from Sri Lanka shares how she used to be very quiet and timid, but now she is very comfortable with being assertive because this is the behavior that she believes is expected and accepted. This change has been necessitated by the educational and professional environment in which she has had to learn to operate. A female from Japan who has been in the United States for over 30 years, acknowledges that her young age at the time of immigration made the transition and the changes rather effortless:

I was only like 20 when I came here. Old enough to have my background in the country but young enough to feel comfortable without making any effort [to adjust]. If I was 40 when I came, I think that would have been much harder. At that age I was more excited to be out of the country and it was like adventure. So by the time I noticed "oh I'm living here," it was a very simple thing.

Co-researchers consistently maintain that they have become used to certain aspects of the life in the United States; yet, they have been unable to accept them as their own. Although they may have adopted some new interaction patterns, such as friendly exchanges with strangers accompanied by limited degrees of disclosure, they frequently experience some discomfort with them. Interviewed immigrants' narratives convey that while the core of self may have remained somewhat unchanged, its communication has altered in order to meet the expectations of the new milieu. As a forty-year old man born in the French region of Canada explains:

I got used to [the fact that people are very private]. I don't think I can adapt. People are very private; they don't want to share their personal lives. Or they do it with very few people, so I just got used to it. I don't think I changed, but I must have to some extent. I have to [stop being private while interacting with US Americans]. I know that at first when we arrived here a few years ago, many years ago, we tended to be more open and shared some of our deep feelings and saw that the receptivity or the response was odd in the sense that people didn't want to engage at that level of conversation, or that level of friendship. So I guess I basically stopped doing it. It's not worth it. So our few particular friends, so the circle is close, very small, and with those we can talk but not with everybody.

Another co-researcher – a man in his early twenties born in Poland – explicitly states at the beginning of the interview that he saw no need to alter his behavior upon his arrival to the United States claiming that the change has not been necessary due to the similarities of the cultures of the host country and the country of origin. In addition, he dislikes many interaction behaviors that he observes among host country members, which has caused him to resist the adoption of the new culture. Yet, throughout the conversation, he consistently refers to the need to adjust and to his own attempts to create an impression of being “blended in.” Simultaneously, he expresses the desire to retain aspects of his identity unchanged. This co-researcher's perceived need to adopt new behaviors has intensified with the realization that the accomplishment of academic goals

and the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is contingent upon his successful transformation:

I got used to being nice. But once you are here, you can't be like this white crow, because it doesn't make sense [to stand out]. You are here, so you should act like them. [Here] everybody is kind of friendly, more friendly than in Poland. [It makes me feel] better, [but I didn't become] as friendly. Poland is 99% Catholic, 99% white. And here it's multicultural, multi-religion. I kind of notice it and know what to say and what not to say. I went to college six months after I came here and YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING that makes you pretty much the same, [so that] you feel comfortable. It's easier to make friends, you are not different, so you feel comfortable, and you feel like one of them. Pretty much you start acting and doing everything like they do.

For some co-researchers, especially those who came to the U.S. later in their adult life and whose own cultural values appear very different from those of the host country, the acceptance of U.S. American lifestyle and customs has been very difficult, if not impossible. This is how a man in his fifties, who came to the U.S. ten years ago from India, describes his challenges with negotiating the cultural differences, which he seems to perceive as insurmountable:

[The two countries] are very different, very different. The age I came here was between 40 and 45. I spent a lot of time in India. Everything here is different. Language wise, food wise. Everything is different! EXCEPT SIGNAL LIGHTS! Red – stop, green – go. Except that, they are entirely different. Because I grew up 40 years in India; most of, all of my life is in India.

Although this co-researcher asserts that he is unable to adopt the values of the new country, he does acknowledge that he is forced to slightly alter his behavior while interacting with U.S. Americans. He helplessly recognizes that there are some aspects of the U.S. culture that inevitably creep into his and his family life, and he has no alternative but become accustomed to them:

My children grew up in Hinduism, but they came here. For example, beef is a God. Here beef is what people are eating. That is why I don't eat, but my sons are eating. They do eat beef because they're staying in their dorms in college.

There is no other alternative. That is bad, except I can't do anything for that one. And also I know my sons, my two sons don't have any girlfriends, but if they have a girlfriend, I'm OK. Because this culture is changing everything.

Selective Adaptation

Across co-researchers' accounts, the expressed need to transform themselves is accompanied by their desire to retain the core of their own cultural identity, as articulated by a 27-year old Romanian woman, who has been in the U.S. for three years:

I think I will always try while I'm here to always have something from Romania that is in me, like the values. But I still need to adjust, and I have to give the best from both cultures. I think I'm trying to resist American culture - certain parts of it. I'm born in the traditional roles that a woman ought to do a couple of things, and my husband helps out. Even though I don't have time, I keep my house clean. That's one of the things that we have pride in. I like to read books, I like to watch what I'm eating. I don't adopt their style of eating out and spending money they don't have. There are parts of American culture that I reject such as being ignorant about what happens around you. A lot of people don't think that there is a world outside of them. Sometimes they value more their pets than the person right next to them. I have two cats, I spent five hundred dollars on saving one of them and I was thinking, "I don't spend that much on me!"

For her, becoming a U.S. American would inherently involve the acceptance of the values and behaviors that conflict with who she wants to be; at the same time, she welcomes the opportunities that seem to uniquely present themselves to those who are committed and willing to learn the nuances of the U.S. American culture. Such selective acceptance of a variety of aspects of the host country permeates immigrants' narratives. For instance, a male co-researcher from Iceland keeps emphasizing that although he considers himself very adaptable due to numerous previous exposures to the United States and other foreign countries, he still refuses to integrate the characteristics of the U.S. lifestyle that do not align with those of his country of origin.

Despite their struggles to adjust to the new environment, co-researchers frequently express gratitude for having an opportunity to be exposed to a different

environment, interact with individuals from a variety of backgrounds, and take advantage of the opportunities that they believe United States provides. Some even express a desire for their country of origin to adopt selected aspects of the U.S. American culture and sometimes attempt to persuade their co-nationals who stayed in the country of origin to change their behavior and be more “American.”

Reactions to Assimilation Pressures

Many co-researchers recognize that their decision to stay in the United States as immigrants unavoidably involves a lot of effort and acculturation. This includes the transformation that co-researchers have had to undergo in order to raise their children in the environment that is different from that in which their co-nationals’ children are being raised. The intention to establish themselves in the new country has affected immigrants’ goals and expectations on a professional and interpersonal level, which in turn, has necessitated behavior and attitude alteration. A woman, in her late twenties, who came from Romania three years ago shares:

[When I came here for the first time as a visitor], I had a different mentality. [I thought], “I’m coming here for four months and I’m going to work until I drop, make lots of money and go home.” But second time when I came back [to move to the U.S.], I was shocked because I came over and I knew I wasn’t going back [to Romania] in four months. [I knew I had to] grow up and settle down. [I had] expectations. When you come for four months, yeah, you can be a cook.

Several co-researchers stress how important the transformation of self has been to them in the organizational contexts in which they have found themselves. One female co-researcher, who was born in Singapore and raised in India, talks about her conscious and systematic efforts to improve her Indian-sounding accent in order to facilitate smooth interactions with U.S. Americans, especially at work. She describes a co-national living in the United States who has managed to learn to “talk the American way” as her role

model. This woman clearly differentiates between her willingness to change her accent to communicate effectively and advance professionally, and her reluctance to alter other aspects of her self:

The BIGGEST challenge I had [was] that people as soon as they saw me they knew I'm not a white. So they knew I was from a different country. But I think the ONE biggest challenge I had in my old job was [that] I DO have an accent, and obviously it's not American accent. Now I've been making a CONSCIOUS effort, trying to get some of the sounds right. I PRACTICED it SO much! I've been making a conscious effort to change that. But that's one thing I didn't mind doing. And my brother in law, he came to the U.S. 25 years ago, and if you talk to him now, there is no way you could tell he's from India. You would think he was born and raised in America. That's how well his accent is. He made a conscious effort, he's been practicing and practicing for MANY years and now, it's just part of him now. And I, to an extent, I don't mind doing that, I'm not pressured by it, because I'm going to go out and start talking to people and want them to clearly understand what I'm saying. If it was something that I had to change myself to make others happy, then sure [I would mind].

On the other hand, some immigrants do not see themselves as the source of barrier to effective communication; instead, they believe that it is the unwillingness of the U.S. Americans to make an effort to understand that causes interaction difficulties. A young woman who came here from Ghana two years ago recounts:

[Before I came here, I thought] that I was going to have problems understanding people when they talk, but it is the other way round. They find it difficult to understand me when I talk. Any time I talk, someone is like, "What's your accent?" They don't get me when I talk. I don't know why. [They say], "You have an accent." "Where is that accent from?" I just don't worry about that. If I talk to you and you understand, fine. If you don't, maybe we find someone to explain to you. That's been something that I've been thinking, "I don't have a problem; maybe they have a problem." I try not to worry about it. It's just them. If they don't get me, they don't. If they do, fine. But if I can help them get what I'm saying, I will do something. But some people are like, "Oh I can't understand." They just don't want to do anything. They want to talk to someone else. When someone calls the [workplace], they say, "Can I talk to someone else?" [I say], "Sure."

Reactions to implicit and explicit pressures to assimilate into the host country are present throughout co-researchers' narratives. For instance, a woman from Guatemala

expresses discomfort with having the pronunciation of her name changed because it is more convenient for U.S. Americans to enunciate and remember:

American people [call me by Americanized version of my name]! I don't like it! No! The family that I worked kept saying [American version] and I kept saying, "Don't call me that, please. Call me [Guatemalan pronunciation]." But I got used to it. And at the end I got used to being called [American version]. And now I'm [American version]. So I feel like I changed my name. [It doesn't make me feel good]. [I don't correct people]. I got used to it. But the Hispanic people call me [Guatemalan version].

Another female co-researcher, who has been in the U.S. for three years, expresses how pressured she has felt to sacrifice her own culture for the sake of becoming more Americanized. She realizes that a lot of immigrants eventually do give in to those pressures; however, she feels committed to retaining her own cultural values. At the same time, she does adjust her observable behavior to avoid "standing out."

Similarly, a retired man from Korea, who has been in the U.S. for 40 years, has had to alter the manner in which he communicated with colleagues due to the pressures he consistently received from his superiors. This change, however, was extremely difficult to incorporate, as it conflicted with the underlying values that guide interaction in his culture of origin, and which he has been unable to renounce. The same co-researcher also emphasizes that he had prepared himself for the inevitable need to adopt a set of new behaviors and values prior to coming to the United States. What he believes has helped him is the fact that he shares religious beliefs with the mainstream U.S. Americans, and that he had expected to be one of very few Koreans in the country at the time of immigration:

Unless you mix into American society, you cannot really function too well. It's just like living in a prison. We were [making effort to fit within the mainstream] because when I came to this city, we were the only Korean couple. It wasn't big deal then, because we left Korea realizing that's what the situation will be. That's

what we expected, so it didn't really bother us. In a sense, [I had to change my behavior]. I guess my problem was that I was a little too blunt. I had trouble with that all the time. My bosses were always saying that I'm too direct, so I kind of modified my way of doing it. That was my major problem all my career actually.

The transformation of self, as an obligation for all immigrants and a necessary condition without which progress is impossible, is expressed by a German male who has lived in the U.S. since 1960s. He believes that all newcomers should strive to abide by the cultural norms of the new country and become fully committed to its values. He maintains that it is possible to do so without giving up one's identity, which in his case is exemplified by not attempting to get rid of his German accent. Consider his account:

[I consider United States my home]. I got naturalized in 1969. I came here in 1963. I feel once you have advantages of a certain country, you should commit yourself and not just half way. I am not really enamored with the attitude of the Latinos who think they can RUN THEIR OWN COUNTRY HERE! And of course they have Spanish publications, Spanish radio stations, TV stations, and the government supports this in a way that I think is very dangerous. And I don't think it's a good idea. America is a melting pot. And the melting pot is not cooking very well right now. There is nothing wrong [with keeping your mother tongue]. I gave you examples about how we feel about languages in our family. It's WONDERFUL if you can speak Spanish. But to isolate themselves in such a fashion. This has never been there before. When the big German and Italian, and Irish waves came to the U.S., they were as massive as Latinos are right now, and they integrated pretty fast. And here we have bilingual education and some of these kids never learn to speak English. It's ridiculous! It's not good. It's not good for those people either. Because we can't advance much in this country unless you can speak English. And that's the problem. All of these Hispanics and also some of the Blacks.

Through the theme of inevitable transformation of self, immigrants express how they negotiate both external and internal pressures to assimilate into the host country. Co-researchers' descriptions of selective acceptance of U.S. American values and behaviors seem to indicate that the aspects of self that immigrants uniquely consider as the "core" of their self are perceived as unchanged. While some interviewed immigrants have been unable to reconcile the cultural differences of the two societies, they too have

undergone a change of behaviors. Although it is clear through the narratives that all interviewees have changed throughout their immigrant experience, they do not always seem to readily acknowledge it. The transformation of self has frequently occurred unconsciously, and the realization of the change has often been met with a level of discomfort and resistance.

