

Who Am I?

Reconstructing Cultural Identity Upon Reentry

Master's Thesis
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March 2012

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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Title Who Am I? - Reconstructing Cultural Identity Upon Reentry	
Subject Intercultural Communication	Level Master's Thesis
Month and Year March 2012	Number of Pages 93 + 1 Appendix
<p>Abstract</p> <p>The topic of this thesis is reentry adaptation and its effects on an individual's cultural identity. The purpose of the study is to find out what kinds of problems may arrive during reentry adaptation, how identity is changed as a result of intercultural experiences, as well as what kinds of communication strategies help the entire adaptation process. The aim of the study is to examine what kinds of factors should be taken into account during reentry in order to make it easier on the returnees. In addition the aim is to investigate how individuals are able to comprehend their new cultural identity and in which ways they are able to communicate the possible changes to friends and family at home.</p> <p>The research was conducted using a qualitative open-ended questionnaire that was sent to a sample of 15 participants who have lived abroad for a minimum of three months and have returned back to Finland. The resulting 10 responses were then examined using inductive content analysis. The results of the questionnaire were presented according to the themes set out in the research questions; reentry adaptation, cultural identity, and communication strategies.</p> <p>The research showed that most participants felt that their identity had changed as a result of the time abroad. Most of the difficulties during reentry were caused by the lack of interest and understanding received from loved ones. Furthermore, participants felt out of place at home, as well as some recalled struggling with finding a balance with their new cultural identity and their old home culture. Finally the research also showed that effective communication with family and friends was one of the key factors that eased the reentry adaptation process. Also, being able to share the experiences with visiting family members abroad was valuable to some participants.</p>	
Keywords Identity, reentry, adaptation, intercultural competence, intercultural communication	
Depository University of Jyväskylä	
Additional Information	

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos Viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä Tytti Tepponen	
Työn nimi Kuka minä olen? - Paluumuuttajan kulttuurisen identiteetin muodostuminen	
Oppiaine Kulttuurienvälinen viestintä	Työn laji Pro-Gradu Thesis
Aika Maaliskuu 2012	Sivumäärä 93 + 1 Liite
<p>Abstract</p> <p>Tämän pro-gradun aiheena on paluumuuttajan sopeutuminen sekä kansainvälisen kokemuksen vaikutukset henkilön kulttuuriseen identiteettiin. Työn tarkoituksena on selvittää minkälaisia ongelmia paluumuuttajat kokevat palatessaan ulkomailla oleskelun jälkeen takaisin kotimaahansa. Työn tarkoituksena on lisäksi selvittää miten henkilön kulttuurinen identiteetti muuttuu sekä miten erilaiset viestintämuodot vaikuttavat sopeutumiseen. Työn tavoitteena on selvittää minkälaisia asioita henkilön tulisi ottaa huomioon paluumuuton yhteydessä jotta sopeutuminen sujuisi helpommin. Tavoitteena on myös tuottaa tietoa siitä miten henkilöt näkevät oman kulttuurisen identiteetin sekä siitä miten he pystyivät selittämään havaitut muutokset perheenjäsenille ja ystäville palatessaan kotiin.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus toteutettiin käyttäen kvalitatiivista avointa kyselylomaketta. Kyselylomake lähetettiin 15 henkilölle jotka olivat asuneet ulkomailla vähintään kolme kuukautta ja palanneet takaisin Suomeen. Kyselyn tuloksena saadut 10 vastausta tutkittiin hyödyntäen induktiivista sisältöanalyysiä. Tulokset jaettiin kolmeen teeman jotka syntyivät tutkimuskysymyksen seurauksena. Teemat olivat paluumuuttoon sopeutuminen, kulttuurinen identiteetti ja viestintätavat.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat että suurin osa vastaajista huomasi muutoksia identiteetissään jossain muodossa palatessaan takasin kotimaahan. Eniten vaikeuksia tuotti perheen ja ystävien väliinpitämättömyys ja vähäinen ymmärrys paluumuuttajan kokemuksia kohtaan. Lisäksi osa vastaajista kohtasi vaikeuksia tasapainon löytämisessä kulttuurisen identiteetissä ja oman suomalaisen kulttuurinsa välillä. Tulokset osoittivat myös että tehokas kommunikointi perheenjäsenten kanssa helpotti kotimaahan sopeutumisessa. Kokemusten jakaminen ulkomailla vierailevien perheenjäsenten kanssa nousi myös esille tärkeänä apuna paluumuuton vaikeuksissa.</p>	
Asiasanat Identiteetti, paluumuutto, sopeutuminen, kulttuurienvälinen kompetenssi, kulttuurienvälinen viestintä	
Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän Yliopisto	
Muut tiedot	

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1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Today, it is not uncommon to experience intercultural encounters on a daily basis. With multicultural communities, increasing globalization, and interculturally competent individuals being an everyday occurrence, many do not give thought to the challenges that might come up when adapting back to one's own culture. Although researchers have long acknowledged the issue of re-entry, along with its challenges, many individuals do little to prepare for the possible culture shock, also referred to as reentry shock, when they return home from spending a considerable time abroad. Persons may not realize the changes that have affected them and their identity, resulting in confusion and frustration when they try to return to the way things were at home.

The goal of this research is to find out how individuals perceive the changes in their cultural identity after returning to their home country. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate what kinds of communication strategies have helped in the process. In order to find the answers to these objectives, the empirical study has been divided into three central themes. The first theme is re-entry adaptation, where I aim to examine the general experience of the re-entry process as a whole. The second theme is cultural identity, where I intend to discover what kind of changes, if any, the participants have noticed in their own identity after their return home. The third and final theme is communication, and more specifically communication strategies. Through this theme, I strive to determine what kinds of communication strategies have been used by the participants to explain their changes to others upon reentry and the adjustment period. In the following section, I will further explain the objectives of this study.

The three themes of this research are the adaptation process, cultural identity, and communication strategies. From these three themes, I formed my research questions:

1. How do the participants of this study experience the reentry process?
2. How do the participants of this study perceive their own cultural identity?
3. What communication strategies do the participants of this study use in their adjustment process?

The focus of studies that have looked at the adaptation process of cross-cultural encounters have been on the problems that individuals encounter along the way. Kim (2003) refers to this viewpoint as the problem-oriented view. This research method emphasizes an individual's anxiety and negative views about their new environment. However, some studies have taken a different approach to the adaptation issues. The learning and growth-facilitating viewpoint, as Kim (2003) calls it, takes a wider look at the experience (Kim, 2003: 247 – 248). In this frame of reference, the cross-cultural encounters and the problems that arise from it are seen as shock that then leads to an exceptional opportunity for learning and identity growth.

Through my qualitative study I aim to use this growth-facilitating viewpoint to look at the changes that returnees have noticed in their identities. I hope not only to discover the difficulties they have faced, but how those difficulties have helped them develop as an interculturally competent person.

I will carry out my research by first presenting relevant concepts and literature pertaining to the topic of the study. The data for the research was gathered through a qualitative questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire will be presented using content analysis. The information received from the qualitative questionnaire will then be discussed and finally drawn back to the literature to see if similarities can be found with the research data and the theoretical background. Finally I will discuss the reliability and limitations of the study, as well as present suggestions for future research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, I will discuss the theories, models, and concepts that are relevant to the study of adaptation in a reentry context. First, I will look at what the term identity means and what kinds of factors play a role in development of an individual's identity. I will then go on to discuss the influence of acculturation on an individual's cultural identity, as well as review literature and previous studies from an intercultural communication point of view.

2.1 Cultural Identity

For the purpose of this study, identity is examined from the cultural identity point of view. In the following sections, I will examine how identity is formed, how identity is affected by crisis, as well as how individuals adapt to their environment.

2.1.1 Formation of Cultural Identity

The term identity is very complex and has developed over the past few decades. The term became known in the 1950's and 1960's through its use in the Eriksonian tradition. In this tradition, 'identity' was largely looked at from the individual's point of view. The focus was on how individuals see themselves and their own characteristics. The Eriksonian tradition recognized that an individual's understanding of his own identity develops with age as the person learns more about himself (Sevänen, 2004:

5). Therefore, this definition of identity looks at how closely a person is aware of his own personality.