Barriers to Being Authentic

Throughout their immigrant experience, co-researchers have struggled with their inability to be authentic in interactions. Many convey that the unspoken rules that guide daily interactions among U.S. Americans make it extremely difficult for immigrants to be themselves. One of the communication patterns that constitutes a major barrier to co-researchers' authenticity involves implicit pressures to remain at a distance from others both physically and psychologically. Immigrants are also surprised that in a society that places so much emphasis on individuality, conformity with the accepted norms seems to be a paramount value. These pressures are frequently considered as an obstacle to being "natural," as a Romanian woman explains:

I stopped [kissing people on the cheek] in America because they have this thing called personal space, you should walk with a box around you. I [informally touch people while talking to them] but I stopped doing it. Also relationships are very different, like the personal space. I have to sacrifice my own comfort level for people to feel [comfortable]. You can't be natural any more. You can't be natural, I almost feel robotized. "Hi, how are you?" So you sacrifice being more natural.

Many interviewed immigrants experience that they cannot be who they really are because the interaction behaviors implicitly expected of them are very different from what constitutes the core of interpersonal relationships in their countries of origin. For instance, being very outspoken and direct in communicating what is on one's mind

frequently does not seem to be socially acceptable among mainstream U.S. Americans. This results in a feeling of frequently having to pretend and mask one's true self. The important opportunities to go back to the country of origin and interact with co-nationals make it possible for many immigrants to fully express themselves and feel comfortable communicating with others. A man from Norway captures this idea in the following comment:

Just that they think that like I tend to speak my mind, and people like it or they don't understand it at all. And I noticed that that's a comfort feeling. When I'm in Norway, I enjoy that you can say whatever. You are comfortable with the fact that people can tell you to your FACE exactly what's happening. Here I have a sense that you always need to mask who you are and you shouldn't be yourself in a way. You should conform to norms instead of being yourself.

Furthermore, many co-researchers emphasize how important it is to them to have someone who understands their true self even though they may have had to change some, or most, of their behaviors to better function in the new milieu. Interviewees feel more authentic with the few close friends and family members who are able to understand that "you can hide something to yourself," as one Polish immigrant articulated. Other co-researchers attempt to enjoy their "true self" in the company of co-nationals, who share their language and values.

Challenges with Relationship Building

Co-researchers' perception of the distance that seems to be an integral part of daily interactions among mainstream U.S. Americans makes it difficult for immigrants to build and maintain long-lasting, meaningful relationships. Throughout their descriptions, immigrants talk about how challenging it has been for them to find "soul mates" in the United States. Some identify the pervasiveness of individualism as a major barrier to continuing the communication behaviors that they had brought from the country of

origin. Many interviewees recount their discomfort with the lack of warmth and spontaneity they see as prevalent in relationships. Similarly, a low frequency of interactions and the perception of reluctance or inability to devote time to friends has been very difficult to accept for many co-researchers. Immigrants often find the structured and pre-arranged nature of social interactions very constraining. The loneliness that they have experienced on the level of interpersonal relationships is also believed to permeate the society as a whole, where everyone is expected to take care of themselves. A man in his early fifties, who was born in Jordan and came to the U.S. fifteen years ago, expresses this idea in the following manner:

Here I think people are more isolated. Back home my neighbor could knock on my door right now and come in. They don't have to call you. "How is it going, have a cup of coffee, a cup of tea, sit down and chat." They are more social; they care more about the social life. Here because everybody is busy at work, and they wait for the weekend to relax, everybody is by himself. There is more warmth in the relationships compared to here. I miss that. Maybe with some friends it's easier. We have good relations [with some people] and we stay in touch all the time. I would say, have 3 or 4 good friends. The rest I would say are acquaintances, we know each other, but I wouldn't say we are friends.

Co-researchers' unsuccessful attempts to reproduce the types of relationships that they had in their countries of origin are often attributed to the perception of the superficiality of interpersonal interactions among mainstream U.S. Americans. This superficiality is expressed through casual and friendly exchanges and the avoidance of controversial topics. Many immigrants are surprised with how challenging it has been for them to establish deep friendships as they believed that the seemingly omnipresent friendliness and openness would facilitate this process. The gap between the conviviality toward strangers and the simultaneous lack of depth in relationships with "friends" and acquaintances seems to engender immigrants' distrust toward mainstream U.S.

Americans because of co-researchers' inability to determine the sincerity of others' communication and intentions. The perception of the stifled nature of interactions has been particularly difficult to accept for the immigrants whose cultures of origin are not believed to be very distant from the culture of the host country. Consider these two co-researchers' accounts:

I think that Americans are very open and friendly, but it's very surface friendly. In Norway, you just don't bother to be nice with people that you don't necessarily enjoy or like because you come across as phony. Versus here they say, "You shouldn't talk about how much you earn; you shouldn't talk about religion." And THAT'S WHAT WE DO NORWAY! We go out to a bar specifically to talk about those things, to BE controversial, to TALK about things that upset you. And here we're holding the door, we're telling everybody "how are you doing," "Nice to meet you." And you're very friendly to everybody on the surface.
Man in his thirties born in Norway; in the U.S. for 6 years

The superficiality of friendships with American people [is what bothers me]. It's "Hi, how are you?" As long as it remains on the superficial level of general talk or small talk, it's ok, but it does not seem to want to go deeper than that. International students or employees here often share that same concern that people don't seem to be wanting to share deeply with others, even with the people that are closer [to them]. Whereas, I know some international people who have quite openly shared with others some of the difficulties that they are having. It almost came as a surprise to some Americans that people would make themselves vulnerable to talk about that.
Man in his forties born in French region of Canada; in the U.S. for 13 years

While friendliness, small talk, and inability to freely bring up the topics regarded as essential in building and maintaining meaningful relationships are often seen as constraining, some co-researchers recognize the value of these communication patterns. Although they feel that they have to "pretend all the time," as a Polish male put it, at least the friendliness makes the environment more pleasant to live in as opposed to his own country, "where nobody cares, and nobody is pretending." Similarly, a German immigrant finds that informality and the egalitarian forms of address, regardless of one's organizational status, facilitate relationship building and maintenance.

The challenges that the co-researchers have encountered in creating relationships that they would consider authentic by no means prevent them from finding meaningful friendships and support among U.S. Americans. In fact, immigrants interviewed as part of this project seem to regard mutual effort to get to know one another as an opportunity to express one's true self, as a woman from Romania recounts:

Being something different in this country always makes me wonder why people have an interest when they are asking, "Where are you from?" You never know if these people have interest in YOU or in you as different. You always have that doubt. Do they talk to me, befriend me because of ME as [co-researcher's name] or me as a foreigner? And you need time to pass that barrier and get to know people and maybe they'll appreciate it. But it's very difficult because there are mixed messages.

Although relationships where immigrants can safely express themselves have undoubtedly contributed to their positive experience, it is frequently challenging to establish such relationships due to co-researchers' difficulties with language and cultural differences. Sometimes those barriers are perceived as overwhelming, and they result in co-researchers' reluctance to interact with anyone who does not share their native language and background. Such is the case for a man in his fifties who emigrated from India ten years ago:

I don't like so many people, because of culture things. That is why I don't [talk] anybody. I'm working at [name of workplace]. There I talk with my other colleagues. I talk about my culture; they are also asking me about my culture. I tell them about my culture; I like talking about that. Some people [are] more interested, some people don't like [it]. Some people say, "He's not American." Some people will say like that. "He's not American. [co-researcher's name] is not American!" Some people say [it] like that. That's why some people don't talk to me. Some people don't like me because of my language. They can't understand my language. They don't make an effort to understand my language. Other people are interested in the culture and make effort [to talk to me and understand me].

Level of Comfort with the English Language

Many co-researchers express a degree of discomfort and stress that stems from having to communicate in a foreign language, while at the same time noticing that speaking a language other than English in public is not well-received. A woman from Guatemala, for instance finds it extremely challenging to effectively express herself whenever she has to interact with a doctor or a bank employee. Other immigrants talk about how they have trouble with accurately and fully conveying who they are, as all the messages are filtered through a language that they do not feel they can ever master. Some co-researchers even find themselves talking about different things and acting differently while speaking the two languages.

Moreover, being constantly self-conscious about speaking or writing in English resonates throughout immigrants' descriptions. Some have experienced that they are perceived as incapable of performing their job – an assumption based solely on co-researcher's foreign-sounding accent or physical features that are different from those of the majority. For some immigrants, it is difficult to accept the fact that even those who are very close to them are unable to comprehend their experience even though they may have lived in a foreign country themselves. A description provided by a woman from Romania exemplifies this idea:

It's very difficult for [my U.S.-born husband] to understand our [immigrant] perspective. I told him, "You are not asked twenty five times a day to justify [your presence here]; you don't have to deal with stupid questions." Some people look down on me [because of] the way I talk. People call in to do a take out order, [and after talking with me, they] call back to see if I got the order right. They say, "I just called and spoke with this person with this weird accent. This is what I ordered. Does she got it?" I have these people who call and say, "Can I speak with someone else?" I get offended. People say, "Oh, don't worry about it." But I really get hit.

Spiritual Connections

Co-researchers also find it difficult to find spiritual comfort in their new environment. Difficulties with language and discomfort with some aspects of the host culture make it hard to connect spiritually with the communities that, on the surface, may appear like ideal places for immigrants who seek commonalities with similar others. As a man from India articulated,

I have a place of worship here but I don't go to the temple. I don't like to go to that place. I only went two times in the ten years. I don't like that kind of people, Indian people. In India, there is a lot of difference. Some states [have] a different language.

Some immigrants, particularly those who identify themselves as unreligious, feel uneasy with the omnipresence of the mainstream religion in everyday life and language. This has been especially difficult to accept for the immigrants who came to the United States with the expectation of the separation of church and state. A woman born in Japan expresses her discomfort in the following manner:

This guy [complete stranger] said, "Are you Japanese?" I said, "Yes." He goes "[in Japanese] kamiwa sprashi," and I said "What's that?" He said, "Kami, you know kami?" I said, "No." Because we have kami (stress on the first syllable) is God; kami (stress on the last syllable), is paper. So he was trying to say "God is wonderful," and I happen to be very UNRELIGIOUS person so I'm even more offended by that.

On the other hand, some immigrants have found the church as the place where they can be themselves while interacting with others with whom they share religious background. A female immigrant from Ghana explains how accepting her church community has been:

I go to church sometimes, and I'm the only black person in church. And the people are so welcoming. And I think it's more because we have this partnership [between the churches], and they've had more visitors coming from abroad.

Another co-researcher, a man who came from Korea forty years ago, insists that being a Christian prior to coming to the U.S. has greatly facilitated his transition:

At the time [living in the U.S. and speaking English] wasn't very comfortable, but as I lived here it became more and more comfortable. I WAS a Christian even before I came to this country, that's maybe the one reason why I didn't have much problem of adjusting to American culture.

Inability to be Authentic in Both "Homes"

Notably, co-researchers' challenges with feeling forced to be who they are not extend beyond interactions within the host country. Several immigrants articulate that during their visits back to the country of origin, they are expected to be someone that no longer exists. These two interviewees' descriptions exemplify these emotions:

I go [to Japan] and people bother me too much. Too much obligations whenever you go to your country. There are some protocols; my [foreign-born] husband feels the same way. If you go to your country, you're not in charge of your day-to-day schedule. "Oh, we have to go to see this aunt and so and so." Or "Uncle so and so is coming." I really don't want to see them but THERE IS NO CHOICE ! And when you are in a similar situation [in America], it's so much easier. If you don't like it, you just say, "I'm not coming." You just have this totally split personality type of thing. But you can do it because it's only two weeks. When I go there, I act like Japanese. Probably I'm not so outspoken there, because I think there is quite a bit of sexism there. So when they are arguing certain political issues, I feel I know better than they do in some ways, but I just let them talk their piece. I just say a few words to dissent or assent, and I don't really bother arguing that much because I don't live there. But if I meet some people here, we may argue.

Woman in her fifties born in Japan; in the U.S for over 30 years

You are like a soulless person because here you get used to some benefits with the lifestyle, with the mentality, and then you go home and here you miss everything about your country, family, food, and then you go home and of course you don't find the same things that you experience here. [And] you start missing craving this. And here I just feel like I'm trapped between two worlds, like I'm not Romanian any more, I've been corrupted, but I'm not American.

Woman in her late twenties born in Romania; in the U.S. for 3 years

These two accounts demonstrate how the inadvertent transformation that co-researchers have undergone makes it challenging to remain authentic in both milieus. It

seems that the experiences in the new home – the experiences that those in the country of origin cannot relate to – have complicated co-researchers’ definition of authenticity. As immigrants interact with others, both in the host country and the country of origin, they seem to constantly be pressured to play by the rules of the country where they happen to be in order to meet the expectations of their “hosts.” This constant negotiation of competing forces seems to complicate the issues of belonging and acceptance, which are explicated through the theme that follows.