Several other disciplines began using the term identity in the 1960's and 1970's. At this point, the term identity began to take on more meanings and various disciplines began to differentiate between the various definitions and concepts of identity. 'Identity' was separated into two major categories, one being personal identity and the other being cultural identity. Even these two categories are very complex and are often explained in various ways. The definitions of personal versus cultural have often mirrored the framework of individual versus social. (Sevänen, 2004: 5.) The uniting thread in the existing research appears to be the quest to define what individual identity actually is, and how it is affected by various influences such as sociocultural aspects. From a cultural aspect, the focus has been on the connections that a person makes through his sense of personal identity to larger cultural groups and communities. In her text Kroger (2000) aims to map out the key issues that affect the formation and development of an individual's identity. She offers a definition of identity development which states that "identity is formed, delimited, and constrained within ongoing relationships and the cultural context" (Kroger, 2000: 7).

To expand this idea further, Sevänen (2004) explains that personal identity is usually seen as how a person sees himself as compared to other individuals and their personalities (Sevänen, 2004: 5). This includes both similarities and differences, meaning how a person feels connected to other individuals and how he feels distinct from others. Cultural identity on the other hand is how a person links himself to other social or cultural groups.

Sevänen (2004) goes on to state that the two definitions have also sometimes been separated into two totally different processes. Cultural identity has been seen as something that happens when a person is in contact with other people and societies, either through interaction or communication. Personal identity, on the other hand develops during early childhood without any major communication and interaction with other groups outside of one's immediate family. (Sevänen, 2004: 5).

This kind of separation of individual and cultural identity is too rigid, and one should recognize the chance for overlapping in personal and cultural identity, as well as the possibility that they can both influence the other. Sevänen (2004) emphasized this in his text as he goes on to state that this way of thinking is too basic. He hints that this view may actually stem from cultural viewpoints. In the Western view, where individualistic ideals prevail, one strives to separate the individual and society into separate entities, whereas in other worldviews the difference is not so clear-cut (Sevänen, 2004: 5 - 6). For example, in many Asian cultures, a strong bond between the individual's social ties and his personal identity is recognized. The individuals from these types of cultures do not separate themselves from the groups to which they belong.

Kroger's (2000) thoughts on identity development closely rely on the Eriksonian tradition of how identity changes during the life cycle. The stages in the lifespan describe the different points during a person's life that require identity resolution through various psychological tasks. Kroger's (2000) focus, as is the focus of this study, is on the Identity Versus Role Confusion stage of the identity lifespan described by Erikson in 1963, which is one that exists throughout the life cycle (Kroger, 2000: 10-11). Role

confusion is thought to be the opposite of identity. Role confusion refers to the difficulty of committing to actions that might help a person define their own identity (Kroger, 2000: 11). This confusion may be a result of many factors, including the demands put on an individual by society and close relationships. However, it has been thought that undergoing a period of role confusion is a vital step in order to successfully develop one's identity (Erikson, 1968: 15 - 19). The confusion and the resulting resolution make a person more aware of their identity. The process prepares them for the other periods of uncertainty that they will meet during their lifetime when their sense of identity is being questioned.

The actual identity formation process begins in early childhood. The process continues throughout the life cycle, with its peak during adolescence. The process begins during infancy through introjections, meaning the formation of a self image through early relationships and other's images (Kroger, 2000: 11-12). Therefore, the experiences of early relationships in an infant's life become the building blocks to explore new unfamiliar relationships in the future. Kroger (2000) says that later on, the child will develop his identity through identifications of similar admired qualities of the people they are closest to. However, the true identity formation process begins once the development advances from the identification phase, and the adolescent begins to define his identity through more complex means. This is the surfacing of an intrapsychic structure (Kroger, 2000: 11-12). This structure is more advanced than the child simply picking up characteristics that he observes in others. This stage means that the child is finally beginning to evaluate and reflect on the identifications and opinions he observes, rather than living by them

automatically. The child is learning to think critically about why something is valuable to him and if it truly gives meaning to his own sense of self.

Identity formation has been looked at through multiple other concepts as well, outside of the life cycle stages. One of the earliest concepts which has been described by Erikson (1968) as an important concept in identity formation is identity crisis. Similarly to role confusion, Erikson wished to bring out identity crisis, not as a negative process, but as a vital moment in one's process of forming a sense of identity (Erikson, 1968: 15-19).

...it may be a good thing that the word "crisis" no longer connotes impending catastrophe, which at one time seemed to be an obstacle to understanding the term. It is now being accepted as designating a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation. (Erikson, 1968: 159).

Erikson's definition of identity crisis clearly implies that the state of confusion will force an individual to work through the period of uncertainty, and that a state of crisis is not permanent (Erikson, 1968: 15-19). It is a turning point where the identity formation process will take steps towards one finding a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Therefore, the identity formation process is ongoing throughout an individual's life that goes through phases of crisis that in turn develop and deepen one's perception of identity.

2.1.2 Identity and Intercultural Influence

Another approach to identity and its development has been to examine how society plays a part in introducing new factors that may affect an individual's perception of identity. Kroger (2000) states that this sociocultural approach circles around language and actions as the key sources of new information from social relationships. In this sense, identity has been understood as the product of the opportunities and restrictions available to an individual through the culture that he is submerged in or limited from (Kroger, 2000: 19-21). Through the experiences of interacting with different cultures and many relationships, a person will be able to have multiple personalities. Through interacting with different social communities, a person will then be able to decide which characteristics of his identity and personality applies best to each different relationship. This helps to explain the variation of identity in different social situations. This viewpoint is echoed in earlier research which presented the Social Identity Theory (SIT). The theory states that an individual's identity and self image are made up of social and personal identities (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 33-34).

In her text, Kroger (2000) suggests that when an individual changes social contexts or has encounters with new people different from his familiar setting, his identity might undergo some changes (Kroger, 2000: 21). From this viewpoint, it would mean that identity is the outcome of social experiences, and a change in relationships and the normal sources of feedback might in turn make an individual question his perception of identity.

One such change to one's familiar setting and framework is relocation to a new geographic location. The change can happen within a country or across borders and continents, but in any case it will have an impact on a person's identity. Kroger (2000) explains that during this type of a change, a person will have to find similarities between his current identity and the new environment that will eventually form their future identity. During the relocation, many factors influence the magnitude of the changes that a person will experience with forming of a new sense of identity. Such factors include the reason for the relocation, the amount of contextual change, the person's age at the time of the change, and family support throughout the change process (Kroger, 2000: 131).

Through interactions with different cultures, a person might develop a deeper and more complex identity. This expanded identity is no longer shaped by a singular culture or group, but rather extends beyond the limits of one culture and taking on characteristics of host cultures. Kim (2001) calls this adapted identity as an intercultural identity, which is "an acquired identity constructed after the [...] enculturation process through the individual's communicative interactions with a new cultural environment" (Kim, 2001: 190-191). Thus, this definition would imply that the identity is now something that had been adopted from outside influence rather than it being something unchangeable or assigned. Therefore, an individual's identity seems to live and evolve with new cultural encounters in a process that continues throughout an individual's lifetime. Kim (2001) brings out that this places a person in a situations where they constantly need to reevaluate their norms and their values and in a sense form a new reality which encompasses their old identity and

also their new evolving intercultural identity (Kim, 2001: 191). Although the process of forming an intercultural identity is very psychological process for the individual, the process goes further. The development process links a person to specific cultures, and more importantly, to more than one culture. Therefore, the person is better able to understand the different experiences they face and have a greater understanding to interact with individuals from multiple different cultures.

The first section of the theoretical background has introduced the concept of identity and the factors that influence its development. I will now go on to explain the adaptation process caused by cross-cultural encounters. The section will continue to explore the effect that cross-cultural experiences have on an individual's identity and sense of self.

2.2 Adaptation

This section will focus on the effect that a change of culture has on an individual. I will introduce the term acculturation as well as models that illustrate the adaptation process. This section will also discuss the process of entry into ones home culture and the challenges that come with the process. Finally, I will be discussing the possible coping strategies that can be used in the process of adaptation and getting over reentry shock.

2.2.1 Acculturation and Cross-Cultural Adaptation

When dealing with adaptation to different cultures, various issues will arise that require individuals going abroad to learn new ways of dealing with problems and situations. This adaptation to a multicultural world

requires us to change our usual frame of thinking and stretch our normal limits of understanding. Various disciplines have researched this process of cultural adaptation, resulting in a broad scope of knowledge, theories and approaches. In this study, the approach will be looking at cultural adaptation on an individual level. The factors that have been examined in studies on an individual level can be roughly divided into three categories, presented by Kim (2003). The first is that an individual has their own distinctive culture and they enter into a new unfamiliar environment. The second factor is that an individual is somehow tied to their host environment for support. The third factor is that the individual is somehow involved in communication and contact with the new environment (Kim, 2003: 243–244).

The process of adapting to a new culture has been referred to with many different names. For the purpose of this study, adaptation will be looked at from an acculturation viewpoint, which refers to a person acquiring some aspects of a host culture. However, it should be kept in mind that when acculturation happens, it does not imply that a person simply gains new traits and ways of behaving on top of what he has learned so far. Kim (2003) points out that some form of deculturation, or simply unlearning, may eventually take place as new traits are being picked up (Kim, 2003: 243 –246).

The process of acculturation and deculturation will, in the end, result in a person forming a whole new sense of identity:

Unlike the original cultural identity that had been largely preprogrammed into the stranger through childhood socialization experiences, the emerging identity is one that develops out of the many challenging, and

often painful experiences of self-recognition under the demands of a new milieu. Through prolonged experiences of trial and error, the stranger begins to 'earn' a new, expanded identity that is more than either the original cultural identity or the identity of the host culture. (Kim, 2001: 65).

Both of Kim's (2001 and 2003) writings emphasize the fact that no individual will keep all of his original cultural qualities, nor will he adopt all of the host culture's traits (Kim, 2001: 65). Rather, the end result is a give and take of both sides, where the person will find a balance of both sides that he feels comfortable with.

Adaptation models demonstrate the various phases of the acculturation process. In her article Kim (2003) presents the commonly used "W-curve" to illustrate the various phases of the adaptation process (Kim, 2003: 248). The U-curve model that then extended to the W-curve was originally presented by Gullahorn and Gullahorn in 1963 (Cox 1980: 72).

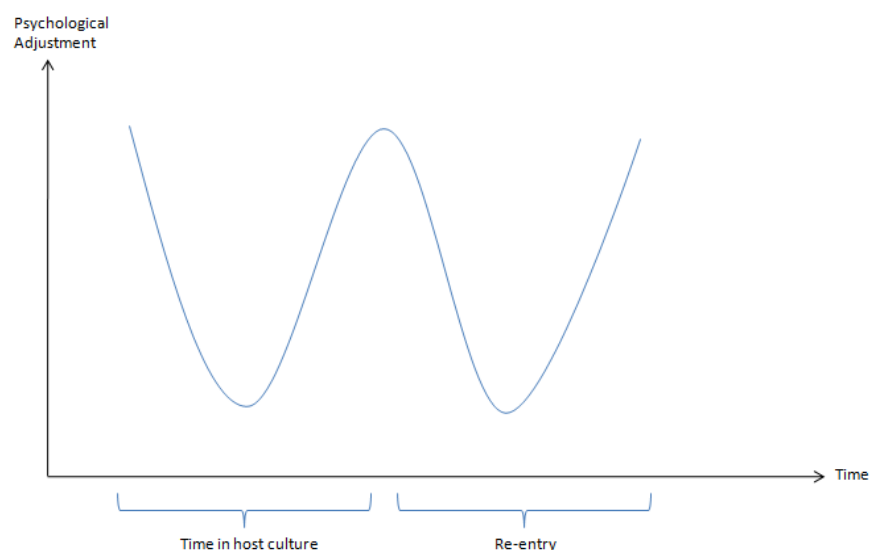


FIGURE 1: Kim's U-Curve and W-Curve Adaptation Model of Sojourners (Kim, 2003: 249).

The W-curve seen in Figure 1 shows a stereotypical pattern for an individual's cross-cultural adaptation process. The process begins with what is often referred to as the "honeymoon" phase. A phase in which the host culture is viewed with a very hopeful and optimistic outlook. This phase is then followed by a stage of hostility, depression and possibly strong stereotypes towards the host culture. This phase is also often referred to as the culture shock phase. After the shock, becomes the recovery phase, as individuals become acculturated to their host environment. The second curve in the W-curve model explains the adaptation process of returning to one's original or home culture. The phases are almost identical to the phases of the host culture shock. The strength of these feelings throughout the process depends largely on the individual, time spent in the host culture and previous experiences.

The next model, presented by Kim (2003), takes the learning and growth perspective a step further by trying to show the cumulative progress of psychological and social adaptation.

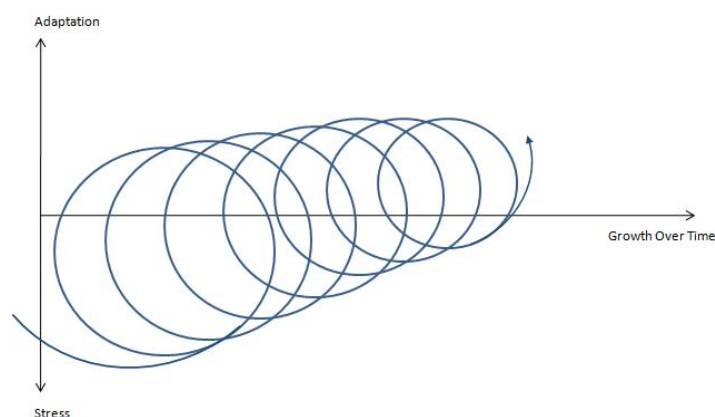


FIGURE 2: The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic: Kim's Process Model (Kim, 2003: 250–251).

Figure 2 indicates that an individual's struggle towards adaptation bring gradual advances towards psychological growth. The pattern repeats itself, showing the progression and regression of adaption, but the overall trend is positively toward adaptation. As already previously discussed, Erikson (1968) suggested that through stress and anxiety one is motivated to find a state of peace and understanding, which in turn fuels the speed of adaptation and personal growth (Erikson, 1968: 15-19). Kim (2003) agrees with this view, and states in her research that some studies have found that those individuals who undergo the most intense culture shock are eventually the most effective in adapting to the new culture (Kim, 2003: 250–251).

Researchers have tried to generalize factors that might indicate the speed of acculturation for individuals. By identifying variables that can help or impede the speed of adaptation, Kim (2003) brought forth a model (presented on page 22) that shows the various factors that have an effect on the successfulness of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2003: 250–251).