Managing Issues of Belonging and Acceptance

The theme of managing issues of belonging and acceptance unites all interviewed immigrants’ experiences. Through this theme, co-researchers express how the surrounding environment, including social networks and legal systems, impact their feeling of being accepted in the host country. This motif explicates how immigrants’ diverse standpoints and expectations as well as interactions with host country members collectively affect co-researchers’ level of comfort within their new country. Immigrants’ narratives illustrate an unrelenting search for home, which is complicated by their constant feeling of being foreign that does not appear to simply wear off as time elapses. This is how a woman who emigrated from South Africa over thirty years ago describes the experience:

[I consider] America to be my home now. I’ve been here SO long. It took me a LONG time to come along to that! It’s hard to say [why] because I just found a lot of things different, and it’s hard to pinpoint them. Very frequently I would feel, and I still sometimes do, very foreign. Even the language was not a barrier, but I would sometimes be in a situation where I’m like “Oh, my gosh, I don’t think I really belong here, I just feel very odd!” So it took me a long time before I really regarded America as my home. I can’t really think [of any specific incidents that caused the change]. It’s just sort of this general feeling where people sometimes respond to certain things. Of course I constantly get, “Oh, you have an accent!” Or else people are very complimentary about my accent. “Oh, I

love your accent!” They all think I’m from England and then I have to explain to them, “No, I’m not.” Sometimes they think I’m from Australia. I don’t think I ever say to people, “You have an accent.” I wouldn’t dream of it because I think it’s RUDE! I think it’s a way of showing friendliness, but it feels AWFUL!

Interestingly, this co-researcher is one of several who had been delaying becoming a U.S. citizen. A few interviewees acknowledge their hesitance to accept United States citizenship although they cannot determine the cause of this reluctance. Some immigrants explain that their decision to be a U.S. citizen was ultimately dictated by practical considerations rather than the acceptance of the new country as home. They frequently became United States citizens to gain the right to vote or to facilitate the inheritance procedures for their U.S.-born children. Yet, other co-researchers kept the citizenship of their homeland in order to be able to move back to their countries of origin if they ever decided to do so. For some it has been possible to hold two passports due to the provisions offered by their homelands.

Defined as Foreign

All co-researchers recount how they are constantly reminded of being foreign, which sometimes makes it difficult to regard the United States as their only home. The never-ending questions about their origin define them as cultural outsiders who do not “naturally” belong in this country. Immigrants’ foreign-sounding names and non-native accents inevitably cause most interactions with the mainstream U.S. Americans to begin with the “Where are you from?” question. One female Romanian immigrant working in a customer service role says, “I answer that question like fifty times a day!” Several co-researchers find it surprising that they are so frequently asked to “justify their existence,” especially that they had expected the United States to be very diversified and accustomed to people from other countries. Some immigrants do recognize that others’ attempts to

“place” them are indeed much more prevalent in smaller and more homogenous U.S. regions. Likewise, a few co-researchers who either share the native language or many physical features with mainstream U.S. Americans acknowledge that their own “immigrant life is a heck of a lot easier than other people’s” – as a man from Norway put it.

Immigrants interviewed for this study find it particularly disturbing that many U.S. Americans often seek the answers to the questions about immigrants’ accents or origins to merely satisfy their own curiosity. Co-researchers perceive such inquiries as U.S. Americans’ attempts to determine the belonging of the foreigners rather than using the question to initiate a meaningful interaction, express genuine interest in the individual, or learn more about the immigrant’s country of origin. A Polish man, who has lived in the United States for six years, shares:

[Americans] were asking me, “You are from Poland?,” And I would ask, “You know where this is?” “No.” So that annoyed me. [They would ask] “You’re from Poland?” “Yes.” “From what city?” “Lublin. You know where is Lublin?” “No, no, I don’t even know where is Poland.” People also didn’t know if we speak Polish there or we speak French. It annoyed me. [Poland] is a big country in Europe. Every single drunk in Poland knows where is America, what is the capital. I was surprised sometimes that people I work and study with, don’t CARE. They don’t know about Poland anything. If I work with somebody from another country, I would like to know some more about the culture of another country. They, most of them, they don’t.

What immigrants often find surprising in their interactions with U.S. Americans is the fact that in a society that places so much emphasis on privacy, people do not refrain from asking the “foreigners” questions that are considered to invade the privacy of others. This is frequently done just for the sake of satisfying curiosity. A Romanian woman’s narrative communicates this idea:

They are always asking, “Where are you from, how you got here?” People just demand 24/7 to justify my presence here. “Where are you from? How you got here? How long have you been here? Are you legal?” People ask me if I’m British, if I’m French, if I’m from Canada. They go, “You got an accent” and I’m like, “Here we go again. I’ve heard this question fifty times today.” And people ask me private questions, and I always feel like I’m raped again. I used to lie. I would tell them, “I’m a student. I’m just here to go to school.” Because I really didn’t want to share that private information. And then they tell you, “You must be happy you got here” I’m like “Why?” “Oh, you are third world country.” And they asked me if I’m a mail order bride. You get all kinds of things like that. It’s very difficult. When people ask me where I’m from, it’s always like you are used by them. They don’t understand that sometimes it could be harassing. For people that protect their privacy so much, I don’t know how they don’t understand how rude it is to interfere. And those are private questions. You feel like a used sock; they squeeze information and they dismiss you. “Ok, I’m done, I got what I wanted, get out of my face foreigner.”

The negotiation of cultural differentness and belonging is even more complicated for those who are physically different than mainstream U.S. Americans. Some co-researchers describe how people automatically make an assumption that they are not a U.S. American just because of the way that they look, as illustrated by this Japanese woman’s narrative:

People say “Where are you from?” And I feel, “how can they ask me before I even open my mouth?” But I think they don’t say that to somebody who is black, somebody who is Mexican. Mexican they would just assume that they are just first generation maybe illegal alien or something. But I just get surprised because there are lots of Asians who are second, third, fourth generation. I get asked a lot before I even open my mouth. And if it’s after I start speaking, of course I understand that. But just looking at me? I don’t consider myself any other than American.

A woman from Sri Lanka talks about incidents when she has felt singled out by strangers due to her “unusual” physicality, or when U.S. Americans mistakenly assumed that she is not capable of speaking or understanding English:

I had this accounting teacher, and she would come to me and slowly ask me, “Can–you–understand–what–I’m–saying?” I HAVEN’T EVEN TALKED WITH HER YET! So she was assuming that I would not understand what she is saying, and she wouldn’t understand what I say. And I felt discriminated there. Why

would you come and ask ME that? She bases it on appearance, because I haven't talked yet. I heard people tell me, "Oh, you speak English so well." I guess I took it as a compliment, but I guess when you see me, you don't expect me to speak English well, but when I open my mouth, you would think "Oh, you're doing great."

Imposed Identity

Several co-researchers describe their encounters with U.S. Americans who tend to engage in guessing the immigrant's origin and incorrectly ascribing national identity based on the person's looks and accent. Consider these three short accounts:

I tended to be pinpointed as coming from Central Europe, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, some of those places. People tended, tend to say that my accent is a Central European one, not French Canadian.

Man in his forties born in French region of Canada; in the U.S. for 13 years

Some people ask me, "Where are you from?" "Are you foreign, where are you from? You came from Pakistan?" [They] ask me that. No, sir, I'm not. I'm American. I'm Hindu, I came from South India.

Man in his fifties born in southern part of India; in the U.S. for 10 years

At first they think I'm Mexican, and then I say I'm not Mexican, I'm Guatemalan. IT'S DIFFERENT! They always ask.

Woman in her forties born in Guatemala; in the U.S. for 15 years

Interviewees frequently recount incidents where U.S. Americans assume their identity. These assumptions are based solely on some remote similarities with other foreign-looking or foreign-sounding individuals. Such interactions make it necessary for co-researchers to explain their origin using national identity labels, which they had not had to utilize while living in their countries of origin.

Interestingly, the experience of having one's identity defined by someone else extends to co-researchers' children who were born in the United States and do not have another place that they could call home. While it is rather effortless for the children of European immigrants to blend in within the U.S. mainstream society, multiracial

immigrant children continue to hear the same “Where are you from?” question. A woman born in Japan and married to an immigrant from Ethiopia recounts,

[My daughters] happen to look very DIFFERENT, so people can’t place them. So [they ask], “What are you?” And [my daughters] used to get so mad and say, “American!” but [people would insist], “Your ORIGIN?” So in their case it’s even more annoying because they are born here and [they have] no accent, nothing. My younger one, she is often taken for an Indian. Bangladesh people think she’s Bangladesh. And both of them are taken for Latinos, South African sometimes. My older one was in Peru and Chile for a while, and she said that’s the place she felt most at home in terms of people looking at her. Because when we go to Japan, they look [like a] foreigner, when we go to Ethiopia, they look [like a] foreigner, when they are here they look [like a] foreigner. People always ask, “Where are you from?” And when she was in Peru and Chile, nobody looked at her and stared. One time a homeless guy in the street asked [my younger daughter] something in Spanish. And she has no idea of Spanish. So she said, “Sorry, I don’t speak Spanish.” And the homeless guy says, “Don’t forget your tradition!” And she’s like, “What tradition?” She’s Japanese and Ethiopian, she has nothing to do with Spanish!

While immigrants struggle with others imposing identity on them, some co-researchers admit that they too are guilty of making similar assumptions about foreign-looking individuals in the U.S., as expressed by this Indian woman,

The one friend from work, she is actually from El Salvador. And that’s again, ignorance again. I always kept thinking she was a Mexican. And she’d be like, “I’m not Mexican. I’m from El Salvador.” Very similar to how people usually think I’m Muslim, and I’m not Muslim.

Generalized Perceptions of U.S. Americans vs. Interactions with Individuals

Co-researchers’ descriptions indicate that they are constantly reminded of their outsider status because of their foreign sounding accents, non-native communication behaviors, or appearance. While they seem to continually struggle with the issues of belonging in more casual interactions with strangers, they often acknowledge that the opportunities to get to know some U.S. Americans on a more intimate level have assuaged their feelings of exclusion. Immigrants involved in this study frequently

recount how a close relationship with a U.S. American has changed their experience and allowed them to feel accepted and “normal.” Co-researchers make a clear distinction between their generalized perception of the U.S. American people as a group, and their personalized experiences with specific individuals. They describe how they have been able to take advantage of the opportunities to be “coached” by U.S. American friends on what is acceptable in terms of language usage and communication behaviors. Those friendships have alleviated the feeling of not belonging especially for those co-researchers who frequently find themselves to be the only people of color in a given environment. The community of accepting individuals has served as a safe haven from those who appear biased and unfriendly, as illustrated by this quote:

One thing that has helped me so much is the family that I stayed with. So I’m kind of integrated into the system. If I had come myself, then I would find it difficult, but they do so many things that they get me involved in. Some people are just closed minded, but you can meet someone very, very open. And you can just flow and flow and flow with them. I kind of now know, somehow know my way around things because they taught me. That’s how come I can now move all around. And I’m going somewhere else. That really helped me. Like you know what some people expect and what people don’t expect.

Woman in her twenties born in Ghana; in the U.S. for 2 years

Impact of Organizational Environment on Belongingness

Apart from the friendships with U.S. Americans, the organizational environment into which co-researchers were initiated when they came to the United States greatly impacted their perception of being accepted. A woman from India recounts how her initial discomfort with being the only foreign-born and “foreign-looking” person at her workplace was alleviated by positive relationships she was able to develop with her colleagues who were genuinely interested in her culture of origin:

People have been very friendly, and I’ve really enjoyed that. People, especially now that I’m working in a college environment. I was very uncomfortable when I

first started because I'm the only Asian in the entire administrative staff. There is a handful of African Americans, like five or six; one Hispanic and one Asian. [I haven't felt] very uncomfortable because I'm from a different country. Truly everyone has been very nice. I was very resistant at the beginning. I wasn't sure how they would treat me, but they were fine. And most of the times it's very interesting to see how people really like to learn about another country and culture, and I've had people come and ask me, "Do you want to cook me some Indian food because I love spices and everything?" And they would come and ask me, "There is a restaurant in [city], so if I go there can you recommend a dish that I could buy?" That makes me really feel good and comfortable, and I'm not completely out of place.

Some co-researchers used their international student experience as a gateway to their successful life in the United States and a springboard for further endeavors and interactions. The support they received as international students allowed for a gradual exposure to the U.S. culture and life after college, making the transition very similar to that of any other student, as a Sri Lankan woman explains,

We didn't come here as a family, that helped in a sense that we first lived in dorms. We transitioned from almost like, not a teenager, we came here when we were like 20, very young adults, so that helped with the transition. We didn't come here looking for a house and everything. So we first started here and slowly went to working and buying house and so forth, so it wasn't necessarily like a culture shock as soon as we came.

While some immigrants have been able to benefit from the organizational structures and supportive surrounding environment to get integrated and achieve a level of comfort, others have found the organizational climate into which they got initiated quite constraining, as expressed by a comment a man from Nepal makes:

I always had a language problem, and a lot people don't understand me, which I'm aware of that, and that is also bugging me. People at work are familiar with my accent, so they don't have a problem, but when I went to work for the first time in X company, I always felt intimidated.

Spiritual Homelessness

Although most daily interactions with strangers do make co-researchers feel that they are constantly singled out as different, many of them recognize that the United States is still the easiest place for a foreigner to live compared to other countries in the world, as two female immigrants succinctly state:

The way that Asians work is they are nice to you, but they don't think you are one of them. You go to Japan, people will be very nice, very nice to you, very polite, but they'll never think you are one of them. In a hundred years they wouldn't think [it]!