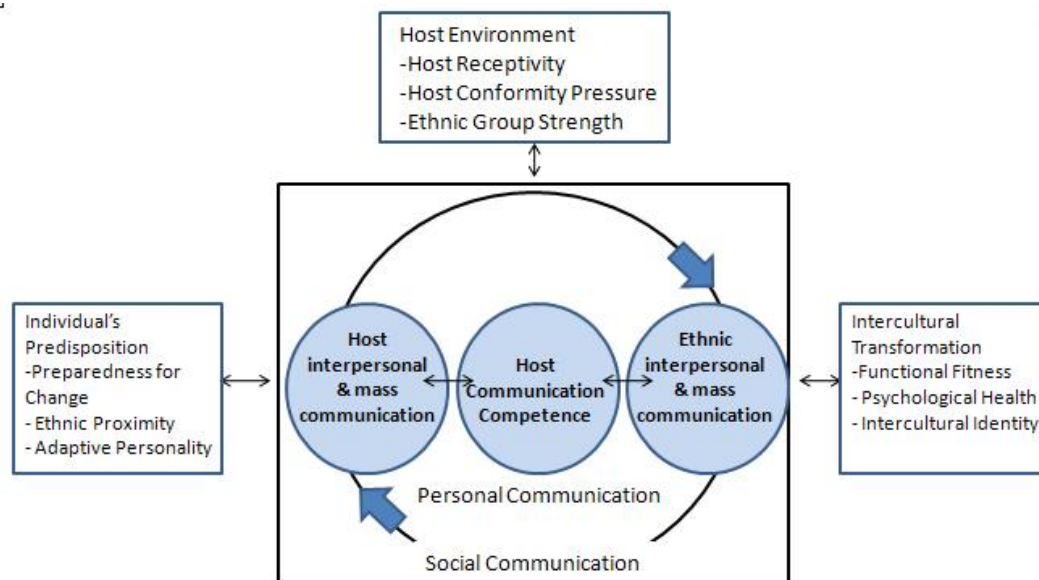


FIGURE 3: Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation: Kim's Structural Model (Kim, 2003: 251).

Kim's (2003) model does not define the process of adaptation as neither an independent variable nor a dependent variable. Rather, her view takes the perspective that the process is its own phenomenon where different factors influence the various relationships and interactions. At the center of the model lies "host communication competence". It symbolizes the key to the make the adaptation process work. Host communication competence is linked with communication mediums both for the host and the culture, personal and social. The model also includes three elements that determine the effectiveness and possibility of successful adaptation. First is the individual's own readiness. How much of a change is the individual prepared for, how big of a cultural change is happening and how adaptive the individual is in general. Second is the host environment; is the environment inviting, what kinds of expectations they have and can they be met. Finally, the third element is intercultural transformation, exploring

if the individual is physically and psychologically able to process the changes that come with the adaptation into a new culture.

Now that the basic concepts about acculturation and adaptation have been introduced, I will go into more detail about the process of returning to one's home culture. The general issues of reentry will be discussed, along with the phases of the process.

2.2.2 Reentry

In this section, I will define and discuss reentry adjustment. This study will use Adler's (1981) definition of reentry adjustment which defines it as "the transition from a foreign culture back into one's home culture. It is the experience of facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment for a significant period of time" (Adler, 1981: 343). One of the main issues about coming home has been the fact that it has not been seen as a possible cause for concern. After all, a person knows what home is like. A person also knows the people there, and one is familiar with the customs and norms. Although attention is given to the possible problems of adjusting back to life at home, it still seems to surprise people. Sussman (2001) suggests that the underlying cause for the reentry shock is in fact its unexpectedness (Sussman, 2001: 110). This same idea is also echoed in Storti's (1997) text:

Not only is reverse culture shock normal, most returnees say that readjusting after coming home is much harder than adjusting to the 'foreign' country ever was. The only difficulty, of course, is that while expatriates expect living overseas to take some getting used to, they imagine coming home to be a matter of course. When it isn't, when it

turns out to be even harder than adjusting abroad, they're surprised and confused. (Storti, 1997: 14).

According to Storti (1997), in order to understand the confusion that returnees face during the reverse culture shock, it is important to understand the many definitions of 'home'. In its simplest sense, home can be defined as the place where people speak your native language and where people behave in the same cultural sense as you do. However, this is rarely all that is expected of the idea that is 'home' when returnees arrive. The broader definition of home is largely based in feelings. 'Home' in this more complex sense means that a person is wanting to come back to a place where they are understood, known, and trusted. A place they feel welcome and there is a feeling of routine (Storti, 1997: 15-16). More simply, it is a place where one feels 'at home'. This broader definition is much more abstract, but closer to what the returnees expect when they return. The idea of home is held to very high standard, and when returnees see that the familiar people, places, and relationships are not the same as when they left, the problems of reentry begin.

Two of the reasons that home is not the same as in the returnee's mind upon return is that not only has the place they left changed, but they as an individual have changed. Sussman (2001) states that if changes within an individual can be expected during their time abroad, it can then also be assumed that some of those changes have altered the individual's identity (Sussman, 2001: 112). Changes in identity means that the individual is not going to view home with the same perspective as before departure. Callahan (2010) says that for the individual going abroad, it is somehow easier to adjust to the idea that they will be a stranger when going into a

different culture. However, it is much harder to accept that they do not fit in once they come back home (Callahan, 2010: 1). To further complicate the reentry process, the family of the returnee are equally unprepared for the difficulties during the adjustment process (Sussman, 2001: 110).

An interesting comment that Sussman (2001) brings out in his writing is from a communication point of view of reverse culture shock. He states that a common comment from returnees is that they are disappointed in how little their support network, made up of close friends and relatives, are interested in the experiences they have had abroad. In order to be content, individuals strive for a sense of group identification (Sussman, 2001: 110 - 113). With this in mind, when the individuals returning share the experiences they had while abroad, they are not merely telling about the events themselves. A returnee sharing their experiences is like explaining to family and friends how they have changed as a person while they have been away. Sharing how they have changed is an important process for an individual to be able to feel like they belong at home again.

... for in a larger sense, reentry never truly ends. After all, people don't actually get over experiences, especially profound ones, as much as they incorporate them into their character and personality and respond to all subsequent experience from the perspective of their new self. (Storti, 1997: 71).

As already discussed earlier, a person loses some traits and aspects of his old identity as he goes through acculturation and picks up new characteristics from a new culture and environment. It is this new self that needs to readjust to home. When a returnee can share and explain his understanding of how he has changed, he is able to feel connected to his

friends and family, and once again feel at home. For the returnee, typical difficulties that they face during reentry include communicating with family and friends, uncertainty over their cultural identity, social withdrawal, and decreased relationship satisfaction (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001: 163). In order to deal with these problems an individual must be prepared to cope with these difficulties that they might experience.

In the final section of this chapter on adaptation, I will discuss the various strategies that an individual can use in their process of adaptation back to their own culture.

2.2.3 Coping Strategies for Reentry Adaptation

The issues of mentally adapting back to life at home require both psychological and emotional adjustment. Fortunately, there are some coping strategies in order to not only prepare for the reentry process but to get through the adjustment process. One strategy is to truly prepare for reentry. Thinking about what might have changed, how you will feel about the possible changes, how to explain your new self to loved ones. Ward, Bochner, and Furnham point out that in previous studies it can be seen that there is little correlation between the expectations and the actual experience of reentry (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001: 165). However, even some level of preparation is helpful to guide the returnee through the reentry difficulties. The returnee will have to work through the problems even if they are prepared, but at least it will not be a surprise. Also, thinking about what the expectation is for home to be like before the return will help to put the expectations into perspective. Another factor is not to

rush the adjustment process. Friends and family might assume that after a few weeks, the returnee should already be settled to the normal life (Storti, 1997: 43-44). The process may take months, but it is important to remember that the process will eventually come to a point where you feel at home again.

Most of what the returnee can do is mentally prepare for the upcoming reentry process. However, some other strategies can be helpful in getting through the difficulties that arise. For example, if the returnee feels that no one wants to listen to all the experiences of their time abroad, they should try and only talk about a few experiences at a time (Storti, 1997: 44-47). This will not only help the individual process the shared information better, but others will focus better when they are not given all of the details at once. The process requires patience from both the returnee and their loved ones. Both parties have changed during the time that has passed, and it will take some time to discover the new dynamics of the old relationships.

In this chapter I looked at the adaptation process and more specifically focused on the process of reentry. The process of reentry adaptation closely ties in with cultural identity formation and how a person views themselves as a new self after the cultural experiences. The final chapter of the theoretical background will explore the communication side to reentry adjustment as well as how communication ties in with cultural identity.

2.3 Intercultural Communication and Competence

In this chapter I will introduce the concept of intercultural communication, and specifically how it relates to identity. I will also discuss intercultural competence and how it is developed. Lastly, I will present some communication challenges that come with intercultural encounters as well as the adaptation process. Before we move on to the first concept of identity and communication, I will briefly define intercultural communication as it will be viewed in the context of this study.

Chen and Starosta (2005) define the term 'intercultural communication' as the communication between people from two or more different cultures (Chen and Starosta, 2005: 28). They state that the communication between people from different cultural backgrounds is more difficult than between people from the same culture:

The potential for miscommunication and disagreement is great because of cultural differences. Thus, the study of intercultural communication aims to understand the influence of culture on our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in order to reduce misunderstandings that result from cultural variations. (Chen and Starosta, 2005: 28).

From this definition of intercultural communication, I will move on to explain dimensions of intercultural communication related to this research.

2.3.1 Identity and Intercultural Communication

Scholars in the field have recognized the importance of identity in intercultural communication. Abrams, O'Connor, and Giles (2003) state

that especially social identity has been linked to communication since social identity is the attachment that an individual feels towards various groups. The social groups that a person identifies with usually also have some form of a common communication style (Abrams, O'Connor, and Giles, 2003: 209–212). Therefore the changes to ones identity may also change the communication styles of that individual. The communication point of view stresses that one does not create his identity alone, but rather through communication with others.

The communication accommodation theory, developed in 1971 by Howard Giles, argues that communication, such as language and speech, contain significant factors that make up an individual's personal and social identity (Abrams, O'Connor, and Giles, 2003: 209–212). The theory states that identity itself will control how a person communicates with other individuals in society. The theory goes on to suggest that some sort of acculturation takes place as individuals adapt their own communication style to fit with the environment and culture that they are in. This in turn might leave a permanent change in their identity.

From the literature by Abrams et al. (2003) it becomes clear that identity and communication both influence each other. The next section takes this idea further to discover how a person can interact and effectively communicate with different cultures.

2.3.2 Intercultural Competence

Conceptualizing intercultural competence can be done from various perspectives. In the business oriented views on the concept, the focus of

competence would be more on results rather than politeness as stated in Spencer-Oatey and Franklin's (2009) work, where they looked at intercultural interaction competence from a business manager's point of view. They state that "the dominant criterion for the respondents is clearly effectiveness rather than appropriateness." (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009: 71). However, this viewpoint can be highly debated. For instance, how competent is a person who effectively gets his message across but is so inappropriate that he destroys his relationships with others and ends any future possibilities for communication.

One of the first areas that one should consider when defining intercultural competence, is the idea of mutual understanding and, more importantly, interaction. Thus listening holds a vital role for an intercultural competent person, since it opens the interaction up to dialogue. Salo-Lee (2007) notes in her article on cultural literacy that dialogue "allows for the simultaneous existence of and attention to different perspectives" (Salo-Lee, 2007: 80). This sentence highlights two very important aspects. First of all, an intercultural competent person needs to be open to other perspectives. Moreover, he needs to be able to feel comfortable about such perspectives. Second, Salo-Lee's statement also shows that realizing the fact that there can be differences is not enough; a person needs to also actually acknowledge and identify these differences (Salo-Lee, 2007: 80). By assessing the perceived differences a person can further expand his way of thinking and eventually enhance his intercultural competence.

A definition of intercultural competence that takes interaction into account is given by Rathje (2007) when she summarizes the concept as the "ability within an intercultural context to establish contact in an appropriate way

and to establish conditions that are acceptable for the free expression and effective exchange of all involved" (Rathje, 2007: 256). Although this definition is valid as one of the possible definitions of intercultural competence, it is too focused on appropriateness and does not take effectiveness into account at all. As I mentioned before, appropriateness is a vital characteristic when talking about competent communication, but it is useless if the end result is not effective. Taking the definition provided by Rathje, one might agree that it is useless to provide conditions for free expression if no one actually listens or processes the information. It can be thought that the biggest problems in intercultural communication do not rise due to restrictions on free expression, but rather misunderstanding of the shared information. It is useless for a group to exchange ideas, if no one understands each other or gives the ideas credit. Even Rathje (2007) later returns to this weakness in her text by saying that "while these definitions of intercultural competence do extend the scope of the concept and preserve the broad utility which gives the idea its value, a concrete definition is still lacking" (Rathje, 2007: 258).

I believe that one of the key ties that can bring definitions from theory to practice is an individual's attitude. In case of Rathje's (2007) definition, if the conditions for free expression exist, it is then up to the attitudes and skills of the individual participants to actually take the information expressed and use it to develop intercultural competence (Rathje, 2007: 258). Through this idea of attitude being one of the vital characteristics of an intercultural competent person, it is evident that personal attributes are very important. Anyone can learn the theory about what intercultural competence means, but an individual's personality plays a big role on how

a person can actually learn and become competent himself. In Chen and Starosta's (2005) work, "Foundations of Intercultural Communication", personality attributes are categorized into four dimensions presented in Figure 4 on the next page (Chen & Starosta, 2005: 244–252).

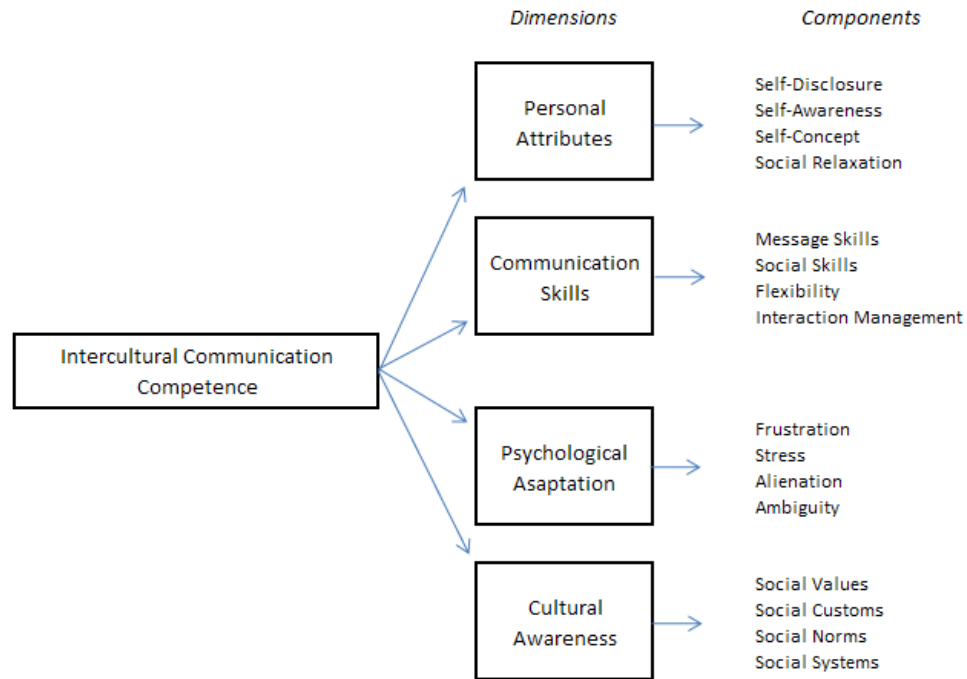


FIGURE 4: Chen and Starosta's Dimensions and Components of Intercultural Communication Competence (Chen and Starosta, 2005: 244).

In the "Dimensions and Components of Intercultural Communication Competence", seen in Figure 4, only one dimension can directly be linked to theoretical knowledge. This dimension is the cultural awareness dimension, since a person can learn things such as values, norms and customs from theory, although a deeper understanding of even these components can be achieved through experiences and interaction. However, it is important to note that the other three dimensions are ones that cannot be learned purely through theory, and are therefore influenced by an individual's attitude and motivation to develop these skills. This

means that these areas of competence are ones which an individual gains through adaptation to different cultures and through intercultural interaction. Personal attributes are something that a person innately possesses, but through self-reflection and increased intercultural competence, these personal attributes can also develop. Of course, these can be developed and a person can change, but this involves self reflection. Also, communication skills are something that a person needs to develop in practice. Theory can help this process, but in order to develop this into a competence a person needs to be aware of their present state, be able to identify personal weaknesses and also to be able to adapt to different situations and environments. Finally, psychological adaptation is probably one of the main attributes that a competent person must possess which cannot be developed simply through theory. A competent person needs to be able to handle anxiety and stress. Ideally, an interculturally competent person would be able to do this unconsciously, without it taking any extra effort.