Woman in her fifties born in Japan; in the U.S for over 30 years

In America it's easy to be Romanian. In Europe it's hard, it's all those Romanians that work abroad and you have all those gangs and there is Romanians that are the Romas, the Gypsies. We are associated with Romas, everyone is kind of hiding their wallets when they hear you are Romanian, but in USA they don't have a lot of prejudice. Thank God they are ignorant!

Woman in her late twenties born in Romania; in the U.S. for 3 years

Several co-researchers recall that other countries where they have lived, including their countries of origin, often prevent non-native individuals from advancing professionally. However, in the U.S., "whether you are German, or Dutch, or Korean, or whatever, you have basically the same chances in the company to advance," as a German immigrant states. A male co-researcher born in Jordan, and raised in Kuwait, expresses his satisfaction with the inclusiveness of the U.S. law by saying that "one thing that is good about this country is that they accept other nationalities and other ethnicities. The constitution they have, the system here is probably the best in the world. They have equality among people, at least by the law." This co-researcher believes that the United States allows people to become citizens and have equal rights as compared to the countries in the region where he grew up. He provides an interesting insight about how he defines belonging:

I would say United States [is my home]. And the next one is Palestine. I wouldn't consider Kuwait my home. I never felt like I'm part of that country. I feel more part of the United States more than Kuwait, although I grew up in Kuwait. The main reason, in Kuwait, because I'm not really Kuwaiti, there was some discrimination between expatriates and Kuwaitis. For example, certain jobs have to be for Kuwaitis even though they are not qualified. Even in research. I went to Kuwait when I was six and stayed till I was 18, and I never became a citizen. My father lived in Kuwait for 30 years and he was never citizen. For you, you really have a country. For me, there is no Palestine. If there was a Palestinian state, I would say that's my home. But I left Palestine when I was six. It was the West Bank, it wasn't Palestine. But really, I HAVE NO PLACE to go to. I don't know WHEN there will be Palestine. It doesn't LOOK LIKE there will be one.

Yet, another co-researcher talks about how easy it has been for him to function in the U.S. since he received his "green card:"

Now once we have a permanent residency, it cut down on everything, so everything is so easy. I was in Nigeria, then I lived in Sri Lanka all by myself also. So one thing that really surprised me that living in the US like an immigrant is much, much easier than living anywhere else. It was much, much easier to adjust actually in the U.S. than anywhere else. Plus, once you get Social Security, everything is very easy about your life. If you go to any government office or something like that, people are very polite.

Man in his early thirties born in Nepal; in the U.S. for 10 years

In addition, some immigrants share how they have been able to benefit from their unique and highly marketable educational backgrounds that they believe overshadow the fact of being "the other," as a man born in Korea, who came to the U.S. 40 years ago, explains:

At that time when we came here there was a shortage of highly educated people. I fit in that requirement although I'm oriental. But nowadays it's a little different. I think my generation of foreigners that came when I came, they had a very good time. Very, very lucky generation. The neighbors were very friendly and at that time, anybody who worked for the X company, automatically becomes well liked, for whatever reason. It's not like now but at that time, if you are X employee everybody kind of liked to make friends with you. That was a good time.

Remarkably, many interviewed immigrants find themselves experiencing that they do not fully belong to either the country of origin or the host country. When they

interact with their co-nationals in the countries from which they came, they are sometimes identified as American, as a woman from Australia recounts:

When I go back to Australia people go, “Oh, there is some American woman on the phone for you.” It’s also kind of weird. If I call someone [in Australia], everybody thinks there that I’m American. So that’s kind of weird that when you go back to your home town and everyone thinks you are foreign.

Some co-researchers remark that although they are not absolutely comfortable in the United States, they experience similar difficulties with fitting back in within their own country of origin. They are perceived as foreigners there and feel that they again cannot take their home for granted, as one male immigrant from Poland recalls,

I went to Poland two and half years ago, and I couldn’t find a word, Polish word, and I said this American word. And my friends told me “Oh, you are now an American, you don’t speak Polish any more.” And I’m like, “No, it’s not like that. I got mad because they told me, “Oh, you don’t want to talk to us because you’re an American, so you think you’re something better, someone better. You can’t even speak Polish now?” And I’m like “Oh, no, it’s not like that. I didn’t forget where I’m from.”

The theme of managing issues of belonging and acceptance illustrates a variety of ways in which interviewed immigrants negotiate the feelings of comfort with their “mother country” and their “step-mother country,” as a male immigrant from India refers to his two homes. Co-researchers’ attempts to re-establish their lives in the new country without severing the ties with the old one are reminiscent of the negotiations of the tensions inherent in building and maintaining a blended family. The next theme of negotiating continuity expresses diverse ways in which immigrants attempt to manage degrees of simultaneous involvement in and detachment from both “homes.”

Negotiating Continuity

This theme communicates co-researchers’ unremitting negotiations of aspects of their “old” and “new” selves. Their descriptions paint a picture of constant struggles to

maintain continuity of their lives that they had in the country of origin. They express how the “roots [that they have] all over” (as a woman born in Australia articulated) impact their communication both, with the people in the country where they grew up, and in the United States. This theme also conveys the idea of a symbolic re-birth that they unavoidably experience and the necessity to re-learn and re-organize their professional and personal lives.

Connections with the Homeland

Throughout the interviews, it is clear that immigrants’ connections with the countries of origin are of paramount importance. As a man born in the French region of Canada explains, those connections are “part of my heritage, part of my life, part of my past. They are part of who I am [and] I don’t want to give them up.” Such ties help immigrants ensure that they would be able to seamlessly fit back into their country of origin if they ever could or wanted to go back.

Co-researchers seem to attempt to maintain continuity on interpersonal and spiritual levels. Although some of the immigrants no longer have family members in their countries of origin, they keep using the culture of their mother country as their point of reference while living in the United States. A man from India explains that the connection with the land, the places of worship, and the friends that he had left behind provide him with an opportunity to have relationships that are impossible for him to reproduce in the U.S. due to language difficulties, cultural differences, and a paucity of individuals who share his background and language in the “step mother country.” He explains,

When I go to India, I spend 3 weeks [going] to my temples. When I go to India, I’m close to my friends just like before. [When I go back], my friendships are

entirely different. My dress is entirely different. [In] America, I have my pants and shirt tucked in and shoes. If I go to India, it is not tucked [in], no shoes. And also I help [with] some land there. That is almost a 100 years of cultivation. My uncle gave it to my brothers. There is so much affection there.

Those who have “no reason to go back” to their country of origin because all their family members and friends have passed away, continue to hold on to their “old” identity through the creation of a community of co-nationals that gets together regularly. This was expressed by a man born in Korea who has lived in the U.S. for over 40 years:

We started a Korean church here 25 years ago, so we meet every week, every weekend. I was original member of that church. We eat Korean food, and speak Korean. That’s very important for the people who are homebound. There aren’t many Korean people so you can meet every day, so once a week they come, they gather together, share the gossips and all that.

For many immigrants, frequent and regular connections with the people who are still in the homeland ensure that co-researchers do not feel isolated from the country of origin, and that the communication with the people left behind appears to have remained unchanged. It is particularly important for those co-researchers who are planning to either move back to their country either in a few years or upon the completion of the careers they have started in the United States. While interacting with the family and friends “back home,” co-researchers attempt to convey that they are still the same person that they were when they were leaving despite the time that has passed and the distance that divides them. This is how a man born in Nepal describes his interactions with his parents and siblings, “I don’t tell them everything. But I think openness is still there. I think that bonding is still there for me. I try to [behave] the same way.”

Co-researchers desire to remain an important part of the lives of those left behind in the country of origin, and they feel left out when information regarding family affairs is not shared them. For many immigrants, the nature of communication with the people

in the country of origin may have changed, and the distance may have grown between them. Yet, the frequent and regular connections via phone and the internet constitute a weekly or monthly ritual that serves to keep things appear “normal.” This ritual seems to be an attempt to communicate to both sides that co-researchers remain an integral part of the lives of the family back in the country of origin, and that those left behind are always part of the immigrants’ everyday endeavors.

Over time, the intensity of interest in the current affairs of the country of origin is likely to decrease. Nevertheless, the longing for something not necessarily tangible does not seem to significantly dwindle. One of the most painful feelings that co-researchers convey is that of the lack of continuity with another person from the country of origin – someone who had known them before “the transformation of self” occurred upon co-researchers’ emigration. This feeling seems to exacerbate as immigrants age and lose their parents, as a woman born in South Africa ponders,

And now that I’m older I feel sad, not sad, I just feel kind of a loss that here there is nobody who knows me for what I really am. I have one friend in Canada, she is a Canadian. She came to South Africa and actually married an old boyfriend of mine. And they stayed in South Africa. But really she is the only person close to me now, physically close, who knew my parents, who knew me as a young woman. And I’m missing that tremendously, I just sometimes wish that there is somebody that I could say, “Remember that old school teacher or remember this and that?”

Many immigrants share that with time it becomes increasingly difficult to be so far away from “home,” as their family members get older. It may have been exciting to leave home at a young age and begin the endeavors of adulthood in a country far away from the parents, however, with time one begins to miss not having an ongoing, close bond with the people left behind. Such is the case for a man who emigrated from Norway 6 years ago:

To move here when you're young is easy. I think for me it's becoming harder the older I get. It's strange, it's like when you're young you have nothing invested in what you had at home. But now, when your grandparents are starting to pass away, you know. Getting older like you're missing all of that. Which when you were young that never even concerned you.

Furthermore, co-researchers' guilt of leaving their countries of origin and their families intensifies as they establish new roots in the United States and realize that it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to leave again. A reunion with the "mother country" that many still dream of, and hope for, would inevitably involve damage to the ties and relationships that one has worked so hard to establish in the new place. An Australian woman shares how difficult it is for her to be unable to move back to Australia although she would love to do so. She does not want to leave her U.S.-born children behind in the same manner she had left her parents thirty years ago when she immigrated to the United States.

On the literal level [U.S] is [my home], but the other part of me where you grew up is kind of your home too. My children grew up [in the U.S.], and I have grandchildren here. And my children grew up and go to college here, and realistically they'll get jobs here. So I wouldn't go [back to Australia] for that reason even if I were alone tomorrow because now my kids, my biological family is here, so we sort of have roots all over. [And] we have a wonderful neighborhood [where] we've lived for many years. We have lots of friends. So, you create a circle of friends. And we have a circle of friends in Australia too. So it would be easy to go and live there on lots of levels. But it would be difficult on the biological family level, leaving my kids behind and live so far away from them. I did that to MY mother. If my daughter did that to me, I would die. It would be so hard.

Woman in her fifties born in Australia; in the U.S. for over 30 years

It is particularly difficult to get over the guilt of leaving for those who, due to economic constraints or immigration status, have not been able to frequently and regularly go back to visit and reconnect with their family members. For many co-researchers, going back – even for a short visit – is frequently on their minds, although it

is not always practical or feasible. Some immigrants have attempted to divide their time between both countries by moving back and forth, but those unable to do so seem to have established a physical home in the U.S. while maintaining their symbolic home in the country of origin. While for some co-researchers it is rather straightforward to pinpoint which country they regard as their home, others have a lot of trouble defining it. For instance, a few female co-researchers share that although they wholeheartedly consider the U.S. as their home, they would not hesitate to go back to their homelands if they were to lose the families that they have in the United States. One woman, who came here from Sri Lanka ten years ago, describes her ambivalence in regard to which place she considers to be her home:

I will always call Sri Lanka as home, but for example when I'm here I'll say, "We have to go home this year," meaning going back to Sri Lanka, but while I'm in Sri Lanka, I'll say, "I'll be going back home in one months' time." So I think it's very fifty-fifty for me. So, for me, I consider this home as well, but for sentimental reason, that's home too.

Necessity to Re-structure Your Life

Some co-researchers' descriptions indicate how the plans or hopes to move back to the country of origin affect the manner in which they organize their physical space. As they attempt to feel comfortable in the new environment and establish relationships that will make them feel at home in the United States, they simultaneously try "not to settle in to the extent that it's difficult to move away from here," as a man from Iceland articulated. Many interviewees' accounts convey how keeping the option of going back open has dictated the choice of education or career that would be "portable." Even if one realizes that a permanent move to the country of origin is not likely to happen, the importance of maintaining transnational linkages by going back for frequent visits has

greatly affected co-researchers' career planning. A woman born in Australia recounts how "running [her] own business, having a life that was flexible [has been] very nice for [her] for 20 years because [she] could go back to Australia for a long period [since she] would make [her] own schedule."

Although leaving the country of origin was extremely difficult for many co-researchers, they feel it was necessary for them to take advantage of economic, educational, and professional opportunities that the United States has provided. The promise of success and professional growth has alleviated personal struggles and disappointments related to leaving the country of origin and relatives behind. The co-researchers who came to the United States to join their U.S.-born spouses have experienced uprootedness both on an interpersonal and professional level. They have found it challenging to maintain professional continuity as they were unable to simply "transfer" their careers to the new environment. One female immigrant from Romania describes her experience as having to "turn into an infant and start all over," which "affects [her] self-esteem" and is "almost devastating."