This same idea of individual attributes is further discussed in Martin and Nakayama's (2004) work. They bring forth motivation as a key factor in a person's ability to develop his intercultural competence. They point out that if a person is not motivated to participate in intercultural encounters, then developing competence is almost impossible. However, they do mention that even motivation is something that can be developed (Martin and Nakayama, 2004: 407–408). If a person is not motivated to understand others in an intercultural encounter situation, perhaps it is just about motivation. The person could be reached through methods that spark their interest and therefore that person's motivation. Thinking about this idea

through a very self-centered point of view, an individual should be able to gain something in order for him to be motivated. The challenge is then to figure out what motivates a person who is not engaging in dialogue. Martin and Nakayama (2004) believe that an interculturally competent group will be able to motivate others if they truly provide an environment for free expression (Martin & Nakayama, 2004: 407–408). That way, a person can feel free to contribute something that he is motivated about, but may have been overlooked by other members. In the end this will provide for a better outcome and a more wholesome viewpoint.

The most ideal definition to present the view of intercultural competence as related to this study is from the thesis by Deardorff (2006) that states “intercultural competence is the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skills and reflection” (Deardorff, 2006: 5). Even this definition leaves room for critique since it is unclear who decides what is effective and appropriate. Even so, the reflection and understanding of what took place is one of the key components in intercultural competence, as it gives all participants the chance to think about how future interactions could be improved.

There are various methods of measuring intercultural competence. One of the most effective ways to measure competence for the purpose of this study would be to use the intercultural sensitivity scale as a tool because it helps to map out in what stage a person currently is, and also it can be used again later to see if any development has occurred. Furthermore, it gives a person a better idea of where they are and what they can develop in order to become more competent communicators. As Bennett (1998)

says in his text, “[the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity] (DIMS) links changes in cognitive structure to an evolution in attitudes and behavior toward cultural difference in general” (Bennett, 1998: 26).

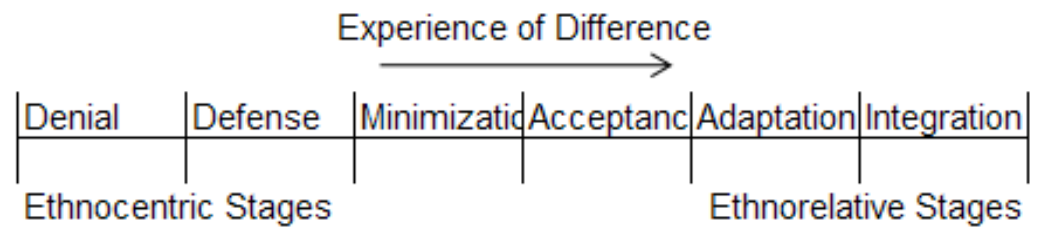


FIGURE 5: Bennett's Development of Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Bennett, 1998: 26).

The DIMS model clearly demonstrates the various stages that a person can be in along their development of intercultural competence. In the more ethnocentric stages where one uses their “own set of standards and customs to judge all people” (Bennett, 1998: 26), a person may be in denial that any differences exist among different cultures. One can also be in the denial or minimization stages where cultural differences are viewed negatively and such differences are avoided and cultural norms are imposed without any deeper understanding. Once a person reaches the more ethnorelative stages they are described as “being comfortable with many standards and customs and to having an ability to adapt behavior and judgments to a variety of interpersonal settings” (Bennett, 1998: 26). This process starts with acceptance, which is a step towards the adaptation and finally the integration phases. The acceptance phase is where a person's worldview starts to change and they become aware of deeper cultural differences than the more superficial cultural differences such as food culture or language. The adaptation and integration phases are where a person recognizes and appreciates the other cultures and they may even

become a part of your own cultural identity. Once they have gone through these phases towards ethnorelativeness, intercultural interaction becomes almost second nature.

As an individual becomes more interculturally competent, the traits become a part of their cultural identity as well. Abrams et al. (2003) introduce the Identity Management Theory (IMT) first introduced by Cupach and Imahori in 1993. They argue that individuals interacting with people from different cultures will become interculturally competent as they form a new cultural identity (Abrams et al., 2003: 212). By the time they have achieved the level of a cultural identity, the intercultural communication will be effortless since it is a part of their concept of self.

2.3.3 Communication Challenges

As already discussed in the previous chapter, communication during reentry can prove to be more difficult than expected. In order for the returnee to feel like he belongs at home again, he wants to be able to express his new sense of identity to loved ones and he also wants to discover what changes have taken place during his absence. (Storti, 1997: 30.) The communication accommodation theory suggests that a person will communicate differently with his familiar groups than with stranger ones (Abrams et al., 2003,; 213). The communication problems arise when the returnee comes back home and tries to communicate the same way with his family and friends as before he left, however the communication styles and identities have changed on both sides (Callahan, 2010: 1). This means that the communication will also need to change in the old relationships.

One might assume that time has in essence stopped while they were away and every relationship can be picked up where they left off. However, this is not possible. The close family and friends one left before going abroad may not be so familiar when one gets back. In reality, the returnee has to treat the people back home as a new culture, and that he in fact is stranger in his own culture (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, 163-165). Although an individual may be intercultural competent to interact with different cultures, he is not expecting to have to use these skills within his own home culture environment.

Another challenge is one for not only the returnee but the family and friends at home. In order to find out how each side has changed during the time apart, they need to do more than just 'catch up.' However, both sides may have trouble listening. After the initial enquiries about how the trip was and how the people at home are doing, most people stop listening. From the returnee's point of view, they wonder why no one wants to hear about their experiences and how they have been affected by what they have gone through.

When you [the returnee] can't tell your stories, you are in effect obliged to remain a stranger to the people you love. The keen sense of loneliness many returnees experience upon reentry comes from this feeling that close friends and relations no longer know who they are. (Storti, 1997: 31.)

On the other hand, from the family and friends side, they get tired of hearing about something that they were not a part of. After all, close relationships are built on shared experiences, and here is a big experience on both sides that was not shared together.

Even when people *are* interested, they will not in every case be able to respond in the way you would like. If they have not had a particular experience, especially one that is out of the ordinary, it is not always

possible for them to understand what you mean, to appreciate exactly what the experience meant to you, and to feel what you must have felt. (Storti, 1997: 32.)

Also, it would be important for the returnee to hear about all of the events that have taken place at home, through which they can begin to understand how home has changed while they were away (Storti, 1997: 30 – 34).

In the theoretical background of the study the aim was to shed light on possible difficulties that a returnee may face upon reentry. Also, some possible coping strategies to get over reentry shock were introduced. The characteristics of an interculturally competent individual were also examined in order to establish groundwork to show what kinds of characteristics an individual with a rich cultural identity possesses. In the following chapter, the research method is described and the results of the research will be presented.

3 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

This chapter will explain the research method adopted in this study. I present the purpose and research questions of the study, the data collection procedure, participants, and finally I discuss the analysis of the data. After this chapter, one should have a clear picture about the participant selection, data collection and analysis, as well as the reliability of the research.

3.1 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Extensive research has been done on identity, culture, and re-entry as separate disciplines. However, information about how re-entry directly affects an individual's cultural identity is much harder to find. Although the concept of re-entry has become very familiar in the field of intercultural communication, its long term effects are often overlooked. It is clear the time an individual spends abroad leaves a lasting impression, and therefore the effects it has on identity should be better understood by both the individual as well as their support groups.

Assuming that an individual discovers changes in his cultural identity upon returning to his home country, I want to better understand how he deals with the changes. I also want to investigate how he experiences the re-entry process, the difficulties he faced, and what helped him communicate the perceived changes to his friends and family.