Continuity beyond the First Generation

Notably, interviews with co-researchers are filled with descriptions of negotiations of continuity that extend beyond their generation. The parents' strong connections with their countries of origin and frequent visits to the "homeland" have allowed their children to develop and maintain solid relationships there, sometimes to the extent that they tend to regard the parents' "mother country" as their own. Consider this one account from a man in his forties born in the French region of Canada:

I think that my kids would probably say that Canada is their home. Very interesting. They grew up here. My oldest one is 28 now I think, my youngest

one is 19, almost 20, and I think all three would probably say Canada is their home.

Parents' attempts to maintain their "old" identity in the lives of their children is sometimes expressed through the fact that they had registered their children as the citizens of the country of origin as well as the citizens of the United States. For many co-researchers it has been very important to ensure that their children are familiar with the cultural values and the language of their parents although the surrounding environment sometimes makes it challenging to preserve these ideals. The maintenance of the parents' mother tongue is particularly crucial for those who either plan to go back to the country of origin in several years, or simply continue to visit and interact with the family that stayed behind. Those who have not managed to help their children learn their language now regret that the continuity of their own experience will not be maintained through their children. An Indian woman expresses her disappointment in the following manner:

We don't teach our daughter our language. It's not that we don't want to teach her. She started going to daycare when she was about 6 months old, and I didn't want her to feel comfortable because she comes home and she speaks a different language, and she goes to daycare and they speak a different language. And I think I should not have worried about that because [children's] brains are like sponges. But I was so concerned that I started talking to her in English, and now all she can understand is English. And that's the one which she would learn no matter what because she's living in this country. And my language is the one she would learn unless we teach her. And I made this mistake with her. I should have started that young, but I did not.

Interestingly, some immigrants describe that their own connection with the country of origin is almost non-existent, especially in a physical sense. Yet, it is becoming increasingly important to their children to learn the culture and language of their parents' homeland, as a male co-researcher from Korea states,

I visited Korea only twice since [I immigrated]. Actually there is NO REASON to visit. As I said, I brought my parents. And [my wife's] parents also. And I

had only one sister in Korea, and she was a Catholic nun. So there wasn't much sense visiting there. She's not there any more anyway. So I didn't visit Korea that much. [When the children were small], we tried very hard to teach them Korean. It just wasn't working, because they don't use it enough so they can never learn it. They never feel the need, until they go to college. Then it's of course it's too late. They always blame us, "Why didn't you teach us Korean?" When they were younger, they didn't want to. They didn't want to be different from other kids, but once they go to college then they realize that they are not quite white Caucasian American. They really wake up they are not really American, mainstream American. They realize they are minorities. Usually the children are really friendly too, and grow up together it doesn't really matter, but once you go to college, with all your friends gone to different schools, and you're trying to make new friends, and that's where these problems start. That's where they really realize the identity for themselves. Then they find out they are different.

As expressed through this theme, co-researchers' experience inexorably involves constant attempts to continue to live simultaneously in two places through various degrees and ways of involvement in the country of origin. The development and maintenance of connections with co-nationals and other international individuals in the host country is one way in which interviewed immigrants express this symbolic continuity. Since the relationships with other "others" are a salient part of immigrant experience, they are articulated through a separate theme below.

Relationships with, and to, Other "Others"

Through this theme, co-researchers express the importance of connections with other co-nationals, foreign-born individuals, and microcultural U.S. Americans. This theme also illustrates the manner in which immigrants interviewed for this study perceive themselves in relation to other "others." Co-researchers' descriptions demonstrate how the relationships with other minority individuals have provided a symbolic space to express their authentic selves. These connections have also assisted many immigrants

with their struggles involved in searching for a comfortable place to call home in the new country.

Importance of Relationships with Other “Others”

Many co-researchers recount how they have been able to utilize their co-nationals while trying to learn the language and understand the cultural nuances they had not expected to encounter in the United States. Immigrants’ co-nationals were also instrumental while co-researchers were attempting to build a network that would assist them with finding employment. Although co-nationals have been very helpful as sources of cultural knowledge for many interviewed immigrants, sometimes those relationships were only used as a springboard for successful interactions with the mainstream U.S. Americans. A man who emigrated from Poland shares how he took advantage of the help provided by his Polish family members living in the U.S. However, he also emphasizes that it is important to avoid isolating behaviors and limiting oneself to interactions within ethnic communities:

[Learning the] language [was a] huge struggle, because I didn’t speak English before. Culture, not so. My aunt, she helped me out because she’s a very open person. And she had many friends, American friends, so I was kind of introduced to the culture in a good way. First of all, [they taught me] how to behave. My aunt told me, this is how they do it here. And my cousins, they also told me a lot about the American culture here.

While some immigrants have been able to find other co-nationals relatively close to their place of residence, which has allowed them to create a community with established regular routines and interactions, others have had to travel some distance in order to interact with people from their country. Although co-researchers do seem to enjoy the connections that they have with others from their homelands, they recognize

that sometimes it is not possible for them to build those relationships just on the basis of shared national origin, as captured by an Indian woman's description:

When I first came to the U.S., my [Indian] husband's life revolved around me and mine revolved around him, and we had friends in Pittsburg that we had met back home in India. So every other weekend we would go to Pittsburg. There is a very big Indian presence in [the neighboring city], and there is a big Indian presence in [this city], but I never talk to any of them. I just went to one party, and it was kind of boring because they talk about kids and clothes and jewelry and husbands. And I'm like, "I'm not one of them, it's not me."

Not all co-researchers have found comfort among the people from their countries of origin. A Japanese woman, who is married to a man from Ethiopia, admits that she has very little contact with other Japanese people; however, she remains very involved in the community comprised of her husband's co-nationals:

I don't have any Japanese acquaintances around here. It's a strange thing. I think when I originally got married, I wasn't very comfortable meeting Japanese [because of marrying a non-Japanese]. I came from Japan and got married and it was OK with Americans and Ethiopians. Probably Japanese didn't care that much, but I felt like I owe them an explanation and I just didn't want to. And I just carried that on. And my parents didn't mention that I was married for 8 or 9 years to the relatives and friends, so it was like a dark secret for a while, so I didn't feel comfortable. But that was totally because of my view, not like I was like persecuted or frowned upon, nothing like that. I just felt uncomfortable meeting them when I was just in the U.S. I did have some acquaintances there but somehow I didn't seek them out. If it happened, it happened. Even now if somebody happens to see me, I'm glad to talk, speak Japanese. But somehow I never pursued it. But I'm very close with the Ethiopian community.

Several immigrants describe valuable connections they have established with other "others" with whom they share the same language or to whom they feel culturally close. A man from Korea explains how he has dealt with his inability to interact with his co-nationals through the relationships that he formed with the people with a similar background and a similar physical appearance:

[When I came to the U.S.], there weren't many Koreans. Not like now. Of course they were surprised to see a foreign student very highly educated in a

reputable school like Berkeley, but then, on the other hand, there are so many of the second generation Orientals, Chinese. Even at Berkeley, even at that time, I think there were lots of Orientals, you don't really feel that much of a foreign country.

Those who do not feel very comfortable and confident using English find it crucial to be able to communicate with others who can share their mother tongue. For one male interviewee from India, the inability to find people who speak the same language has been very isolating and quite distressing:

I don't talk to so many people, Indian people, American. I like Indian people, but there is no reason, because they don't know my language. I talk to Americans. One thing is language problem. I am talking in my English. American dialect is different.

Most co-researchers emphasize how much they have enjoyed relationships with other foreign-born individuals; oftentimes, the first friendship that they established in the United States involved another international person. Interviewees convey that they seem to inadvertently "find [themselves] hanging out more with international people," as a man from Norway shares. Some immigrants express that they seem to be naturally more drawn to people with diverse backgrounds, as this account demonstrates:

I find that my two closest friends are foreigners. My two closest friends, one is South African, one is English. But I find [that] I get along better with people who are foreigners even after all these years. It's so strange. I don't actively seek out [other international individuals] any more. For a while I belonged to a group which was through [local university], and it seemed to have predominantly foreign wives. So I did meet some friends through that. But I don't seek out foreigners. I just see that if I do meet foreigners I tend to like them. Sometimes very much.

Woman in her sixties born in South Africa; in the U.S. for 30 years

For some, an initial focus on interactions mostly with other international people has served as a phase that allowed gaining cultural knowledge and necessary skills to effectively communicate with mainstream U.S. Americans. One male co-researcher from Nepal explains how he used those relationships to prepare himself for the transition:

When I came here for the first time, I came with a bunch of Sri Lankan friends, so we hang out. So we actually got exposed to the Western culture slowly because we were always together at the beginning and we started going to different places. So it was a gradual process of adapting to the new environment.

Several co-researchers talk about how close they feel to other foreign-born people although their cultures are seemingly remote. As a woman born in Japan succinctly states, “When you come here, it’s so much easier to relate to another foreigner than an American.” The shared experience of immigration seems to provide an opportunity for co-researchers to freely express their feelings about their new home and their own struggles, as one man from the French region of Canada reports,

It’s nice sometimes to be with international students and share experiences, and comments about life in general. Those are always good moments. And I find that whether people come from Europe, from Africa, from Asia, most of the time it’s the same kinds of feelings, the same perceptions, and I find that intriguing. Well, same thing about the social network that I talked about. People being kind of private and individualist and not open, not being able to open and share. So international students or employees here often share that, that same concern.

In addition, for several immigrants participating in this study, spending time with other international individuals has helped downplay the feeling of being the only person of color in an organizational context. This idea is reflected in the comment of a woman in her thirties, who came from Sri Lanka ten years ago:

I was the only international person in the entire building. There wasn’t even an African American student there. So I was the only person of color. It didn’t make me feel different, because I wasn’t heavily involved in dorm life. I had a [foreign-born] boyfriend, who had an apartment. So I was there ALL the time. I would be just a visitor to the dorm. I lived at both places really. I guess if I didn’t know anyone at all and was completely dependent on roommates, then I would feel a little awkward being the only person of color. But I had him and other friends that were international students, so I hang out a lot of with them, so I think it helped a lot.

Some co-researchers have, for the first time, been able to form relationships with people with whom interactions would have been very unlikely in the country of origin.

The shared experience of immigration has bridged the differences that divide them “back home.” A woman who came from southern India six years ago expresses that, before coming to the United States, she never had any desire, or opportunities, for interactions with people from the countries that her homeland is in a political conflict with. However, the shared fate of being a foreigner in the U.S. seems to overshadow the divisiveness that is an inherent part of her co-nationals’ everyday lives:

Last summer I met most of the families in my subdivision. Most of them are from Pakistan. And you know we don’t have any resistance, which is very nice. Although whatever is going on back home between Pakistan and India, it’s scary but we don’t feel that over here. Because we are all foreigners in this country, we can’t start fighting among ourselves. We’re foreigners ourselves.

A few co-researchers appreciated the openness that they and their families experienced in the communities of other non-mainstream U.S. Americans. A woman from Japan shares how her multiracial U.S.-born children have been able to find a place of comfort among African Americans:

African Americans, they are accepting. Anybody can be part of them, especially people of color. They don’t care where you come from. That’s where [my daughters] found their comfort group. I wonder if other immigrants’ experience was different if they had contact with African Americans.

Similarly, a female immigrant from Romania expresses how she finds it easier to identify with, and feel spiritually close to, other non-majority members of the U.S. society although she may not have specific connections with them.

Romanians are Latinos. We are close. When I meet all my friends, we kiss on the cheek. Just how we are, how close we are. I feel close to Hispanic people because I’m kind of from the same background. The personality, the way that family is structured. We have to respect our elderly, we live with our parents till we are thirty, forty, without being considered serial killers, like here. If you live with your mom, they don’t think you are a loser. And I feel closer to Spanish people just personality-wise.

Throughout this theme, co-researchers' descriptions emphasize the importance of having another "other" who understands their immigrant experience and the split that exists between their "true" and enacted self as they struggle to express themselves in a foreign language and function in a foreign environment. A Polish man's comment captures this idea:

After I came here, you kind of, YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING that makes you pretty much the same, and you feel comfortable. You are not different. So you feel comfortable, you feel like one of them. Pretty much you start acting, doing everything like they do. You can, you can hide something for yourself. But in general there are basic rules. You should act like other people. I think it's very important to have like family or someone who understands that.

Distancing Oneself from Other Immigrants

Paradoxically enough, while immigrants interviewed for the study find the most comfort and commonalities with other individuals who to some extent also function on the margins of the mainstream society, most of them seem to disassociate themselves from the "category" of an immigrant. Throughout their descriptions, co-researchers convey the idea that their experience is not that of a "usual immigrant." While they were being invited to participate in this study, as well as during the interviews, many co-researchers kept emphasizing that their experience is very distinct from other people's, and thus they may not be the best person to talk to for the purposes of this research. Although none of the co-researchers has specified what he or she believes a "typical immigrant" to be, they appear to constantly point to the distinctiveness of their own situation.

Among the reasons that lead co-researchers to regard their experience as unusual are the unique circumstances and motivations that had led them to come to and stay in the United States. Some, especially female immigrants, share that they would not have

stayed here if they had not married a U.S.-born man. A woman who came from Australia over 30 years ago explains:

I wouldn't have stayed here otherwise. I liked it here, I enjoyed it, and I had a great time. I might have stayed longer than a year; I might have stayed and got into the doctorate program then. So probably I would have stayed several years and gone back. I didn't have a burning desire to move to the US as such.

These co-researchers believe that their experience would have been very different if they were one of the immigrants who “come because they really, really wanted to come because this was the land of milk and honey,” as a woman born in South Africa ponders. Some immigrants feel that they are expected to consider the United States a “Promised Land,” and “should be grateful that [they are] here, because they [U.S. Americans] took [them] from the third world country,” as expressed by a woman who came from Romania.

Another factor that makes some co-researchers differentiate themselves from other immigrants is the intensity of interest in, and longing for, their countries of origin. They also consider their experience highly unusual if they do not feel very homesick, are much more aware of the U.S. politics and current affairs than their homelands', and have only gone back to their countries of origin a few times. In addition, the limited access to, and interactions with, their co-nationals in the United States makes them feel very different from other immigrants. Furthermore, co-researchers consider their high degree of, and desire for, integration within the mainstream U.S. society very atypical of immigrants. Consider this narrative from a man born in Nepal, who came to the United States ten years ago:

[My workplace] hires a lot of people directly from India, and there are people like me who started over here and got adjusted to the system over here, so we sort of try to mingle with Americans; we understand the jokes very well and even go for

lunch [together]. But for some reason Indians who just came from India have this small group of people that they are always bonded to each other. They don't try to explore any other places than home. They are more comfortable there. We do go and talk to them, it's not like we are trying to isolate them, but I think they are sort of more comfortable and they are not exploring.

Several co-researchers express that they are, or feel, very similar to the majority population in the United States in terms of religion, proficiency in English, skin tone, or cultural similarities. These commonalities again seem to be considered as unusual features of a "typical immigrant." In addition, several interviewed immigrants recognize that their experience is distinct because of their educational and professional preparation or the fact that they became initiated into the United States as students or employees of organizations that are very inclusive of minorities.

Last but not least, several co-researchers are sure to highlight their previous exposure to countries other than their own and the ensuing high degree of comfort with different cultures. They believe that these experiences have uniquely prepared them for the transition and made them much more adaptable as compared to other immigrants. A man who came here from Iceland two years ago offers the following comment:

I actually lived in five different countries, so I guess I'm pretty adaptable in that sense. I don't have problems. I've been to Saudi Arabia, France, Israel, the UK, Ireland. I guess I'm pretty adaptable. I didn't have any problems, or there were no surprises or anything, so, but I guess I'm pretty familiar with the American culture through television and so forth, so I knew what to expect. I know a lot of American people. My brother is married to an American, so I knew what I was getting into.

As evident throughout interviewees' descriptions, it is crucial for immigrants to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with individuals who are likely to comprehend and relate to their immigrant experience. Co-researchers undoubtedly share similar challenges related to the inevitable transformation of self, struggles with defining and enacting their authentic selves, as well as negotiating belonging and continuity.

Simultaneously, they emphasize the uniqueness of their own experience and do not seem to want to be perceived as a member of a broad and generalized category of immigrants.

This chapter has explicated five essential themes that exemplify the experience of interviewed immigrants who came to the United States as adults. As co-researchers' voices illustrate throughout the chapter, these experiences are extremely diverse. However, the processes of phenomenological reduction and free imaginative variation have allowed for the emergence of the commonalities that unite co-researchers' lived experiences. These commonalities have been expressed through five essential themes: (1) inevitable transformation of self, (2) barriers to being authentic, (3) managing issues of belonging and acceptance, (4) negotiating continuity, (5) relationships with, and to, other "others." The explication of each of the themes through co-researchers' own voices has demonstrated the uniqueness of every person's reality.

The following chapter will utilize these five themes to illustrate how the process of hyper-reflection led to the emergence of a revelatory phrase, which unifies all the core themes and captures the essence of the co-researchers' experience. Chapter Five will also expound on the phenomenon of transnational identity negotiations as experienced by interviewed immigrants and expressed through the five essential themes, and it will further address the similarities and differences in the way that immigrants communicatively negotiate their transnational identities based on their unique situations and backgrounds.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION THROUGH HYPER-REFLECTION

Chapter Five continues the process of phenomenological inquiry by extending the interpretation of capta described in the previous chapter. In particular, it focuses on the explication of a revelatory phrase which interrelates the themes and captures the essence of immigrant lived experience. The emergence of the revelatory phrase was possible through the process of hyper-reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), which involved re-reading and critically examining all the transcripts and the themes that emerged during phenomenological reduction and interpretation. Throughout the process of interpretation it was crucial not only to “go back to the speech of the respondents, but also go beyond those already speaking significations” (Nelson, 1989, p. 237). This phenomenological interpretation communicates how the essential themes are interconnected, and it provides insights into how immigrants in the United States negotiate their transnational identities.

A Bird in a Cage

During the process of reading and reflecting upon co-researchers’ comments, it became apparent that the idea conveyed by the phrase “a bird in a cage” was present within all interviews. This analogy, as expressed by one interviewee, appears to epitomize the experience of all co-researchers and demonstrate the interconnectivity of all the essential themes: (1) inevitable transformation of self, (2) barriers to being authentic, (3) managing issues of belonging and acceptance, (4) negotiating continuity, (5) relationships with, and to, other “others.”

For all co-researchers, being an immigrant is inextricably linked with various degrees of inability to express their authentic self. This is exemplified by a narrative of a woman who came from Romania:

My brain feels limited like I can't express myself. I feel like I'm a bird in a cage because I can't express myself, my personality fully with a different language. It's frustrating too. I feel like I'm a multiple personality. I know it sounds kind of sick. Those two personalities have things in common. In Romanian, how I express, what I say, how I am is one thing compared to English. In English I have limited expressions, feelings. I tell people there is no emotional value attached to the [English] language. In English I almost feel like my personality is reduced. I don't express as much as I could. People are asking me, "Do you think in Romanian?" I think in Romanian, but very fast I translate it. I talk to my family [back home] pretty much once a week, and I use English 24/7, so of course it's almost automatic, but there are some words that when I'm tired, I'm like, "I'm not speaking English any more," and I start answering in Romanian.

While inability to authentically express oneself through the medium of a foreign language is centralized in this description, difficulties with communicating one's true self permeate other spheres of immigrant realities. Co-researchers' narratives consistently convey that the foreign language and/or cultural norms that they are expected to adopt constrain their freedom of expression. Interestingly, some interviewees even find themselves "being something different" (as an immigrant from Norway put it) when they speak English as compared to speaking their mother tongue.

Language and culture act as filters that trap who co-researchers believe they truly are, and reduce their selves to the enactments that are deemed appropriate by the majority within the host country. This causes challenges with the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Likewise, co-researchers' experiences in professional contexts, as expressed through their narratives, indicate their frustrations with not being able to demonstrate their competence as effortlessly as they could through their mother tongue and in the environment that more closely aligns with their own cultural values.

Immigrants interviewed for this study seem to have difficulty conveying their true professional self as they experience that others' perceptions of who they are differ from those of their own. Living with the constraints that language and cultural norms have placed on the expression of self may be overwhelming; however, all co-researchers implicitly or explicitly address the benefits they have been able to reap from their new environment. Apparently, the promise of educational and professional growth for themselves and their children surpasses the challenges that they unavoidably experience, and it makes it more likely to feel comfortable in the new country.

The close relationships with U.S. Americans that immigrants strive to develop are treated as opportunities to “get out of the cage” and be themselves in the safety of a trusting friendship. Although those relationships are crucial and extremely valuable, they are often complicated by the likelihood that the host country members are not fully able to comprehend the experience since they have not lived through it themselves. Thus, connections with people who can potentially relate to the challenges and rewards of immigrant lives become invaluable. Co-researchers' unique backgrounds, the level of proficiency in the English language, and the degree of comfort with the pressures to adopt the cultural norms of the host country, lead them to seek other “others” to whom they will feel close. Through those relationships, immigrants are able to create a symbolic space within the constraints of the “cage” of the foreign culture. This safe space makes it more likely and comfortable to express their true selves.

Many co-researchers seem to believe that it is possible for them to experience the “freedom” that they remember experiencing prior to their emigration. Some appear to make an implicit assumption that opportunities to interact with people in their country of

origin will allow them to enact their authentic self again. As it turns out for most immigrants, however, the transformation of self that has inevitably and inadvertently occurred forces them to again carefully negotiate how they perform self in the company of those they had previously left behind. As they attempt to appear authentic during those interactions, co-researchers are forced to “imprison” another part of themselves – that which has been developed while living in their new home. Thus, it seems that immigrants no longer have the freedom to enact their true self, no matter which environment they are in. In their host country, they constantly strive to conceal the parts of themselves that would identify them as different or “other.” As they go “back home,” they attempt to “fit in” with their co-nationals in order to be considered as one of them.

These struggles complicate co-researchers’ sense of belonging and make it difficult to define where their home is. While they may have some control over how they enact their communication behaviors, as they have been able to learn and accept the rules of interaction in the two environments, some parts of their identity, such as foreign-sounding accent or physical appearance, cannot be easily concealed. Those involuntary identity enactments single them out as different, as a thirty-year old woman from Sri Lanka expressed through her narrative:

[Complete strangers say] “You look pretty” because I look different. They are so used to African Americans or white Americans, and I would look different. In Sri Lanka, people won’t call me out on it. But here for example when we go to [supermarket] or something, they would say, “Oh, you look so pretty.” STRANGERS, I’m talking about complete STRANGERS! Because [I] look different than everybody else, and [I’m] like, “Oh, my gosh! I stand out in a crowd!” But that’s what they do. I mean, they call out. I think that’s because of the difference in appearance rather than real beauty. They think, “Oh, this is different. Look at the species.”

What makes it challenging for many co-researchers to feel fully accepted is the seemingly innocent question about their origin or their accent. This experience constantly reminds them that they do not “naturally” belong here. It also makes it difficult for some to make a decision about becoming a U.S. citizen because this formal manifestation of belonging does not align with the internal state of belongingness. Among my co-researchers, this is especially true with female immigrants, and both men and women who have lived in the United States for ten years or less. Interestingly, male immigrants who left their countries of origin a decade or more ago, do talk about, and refer to, the U.S. as their home despite acknowledging that they sometimes do feel as different.

Regardless of how co-researchers define “home,” they are all simultaneously involved in, and detached from, both their countries of origin and the host country. Within the confines of “a cage,” where they may have achieved a level of comfort, they constantly negotiate continuity as they attempt to maintain at least symbolic connections with their homelands. It is very painful for some co-researchers that there is nobody in the vicinity who knows them “for what they truly are,” as one woman from South Africa expressed. Although many co-researchers seem to believe that, at some point, they will go back to their country of origin and “pick up where they left off” (as a man from the French region of Canada put it), they often realize that the time and distance have broken the continuity they strive to maintain. For some immigrants interviewed for this project, it is quite clear that they will not be able to move back to their homelands because they are unwilling to have to re-learn to live once again. A sense of resignation permeates this man’s account as he describes his possible future plans to go back to Norway:

I really don't know what's permanent. I just know I'm sick of moving. The physical fact of picking up and relearning everything, then only to discover that every other place is just the same as where you just lived. It just becomes old. But you still think that perhaps that this is gonna be different because of this or that. But then you're like, "You know what? There is no difference. People are people. You wake up, you gotta pay your bills. You can't take off because you have work, whatever it is."

As immigrants who have voluntarily moved to the United States, co-researchers have had to learn to enact what is expected of them, which is sometimes in conflict with what they regard as authentic and true to themselves. After a while, the pressures to alter communication behaviors, which may still be considered as confining, have caused them to change and learn to live with those constraints. Although many co-researchers have trouble acknowledging it, the interactions within the host country have irreversibly impacted their identity. As Hecht and his colleagues (2003) asserted, relationships may cause the enactments of the personal frame of identity to compete with the core of one's self. Simultaneously, the gaps that occur as a result of these relational pressures may lead to the change of the personal frame of identity. Thus, as a result of inevitable interactions with U.S. Americans, co-researchers ultimately achieve a level of comfort with their new enactments of self and may not consider them as entrapments to the same extent that they used to. Although changing oneself to feel comfortable may be effortful, obstinately holding on to one's behaviors and communication patterns seems to increase the degree of distress and the feeling of captivity. A male co-researcher born in Korea succinctly conveys this idea by saying that "unless you mix into American society, you cannot really function too well. It's just like living in a prison."

The following section offers a further reflection on co-researchers' descriptions in the context of the communication theory of identity that was utilized to structure this

study. In particular, it centralizes the identity gaps that clearly permeate transnational immigrants' experience.