Keeping this in mind, I aim to answer the following research questions through the research data:

1. How do the participants of this study experience the reentry process?
2. How do the participants of this study perceive their own cultural identity?
3. What communication strategies do the participants of this study use in their adjustment process?

I will examine the data collected using three research questions. First, I will generally look at how the individual's in the study experienced the process of re-entry. I will attempt to find out the overall picture that the experience has left in the minds of the participants, as well as the reasons behind their feelings about the adaptation process during re-entry. Sussman (2001) said that reentry adaptation can be influenced by a number of factors including time spent abroad, initial adjustment to foreign culture, and the environment the returnee's come home to (Sussman, 2001: 110). This first research question will attempt to lay the groundwork to further analyze the possible changes to the participants' cultural identities and possibly the causes for the change.

Second, the possible changes in the participants' cultural identity will be investigated. More specifically, I aim to see what kinds of changes the participants have discovered as a result of acculturation. I will look at the changes that they noticed themselves as well as how the changes were accepted by family and friends at home. Kim's (2003) research seems to show that some sort of deculturation will take place during the stay

abroad. The individuals will also pick up new traits that might have an effect on their identity (Kim, 2003: 243 –246). This second research question aims to show if the participants have become aware of possible changes after they have returned back to their home culture.

Finally, I aim to find communication strategies that the participants have used during the adaptation process. I will look at possible forms of communication that were helpful and which ones may have made the re-entry process more difficult. As Salo-Lee (2007) suggests, opening up communication and making time for dialogue opens up the possibility for two sides to understand each other (Salo-Lee, 2007: 80). This is important after the return especially since one needs to communicate the changes they have experienced. However, as Storti (1997) points out, family members might now be willing to listen as much as the returnee would need (Storti, 1997: 31). Through the third research question, I aim to see what kind of communication was used during the reentry process.

3.2. Research Method and Procedure

3.2.1 Research Method and Procedure

Factors such as personal adaptation, feelings, and reflection on experiences are hard to measure through the use of quantitative data. The general trend in intercultural research has seen a shift from more traditional quantitative studies to more interpretative approaches. Although in the past, qualitative research has been less valued than the more concretely measurable quantitative research, it is now becoming the choice of

researchers in the communication discipline. (Koester, Wiseman & Sanders, 1993: 10 – 11.)

The positive aspects of qualitative data, for the purposes of intercultural communication studies, are also emphasized in Rubin and Rubin's study (1995) study. They state that "an in-depth understanding is best communicated through detailed examples and rich narratives" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 205). I agree with this statement, since data gathered through quantitative means tends to be rather statistical. Intercultural experiences are more conceptual and require a deeper understanding of the individuals involved.

Due to these reasons, this research was conducted using a qualitative method of data collection and analysis, and the data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The goal of qualitative research is to collect insights into the participants' feelings, opinions and knowledge of the research questions (Patton, 1990: 10). Furthermore, qualitative methods were chosen due to the type of information that was needed in order to answer the research questions. Through the use of the qualitative data, the research would yield insights about how individuals have experienced the adaptation process and how they feel their identity has changed. Another goal was to find general patterns and possible similarities between reentry adaptation experiences. Through previous literature and research, it can be said with great certainty that reentry adjustment is a common phenomenon. I wanted to go into further detail about the experience to see exactly how individuals perceive this process after they have gone through the reentry adaptation.

The qualitative electronic survey was sent out to the participants of the target group in February, 2011. The electronic survey consisted of 26 open-ended questions as well as five general questions including gender, age upon reentry, and the country where they lived. All the questions can be found in the questionnaire in Appendix 1. The questionnaire was sent as a link to the participants and the responses were recorded in the online-survey provider anonymously. The survey was in English for all participants. Since all participants had very good written and spoken English skills, it was best to make sure that everyone had the same exact questions to answer, so that the responses would be the most consistent for comparison. The questions were divided into three themes of cultural identity, reentry adaptation, and communication. The responses to the questionnaire were asked to be returned within two months.

The qualitative data was chosen to be collected through an open-ended, free response questionnaire due to a few factors. Through testing the questionnaire in interview format, I discovered that the participants needed some time to think about the questions and their experiences. The two test participants both commented that they might have thought of better, more detailed responses if they had more time to think about their answers. Also, since some of the questions are very personal, I figured that participants might share more information by answering completely anonymously through a questionnaire, than telling me personally in an interview. Another factor that supported the electronic survey was that it eliminated any geographical limitations. I was able to reach participants regardless of their current location. The decision to go for questionnaires instead of an interview, for example, had some drawbacks as well. The

questions could not be clarified to the participants if they did not understand something. However, this also means that everyone answered the questions with the same starting point. Another drawback was that interesting responses could not be probed further if the respondent did not give enough detail in their answers.

Overall, the responses to the questionnaire proved very positive. In the following section, I will go into greater detail about the participants of the study and how they were chosen.

3.2.2 Participants of the Study

As mentioned in the methods section, I decided to conduct my research using a qualitative electronic open-ended questionnaire. Due to the nature of a qualitative study, the size of the sample was quite small. Patton (1990) states that for qualitative studies, although yielding smaller samples, the participants are chosen purposefully. This type of purposeful sample collection method tries to find participants that will yield the most fruitful data for the analysis (Patton, 1990: 169). The participants were found using the snowball sampling method, which is one of the forms of purposeful sampling. This method “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview subjects” (Patton 1990, 182). In practice, this meant that I used my own social contacts to find participants as well as used those contacts to refer me to other possible participants. The sample that I wanted to gather would consist of the following criteria: 1) Participants would be Finnish individuals between the ages of 18 – 27. The reason I wanted the participants to be Finns, was in order to have the

home environment the same for all participants. Although not so vital for qualitative studies, the aim was to make the results of the survey more comparable to each other. The age group was chosen since many young adults travel abroad during their studies and face the situation of reentry during this period. 2) The participants would need to have spent three months or more abroad. This minimum time was chosen in order for the participants to have spent "a significant time" abroad. Meaning that the time spent abroad is longer than a typical vacation, giving enough time for the individuals to become more familiar with the host environment. 3) Finally, the participants will need to have been back in Finland for at least 6 months, giving all of the participants enough time to process the changes they have noticed and that none of the participants would be in the initial shock of the reentry process. These criteria would ideally set a standard that will help attain a uniform sample. The time spent back in Finland after their return, will have given the individuals time to process the reentry process and possible reverse culture shock.

As a result of the sampling, I sent the questionnaire electronically to 15 Finnish participants. Out of the 15 individuals, I received 13 responses, yielding a positive 86.7% response rate. Unfortunately, out of the returned 13 questionnaires only 10 were eligible for data analysis, as three of the questionnaires were only partially completed. These 10 usable responses out of 15 still yield a satisfactory response rate of 66.7%. Out of the original 15 individuals who the questionnaire was sent to, 13 were female and two were male. However, the 10 respondents who returned the completely filled out questionnaire were all female.

The background of the participants of the study can be seen in the following Table 1. The geographical range of the places where the respondents have spent time abroad is very rich. Three respondents had lived in the USA, two lived in Spain and the rest have spent time in Indonesia, England, Germany, France, and Chile. The average age of the respondents at the time of reentry is 23.4 years, the youngest being 18 years old and the oldest 27 years old. The average amount of time spent abroad 2 years and 9 months. The variation in the amount of time spent abroad varies greatly, with the minimum stay of 3 months to the longest stay of 11 years. Four out of the 10 respondents had lived abroad prior to their latest stay.