Theoretical Application

Immigrants' identity negotiations, as expressed in their narratives and explicated through this phenomenological interpretation, undeniably represent the complexity of identity and its both stable and changing nature (Hecht et al., 2003). The idea of identities being simultaneously situational and enduring is exemplified particularly through the theme of the "inevitable transformation of self." Interactions within the host country have caused co-researchers to adopt (at varying levels of consciousness) communication behaviors expected of people who have voluntarily chosen to live in the United States. Evidently, the necessity to learn how to function in a new environment has not only caused a change in the manifestation of self but also an alteration of immigrants' self-concepts. Some immigrants do insist that the core of their selves has remained unchanged despite all the pressures they have encountered. However, the challenges that co-researchers experience whenever they communicate with people in their homelands indicate that a mere adjustment of communication behavior is no longer sufficient for effective and rewarding interactions. Thus, relational frame of identity has clearly affected the personal layer causing it to change, as conceptualized by Hecht's (2003) communication theory of identity.

Identity Gaps

Personal vs. enacted frame. The data gathered for this study makes it apparent that immigrants experience multiple identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The contradiction between personal and enacted frame is revealed through co-researchers'

constant negotiations of who they are and who they need to become in order to experience a degree of comfort and acceptance. They oftentimes deny changing the core of selfhood; however, their communication behaviors suggest that these changes have indeed occurred. This tension between co-researchers' perceptions of themselves and their enactments of self lurks throughout their descriptions as they recount the exhilaration with the opportunities that they believe they can take advantage of in the U.S. as long as they conform to and adopt the strictly defined norms. As a result of the transformation of self, co-researchers inevitably experience a conflict between their personal layer of self and that which is performed (Hecht et al., 2003). This happens both in the host country and in the country of origin as immigrants are forced to abide by the norms that guide interaction in those diverse environments.

Personal vs. relational frame. "Identities are meanings ascribed to the self by others in the social world" (Hecht et al., 2005, p. 264), but what happens when others ascribe an identity that contradicts one's selfhood and one's own definitions of belongingness? Relationally, immigrants in this study are defined as "the other"; however, they do not necessarily perceive themselves in such a manner. Co-researchers' constant negotiations of how they view themselves and how others view them illustrate their endeavors to reduce the gap between the personal and relational identity layers (Hecht et al., 2005). For many co-researchers, the experience of being an immigrant in the U.S. places them in the minority for the first time in their life, which makes it difficult for them to accept the reality of being identified as not "naturally belonging."

Clearly, immigrants in this study keep emphasizing that their own experience is unique because of the specific circumstances that led them to relocate to the U.S., the

degree of attachment to the country of origin, the intensity and the nature of involvement with other co-nationals living in the U.S., co-researchers' educational and professional backgrounds, or the degree of similarities with mainstream U.S. Americans. By making such claims, co-researchers simultaneously stress their similarity with, and their distinctiveness from, any of the groups that they happen to be identified with by others. Immigrants interviewed for this project seem to do so in order to assert the complexity of their own selfhood and the impossibility of reducing it to a simple category of an outsider.

Communal vs. relational frame. The analysis of the capta also reveals the gap between relational and communal layers of identity. As Hecht and colleagues (2003) stated, relationships complicate one's communal identity due to the ascriptions and categorizations that occur through interactions. The analyses of the capta suggest a clear disconnect between immigrants' relational commitments and their group identifications. Clearly, relationships with other immigrants – both co-nationals and other foreign-born individuals – are crucial to the feeling of comfort and belonging. These relationships also allow co-researchers to express their selves more freely than in the company of host country members. Other immigrants seem to be the only “group” that can most completely understand co-researchers' experience in the host country; however, interviewees are highly reluctant to identify themselves as members of this broad and diverse category. Even though relationships with other “others” are indeed rewarding, co-researchers see more differences than similarities in their individual experiences. The only factor that seems to unite them is the fact of being a “foreigner” in the United States.

This identifier, however, is exactly what they take exception to because it complicates their sense of belonging.

The capta gathered through this study indicates that immigrants do not perceive their group membership through identity labels, as the communication theory of identity would suggest (Witteborn, 2004). Close relationships with U.S. Americans that co-researchers work to develop can be perceived as attempts to demonstrate their unique positionality and defy all-encompassing labels. Interviewees' narratives communicate their efforts to be viewed as a distinctive individual rather than as mere members of a broad category – either as immigrants or as representatives of their countries of origin. It is likely that immigrants' communal identity is not performed through identity labels because they have trouble defining themselves with any single category: an immigrant, a national of their homeland, an American, or a “hyphenated American.” Co-researchers' descriptions indicate that they are symbolically either excluded from, or included in, these categories through communication. None of these labels, however, can completely and exclusively express their belongingness and the complexity of their multiple identities.

Personal vs. communal frame. The gap between personal and communal identity layers (Jung & Hecht, 2004) permeates co-researchers' experience as they attempt to live simultaneously in two different worlds guided by distinct sets of values and norms. Immigrants' descriptions make it clear that it is no longer possible for them to take their communal identity for granted. It seems that their experience is filled with an unrelenting search for “home” and a community that they could call their own. Co-researchers' narratives are filled with attempts to find commonalities with others, which may be

conducive to the feeling of belonging. Throughout interviews, immigrants frequently seem to refer to similarities with other individuals with whom they share nationality, religion, ethnicity, cultural backgrounds, or experiences. None of these similarities, however, seems to be sufficient to consider any specific community as the only one that they could be fully part of.

Although immigrants may continue to believe that the people in their country of origin are, and always will be, the group that they can identify with the most naturally, the transformation of self that has occurred makes it difficult, if not impossible, to be entirely accepted among them. Similarly, it is oftentimes very difficult for immigrants to fully identify with the host country members. As co-researchers illustrated through their descriptions, they can attempt to enact the behaviors that will make them appear as part of the host country; however, those enactments frequently make them experience that they are not manifesting their true selves while striving to be more “American.”

Most strikingly, immigrants do not seem to desire to identify with the community of other immigrants, as it was explicated through the theme of “relationships with, and to, other ‘others’.” While other immigrants may be most likely to relate to co-researchers’ experience and their identity struggles, interviewees seem to either implicitly or explicitly disassociate themselves from other immigrants as a group. It is possible that co-researchers do not desire to identify with other immigrants due to pervasive negative associations with this communal identity.

Co-researchers’ inability to define their communal identity reflects the multiplicity of identity and its fluid nature (Hecht et al., 2003). While the different environments in which immigrants attempt to simultaneously function undoubtedly

dictate what communal identities become manifested in interactions, these manifestations invariably impact the personal layer of identity, further complicating the issues of authenticity and belonging.

Enacted vs. communal frame. Interestingly enough, although co-researchers seem to be unable to find communal identity, they do manifest shared membership and the commonality of experience. They do so through enactments of selected communication behaviors of the group the part of which they desire to be in a particular context and situation. For instance, in organizational environments, immigrants want to be perceived as equally capable of performing a variety of job tasks. Thus, they may be more inclined to strive to appear as an integral part of the community of mainstream U.S. Americans who happen to dominate the workplace. Similarly, when they go back to their homelands, they desire to “fit in” with their co-nationals, whereas in the company of other foreign-born individuals, immigrants’ attempt to align their communicative behaviors with those of their interactants.

This phenomenological interpretation demonstrates that identity gaps are inherent in immigrant experience. Most notably, the capta seems to lead to a conclusion that transnational immigrants do not have a single communal identity. Instead this frame of their identity is clearly multiple, and it manifests itself differently in various contexts and situations. It also appears that the enactments of the communal frame constantly compete with the personal layer of identity, as immigrants do not feel that they fully belong to any one community. Another interpretation of the capta, however, may lead to the question whether a communal identity frame even exists for immigrants. Co-researchers’ narratives demonstrate that they are not perceived as being fully accepted by either their

“mother country” or their “step-mother country.” Nor do they consider themselves as part of the category of immigrants that others ascribe to them. Is it then possible that immigrants’ communal identity to which they could comfortably relate is non-existent in the postmodern world of transnationalism?

Conclusions

This thesis sought to explore a variety of ways in which immigrants communicatively negotiate their transnational identities as they attempt to function in two culturally and physically distant environments. The analyses revealed shared experiences of co-researchers expressed through five essential themes: (1) inevitable transformation of self, (2) barriers to being authentic, (3) managing issues of belonging and acceptance, (4) negotiating continuity, (5) relationships with, and to, other “others.”

These themes communicate the commonalities among co-researchers, and address the research question of how transnational immigrants communicatively negotiate the multiple dimensions of their identities. Simultaneously, the explication of each of these thematic insights illustrates the diversity of immigrant experience. Each co-researcher’s description is both similar and different, and it highlights what each person considers salient in their experience. Yet, the five themes that emerged from the capta consistently recur throughout the narratives irrespective of immigrants’ backgrounds. The expression of every theme, however, uniquely reflects each person’s standpoint as it is impacted by their national origin, race/ethnicity, gender, marital status, religion, socioeconomic status, age, educational and professional background, language ability, accent, support network, motivations for immigration, previous exposure to and the level of comfort with the

mainstream U.S. American culture, the number of years they have spent in the United States, or the age at which they came to the U.S.

The capta gathered through the interviews undeniably illustrates the struggles that immigrants experience in an environment by which they do not feel absolutely accepted, and which often hinders the expression of their true self. Paradoxically enough, co-researchers' descriptions indicate that they too contribute to the creation and maintenance of the same power structures which they find constraining and which make them feel like "a bird in a cage." While they do not want to be perceived as a member of a broad category of foreigners, and they resent having others assume or guess their identity, immigrants themselves are guilty of the same behaviors. For instance, they make the same harmful generalizations about other "others" and about the U.S. Americans. Likewise, they feel constrained by having to "blend in," but at the same time some immigrants' descriptions convey that they do not appreciate or even approve of the behaviors of other immigrants who refuse to perform in accordance with the norms of the host culture.

Limitations

In-depth interviews turned out extremely valuable in hearing the diversity of co-researchers' voices and experiences. However, some interviewees, particularly those who I had not met prior to the interview, may have been reluctant to fully disclose their experiences during the recorded conversation. Thus, it would be important for future researchers to consider this limitation and to establish a relationship with prospective co-researchers prior to the commencement of the interview process.

Moreover, the level of disclosure may have been limited due to the fact that the interviews were conducted in English, the language shared by both co-researchers and the researcher. However, some co-researchers may have had difficulty to share their experiences as completely as it would be possible if they had used their mother tongue. This limitation became particularly clear when I conversed with the individuals who, prior to the interview, expressed that they may not be “the best participant” due to their limited proficiency in English. Also, the interview conducted in English with my co-national, with whom I had a prior relationship and who had shared his experiences with me in Polish on other occasions, revealed that he had difficulty articulating his experiences and insights during the interview conducted in English. Therefore, future research could include a team of researchers who can fluently speak the languages of interviewees to allow them to express themselves without having to filter their descriptions and thoughts through a language with which they may not feel completely comfortable.

Although the backgrounds of the co-researchers who agreed to participate in this study were extremely diverse, some voices still remained unheard. I had attempted to invite co-researchers with a variety of experiences; however, during the process of recruitment it became clear that only those who had known me or one of my other co-researchers, and who felt fairly comfortable and happy with their decision to immigrate, agreed to participate in the study. One person who was invited to participate refused to be interviewed by responding to my email in the following manner:

This research topic is indeed very interesting, but I try not to think of myself as an immigrant. About three quarters of my time here has required extremely hard work and a lot of emotional effort. Therefore, I would rather leave this behind

and never go back to it. I hope you will be able to find many other "non-natives" who will be willing to share with you their experiences of living here.

This statement makes it clear that the voices of those immigrants whose identity struggles make their experience very difficult are not represented in this study. At the same time this comment may also provide some explanation as to why co-researchers avoid thinking about themselves as immigrants. Perhaps, not labeling one's experience as that of an immigrant makes it a little easier to cope with the issues of belonging, acceptance, and continuity that permeate their experience.

Similarly, only those immigrants whose legal immigration status is established, accepted the invitation to be interviewed. During the recruitment process, several individuals inquired whether they would be asked if they have their "green card." The assurance that this question will not be addressed at any time before, during, or after the interview, still was not sufficient for immigrants to feel comfortable enough to decide to participate in the study. Thus, the voices of undocumented aliens were not represented in this research.

Implications for Future Research

The capta gathered from co-researchers provides invaluable insights into transnational identity negotiations and the uniqueness and complexity of immigrant experiences. It is clear from the above discussion of theoretical application, as well as limitations, that future research should address several issues revealed through this exploratory study.

From a theoretical perspective, future research may further investigate the identity gaps that emerged from co-researchers' accounts. Hecht and his colleagues (2005) entreated communication researchers to continue exploring identity negotiations through

“multilevel statistical analyses, layered qualitative methods, and/or multimethod research” (p. 266). Thus, it would be important to conduct additional studies and analyses exploring such interpenetration of identity layers. Specifically, this study suggests that further research needs to examine the gap between personal and communal identity frame as it seems to be of essence in the experience of immigrants living in the United States. The phenomenological interpretation offered in this thesis indicates that the communal identity frame is not as straightforward as the communication theory of identity may lead one to assume. Previous research found that some groups, for instance first generation college students, do not have a communal identity which would unite their experience (Orbe, 2004). This exploration of transnational immigrants’ identity negotiations further complicates this layer suggesting that the transience and the unclear nature of communal identity problematizes immigrants’ sense of belonging and acceptance, as well issues of authenticity and continuity.

As outlined in Chapter Two, most researchers have been focusing on studying one group of immigrants at a time (e.g., Aranda, 2003; Baia, 1999; Burrell, 2003; Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2002; Hegde, 1998; Margolis, 1995; Viruell-Fuentes, 2006; Witteborn, 2004). This phenomenological inquiry, however, reveals the productivity of representing the voices of co-researchers from a variety of countries by explicating both commonalities and uniqueness of their experience. It seems that the diversity of my co-researchers’ backgrounds facilitated foregrounding of the complexity of communal identity. These analyses highlighted both the similarities and differences between and among groups instead of creating an impression that national identity would provide a communal layer that can serve to unify immigrants’ experience more than any other

characteristic. Therefore, future research should continue to involve immigrants from different countries and various backgrounds.

It is also important that future studies explore the experiences of immigrants living in different parts of the United States. This thesis is limited by the fact that all co-researchers live in a mid-sized college town in the Midwest. However, interviewees who had lived in more multicultural and cosmopolitan cities in the United States, acknowledged that their experiences were markedly different. In order to explore those voices, phenomenological descriptions could be gathered through the critical incident technique (van Manen, 1990) with the utilization of the Internet.

The findings from this study, especially as they relate to the irreversible transformation of self, are reminiscent of the research conducted among international students from thirty different countries (Urban & Orbe, in press). Although international students do share a lot of commonalities with immigrants in the United States, there are some significant differences in these experiences. Most notably, many immigrants who did not come to the U.S. as students did not have an opportunity to take advantage of the support system that U.S. colleges and universities offer. In addition, even though many international students seem to struggle with the sense of belonging as they are constantly marked outside the norm as outsiders in the United States, they do realize that this experience will not last forever unless they decide to remain in the U.S. as immigrants. Future work in the field of communication could explore how the strategies and support that international students utilize can facilitate immigrant adaptation in the United States.

Furthermore, future research should address the limitations inherent in the methodology and methods utilized in this thesis. Although the phenomenological

interpretation offered in this study is an attempt to faithfully describe co-researchers' own voices, it is undeniably filtered through the voice of the researcher. Therefore, it would be productive to follow the in-depth interviews and the process of phenomenological interpretation with focus groups comprised of the same co-researchers in order to allow them to express whether they feel that these thematic insights do indeed represent their experience. In addition, the synergy likely to transpire during such focus groups would allow for the emergence of additional insights and experiences that were not revealed during individual interviews.

The methodological limitations described in the previous section could further be addressed through collaborative research (Violanti, 1999). For instance, future studies could involve diverse groups of researchers who could better relate to potential participants based on shared language and cultural backgrounds. Such commonalities might be conducive to co-researchers' more complete disclosure during interviews. Moreover, conducting interviews in co-researchers' mother tongues would likely allow for richer descriptions. It might also be productive to further explore transnational identity negotiations by research teams composed of both insiders and outsiders to the experience of immigration (Mirande & Tanno, 1993). In this manner, the initial phenomenological reduction and interpretation of *capta* by each researcher, followed by collaborative writing, might reveal further insights based on different perspectives (Urban & Orbe, in press).

Summary

This phenomenological inquiry was not designed to find ultimate answers to what immigrant experience in the United States is like. Merely, it attempted to grasp the

essence of the phenomenon as it is lived by the co-researchers who participated in the interviews while at the same time representing their diverse voices. Thus, it is not possible, or desired, to make claims about the universality of immigrant experience on the basis of this study. Moreover, it is important to note that the interpretation presented in this thesis constitutes only one possibility, since a single interpretation of a phenomenon never exists (Van Manen, 1990).

Despite inherent limitations, this phenomenological interpretation sheds light on immigrant experiences, and the findings described in this thesis can be valuable for anyone interacting with immigrants. These insights can help others notice and acknowledge immigrants' different and multiple standpoints that have been shaped by their distinct cultural backgrounds, and hopefully challenge the generalizations and biases regarding immigrants, which inevitably impact their opportunities and the perceptions of their intellectual capacity.

While I was conducting phenomenological reduction and interpretation and shared the findings with my U.S.-born friends, they often admitted that they too frequently ask foreign-sounding individuals about their origin. My co-researchers' insights made my U.S. American friends realize that their questions may complicate immigrants' sense of belongingness, and that their curiosity may communicate exclusion rather than intended inclusion. Clearly, this process has revealed the inherent disconnect between the intention and the perception of the omnipresent "Where are you from?" question.

The thematic insights presented in this study may also help immigrants better comprehend the challenges inherent in transnational identity negotiations and provoke

conversations about the issues that complicate their sense of belonging, continuity, and authenticity. In addition, the commonalities of co-researchers' identity negotiations highlighted in this study and expressed through others' narratives may help immigrants alleviate the sense of loneliness of their experience. Although foreign-born individuals who decided to continue their lives in the United States may not consider themselves to belong to the broad category of immigrants, they do share similar difficulties and rewards while communicating within the new home. Finally, the findings from this phenomenological inquiry reveal that we, as immigrants, also contribute to the creation of maintenance of the power structures that we consider so constraining to the expression of our true selves.

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Appendix A


Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Human Subject Institutional Review Board Clearance

Date: December 5, 2006

To: Mark Orbe, Principal Investigator
Ewa Urban, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Ph.D., Vice Chair



Re: HSIRB Project Number: 06-11-21

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Transnational Identity Negotiation: Exploring Immigrant Experience" 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: December 5, 2007

Appendix B

Phone Script

1. The following phone script will be used to invite immigrants in the student investigator's personal network to participate in in-depth interviews.

Hi, this is Ewa Urban. As you know, I am a graduate student at the School of Communication at Western Michigan University, and I am conducting a study for my Master's thesis. The study focuses on the everyday experiences of immigrants who came to the United States as adults. I would like to invite you to participate in an interview, which will last for about an hour and a half. Would you be willing to learn more about the study to see if you may want to take part in an interview?

If the individual expresses interest in learning more about the study in order to make a decision whether he/she would like to potentially participate in it, a mutually convenient meeting time for completing the consent process will be scheduled. In this meeting, the individual will have a chance to review the consent document and ask questions. At that point, the potential participant will have an opportunity to agree or refuse to proceed with the interview.

2. The following phone script will be used to invite immigrants whose names have been given to the student investigator by others.

Hello, my name is Ewa Urban. I am a graduate student at the School of Communication at Western Michigan University. _____ has given me your name because she/he thought you may be interested in participating in a study I am conducting to complete my Master's thesis. The study focuses on the everyday experiences of immigrants who came to the United States as adults. I would like to invite you to participate in an interview, which will last for about an hour and a half. Would you be willing to learn more about the study to see if you may want to take part in an interview?

If the individual expresses interest in learning more about the study in order to make a decision whether he/she would like to potentially participate in it, a mutually convenient meeting time for completing the consent process will be scheduled. In this meeting, the individual will have a chance to review the consent document and ask questions. At that point, the potential participant will have an opportunity to agree or refuse to proceed with the interview.

3. The following phone script will be used to ask individuals in the student investigator's personal and professional network if they know any immigrants that might be willing to participate in in-depth interviews.

Hello, this is Ewa Urban. As you know, I am a graduate student at the School of Communication at Western Michigan University, and I am conducting a study for my Master's thesis. The study focuses on the everyday experiences of immigrants who came

to the United States as adults. Do you know anyone who immigrated to the U.S. as an adult and might be willing to participate in an interview, which will last for about an hour and a half?

Appendix C

Flyer

The following flyer will be posted at local church communities, companies, and the office of English as a second language at a local university. The student investigator will ask representatives of these institutions for permission to post the flyer by explaining the research briefly in the following manner:

Hello, my name is Ewa Urban. I am a graduate student at the School of Communication at Western Michigan University, and I am conducting a study for my Master's thesis. The study focuses on the everyday experiences of immigrants who came to the United States as adults. Can I post this flyer on the bulletin board of your organization to encourage potential participants to contact me?

EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

***WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN A 90-MINUTE
CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW
WITH EWA URBAN, GRADUATE STUDENT,
ON THE SUBJECT OF:***

**“EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANTS
IN THE UNITED STATES”**

**THIS IS A RESEARCH STUDY THAT WILL GATHER INFORMATION
PROVIDED DURING INDIVIDUAL, CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEWS**

*** MUST HAVE IMMIGRATED TO THE UNITED
STATES AS AN ADULT***

**To learn more about the study,
please contact: Ewa Urban
(269) 323-3854**

ewaurban@yahoo.com

Experiences of Immigrants
ewaurban@yahoo.com
(269) 323-3854

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ewaurban@yahoo.com
(269) 323-3854

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Experiences of Immigrants
ewaurban@yahoo.com
(269) 323-3854

Appendix D

Consent Form Script

Thank you for taking out time to join me today. If you feel any discomfort before or during this discussion, feel free to stop the interview at any time and leave. Before we actually begin this interview, I would like you to take your time and read this informed consent form. You will need to carefully read through it, sign and return one copy to me, and keep the other copy for yourself. Please feel free to ask questions. It is very important to respect your confidentiality and the confidentiality of those who you may be talking about. Therefore, do not reveal any names or other identifying information about other people you may mention during this interview. If any identifying information emerges during the interview, it will be disguised or removed from the transcripts.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (269) 323-3854 or ewaurban@yahoo.com or Dr. Mark Orbe at (269) 387-3132 email

mark.orbe@wmich.edu.

Thank you again.

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
H. S. I. R. B.
Approved for use for one year from this date:

Informed Consent Form

DEC 05 2006

x May Lagerwe
HSIRB Chair

Western Michigan University
School of Communication

Principal Investigator: Dr. Mark P. Orbe, Professor, School of Communication,
Western Michigan University, 269-387-3132, Mark.Orbe@wmich.edu

Student Investigator: Ewa Urban, MA candidate, School of Communication, Western
Michigan University, 269-387-2750, Ewa.L.Urban@wmich.edu

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled, "*Transnational identity negotiation: Exploring first-generation immigrant experience*," which will study the lived experiences of individuals who immigrated to the United States as adults. This study is being conducted by Ewa Urban (MA student, School of Communication) for her master's thesis.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I agree to participate in one interview. This process will take approximately 90 minutes to complete. I can terminate the interview at any time for any reason without prejudice or penalty.

During the interview, I will be asked to describe incidents and interactions that symbolize my experience as an immigrant. In addition, I will be asked about the nature of communication with people in my country of origin as well as the nature of my everyday interactions with U.S. Americans.

One risk to participate is the 90-minute time commitment needed to complete the interview. Other risks may include the possibility of discomfort while sharing experiences. In addition, topics may be sensitive to respond to. Although my participation is valuable, there are no direct benefits that I will experience by taking part in this study.

My identity and information collected from me shall remain confidential. My responses will be audio-taped, transcribed, and later reviewed by the investigator of this project. The audio tapes following transcription will immediately be destroyed. Written transcripts will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office and at no time be handled by anyone other than the investigators of this study. All materials, including written materials will be retained for at least three years (as required by university policy) in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

H. S. I. R. B.

Approved for use for one year from this date

DEC 05 2006

x May Lagom
HSIRB Chair

Informed Consent Form (Cont.)

be subsequently destroyed. In short, at no time will any of my responses be linked to me personally.

If I have any question or concerns about this study, or would like a copy of the research reports it generates, I may contact the investigators listed on the top of this form. In addition, I may also contact the Chair of Western Michigan University's Human Subjects Institutional review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice-President for Research at 269-387-8298 with any concerns I may have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. I should not participate in this interview if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature. My participation indicates that I am aware of the purpose and requirements of the study.

Signature_____
Date

Consent Obtained by: _____
Initials of researcher

Date

My signature below indicates that I agree not to discuss, outside of this focus group, any comments made by the other participants.

Signature_____
Date

Appendix F

Topical Protocol and Hypothetical Questions

Topical Protocol

1. Incidents and interactions that symbolize co-researcher's experience as an immigrant.
2. Co-researchers' nature of communication with individuals in the country of origin.
3. The nature of interactions with U.S. Americans as experienced by co-researchers in everyday communication.

Opening Questions

1. What country did you emigrate from?
2. When did you emigrate?
3. Can you tell me how you decided to immigrate to the United States?

Hypothetical Questions

4. What specific experience or interaction stands out as important to you as an immigrant? It could be either positive or negative. Can you describe it in detail?
5. Describe your emotions as they relate to your decision to emigrate.
6. How does your experience in the United States compare to your expectations before coming here? Can you describe an example that illustrates this?
7. Have you kept in touch with your family, friends, and acquaintances in your country of origin?
 - a. Can you describe how you have kept in touch?
 - b. Why have you (why have you not) kept in touch with them?
8. Do you feel connected to your country of origin? Can you describe this connection? Can you provide specific examples of how you remain connected?

9. How would you describe your interactions and relationships with people in your country of origin? Can you give me an example of what you talk about and how you communicate?
10. Is your communication with people in your country of origin different now from what it was when you lived there?
 - a. Can you give me an instance that demonstrates how it is different?
11. Can you describe the reactions you have experienced from the U.S. Americans while communicating with them?
12. What country do you consider to be your home?
13. Can you describe some emotions that you experience when you think about spending the rest of your life in the United States?
14. Is there any more information that you would like to share with me that we have not talked about?
15. Do you know any other immigrants who may be willing to participate in an interview?