Background data of the respondents					
Respondent (R)	Age upon reentry	Gender	Foreign country visited/lived	Time spent abroad	Has the respondent lived abroad before
R1	27	F	Indonesia	3 months	NO
R2	18	F	USA	11 years	NO
R3	27	F	England	6 months	NO
R4	25	F	Germany	3 months	YES
R5	25	F	Spain	4 months	NO
R6	23	F	France	9 months	YES
R7	19	F	USA	8 years	NO
R8	22	F	Spain	9 months	YES
R9	23	F	USA	4 years	NO
R10	25	F	Chile	2 years	YES

TABLE 1: Background Data of the Respondents

3.2.3 Reliability and Ethical Issues

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the validity and reliability of the data largely relies on the research skills, insight, and truthfulness of the researcher. The same applies for the data analysis process, since the

researcher is making her interpretations from the qualitative answers of the participants. (Patton, 1990: 11-14.) The accuracy of qualitative studies has received plenty of criticism for its subjectivity and small sample sizes, but has recently gained an increase in popularity among scholars. (Proctor, 2005: 221 – 222.)

[The] inquirer is himself the instrument, changes resulting from fatigue, shifts in knowledge, and cooperation, as well as variations resulting from differences in training, skill, and experience among different 'instruments,' easily occur. But this loss in rigor is more than offset by the flexibility, insight and ability to build on tacit knowledge that is the peculiar province of the human instrument. (Guba & Lincoln, 1981: 113.)

Even though intercultural research analysis is highly subjective since it is dependent on the skills of the researcher, the results have the potential to reveal detailed insights into individual behavior and general phenomena.

In order to make sure that the research was conducted in an ethically correct way, the replies to the questionnaire remain confidential to the researcher. In the presentation of the results, I have taken great precaution that the identities of the participants will not be revealed due to the information that I share. The participants were also aware that participating in this study was completely optional, and they had the freedom to answer with as much or as little information as they felt comfortable with. The participants will also receive copies of the completed study as a thank you for their effort and insights in making the research possible.

During the analysis of the results I tried my best to be aware of my own opinions and separate them from what I present in my study. I realize that I have my own viewpoint in analyzing the qualitative data and it is only one interpretation of the results. However, I believe that I have been able to

represent the data in a neutral way, bringing the true opinions of the participants to light.

3.3 Analyzing the Data

The data analysis for this research is conducted qualitatively. Patton (1990) describes a couple of factors that the researcher must take into consideration before analyzing the data in a qualitative study. One such factor is self reflection by the researcher. During this process the researcher tries to become aware of any personal bias or opinions in an effort to eliminate them from influencing the data analysis process. Another factor is to divide the data into various themes (Patton, 1990: 407 – 409). In my study, the themes chosen through the three research questions will be used to divide the research data into clusters. Each of the themes will then be described using the data collected from the participants.

The method chosen to analyze the qualitative questionnaire is inductive content analysis. Content analysis is the process of identifying and categorizing specific pattern found in data. After separating the data into themes, the content of the data will be examined and similarities and differences are noted. Through analyzing the content of the data, the various themes can be examined more closely and will help to gain a uniform idea about how the different responses to the questionnaire relate to each other. (Patton, 1990: 381 – 383.)

Using the inductive content analysis method to analyze the data corresponds with the objectives and the methods of the study. The research questions were already formed according to the themes of the

research. Questions 1 through 12 of the qualitative questionnaire pertain to adaptation and reentry, questions 13 through 17 focus on identity, and the final questions 18 through 26 ask participants about their communication strategies and styles. The questions of all the respondents can be evaluated and compared to see if common trends appear or if similar experiences have been shared between the individuals.

The responses received from the 10 respondents were examined several times. They were examined for similarities, differences, and compared to the three main research questions and themes. After analyzing the data, the findings will be presented using quotes from the responses. This was done to ensure that the data would be presented in its raw form. The quotes from the respondents will be presented in a way that brings out the similarities and differences in the experiences of the participants. The goal is to find underlying phenomena that can be used for discussion and to draw general conclusions about possible trends in the experiences of returnees.

As an example of the analysis process of the results, the theme in the first qualitative section of the questionnaire was reentry adaptation. Question 7 of the section asked "how did you experience adapting to the new culture? (What was positive and what did you find challenging)". From this question, I was aiming to gain an insight into how the individuals themselves perceived the adaptation to the new culture. From these answers I would be able to see if they had been prepared for an initial culture shock, how they felt about adapting. It would also potentially lay the groundwork for their preparedness for the reentry process, by showing how well they were able to adapt to new places. From the responses I

looked at key words that gave the most insight into the participants' feelings. Key words that appeared in the answers for this section included frustration, confusion, curiosity, exhausting, homesick, loneliness, adaptation, and affected personality. Through adjectives such as these, I was able to form a general idea of the overall emotions that the participants felt during the initial culture shock in the foreign country. For each question in the survey, I chose two quotes that gave the most insight into the main views by the participants. In this case, for question 7, I chose the following answers to show the challenges the participants had faced:

R1: The life sure was not easy, like I did not expect it to be! Even though I sometimes felt extremely frustrated and confused, I was able to take it as an adventure and that attitude together with curiosity and will to learn about the culture was I think absolutely the most important things which made my Indonesian experience as good as it was. [...] The locals hadn't gotten used to see white people. I felt I was like a monkey in a zoo; they took hundreds (that is no exaggeration!) of photos of us (the other interns), we were treated like princesses or royalties... At first it was nice and fun, but there comes a point that one just gets sick of being a center of attention ALL THE TIME. It was just exhausting! [...] [My host mum] was my "cultural guide"; always when I had something in mind that I didn't understand about the culture or the people, I asked her, and that was the number one thing which enhanced my cultural learning and adaptation.

R10: Each time that I have gone abroad I have adapted to the culture really well and later noticed that it has affected my personality. [...] In Switzerland challenges were caused by long work days and little social activity. Also the French mentality and language in Switzerland caused challenges, in the end I never adapted to Switzerland having already spent so many years in a Spanish-speaking environment.

I felt that these two quotes from the answers, best represented the views on culture shock and its effect on the participants' identity. This already shed a little light to the fact that the individuals in this study might experience

permanent changes to their identities, as well as show their capability to adapt to a new culture.

4 RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the questionnaire will be presented. The results have been divided into the three themes formed by the research questions. Quotes taken from the questionnaire will illustrate some of the themes found.

4.1 Reentry Adaptation

The first qualitative section of the questionnaire asked about how the participants experienced the adaptation and re-entry process. Question 6 asked the participants how they felt about leaving home. Four out of the ten respondents had a very positive outlook on leaving home and getting to know the new culture:

R3: I had always wished to live abroad so leaving home was very easy to me, I was looking forward to living in a different culture.

R5: ...excitement over came the sadness of leaving everything I know and everybody I love, so I didn't take it as such a sad thing. I think one reason for that was that I knew when I was coming back.

Although none of the respondents had completely negative feelings about leaving home to go abroad six out of the ten respondents have mixed feeling about leaving:

R8: I felt really excited to go and experience a new culture. [...] On the other hand, I was really sad to leave all my friends and family behind. When it came time to leave I realized how many wonderful people I have in my life. In addition, I have to admit that I came to doubt about leaving for a tiny second, when I started to think all the nice moments and things I would miss with my friends and family

while being gone. [...] However, the excitement took over and I was eager to get to Spain.

R4: I also felt somewhat unprepared to leave Finland for I had only been living abroad in the previous autumn. I felt that this time moving abroad came a bit too soon. [...] On the other hand...I felt quite trustful since I had already arranged a flat with roommates for myself. I knew that I wasn't going to be alone in Berlin, even though I didn't know anybody in advance.

Question 7 asked about how the respondents experienced the adaptation to a new culture. Half of the respondents found the adaptation process to be very positive and do not recall any major culture shock:

R5: Adapting went surprisingly well. I did my studying before so I don't think it was such a shock for me.

R4: I found the adaptation process pretty easy. I don't feel that I had any major culture shocks related to German culture. [...] I also think that my living abroad experience makes it easier for me to live alone in a new country. From the beginning I tried not to isolate myself and enjoyed the company of my new colleagues and acquaintances.

Four out of the ten respondents felt positive about the experience, but admitted to experiencing some difficulties during the adaptation process:

R1: The life sure was not easy, like I did not expect it to be! Even though I sometimes felt extremely frustrated and confused, I was able to take it as an adventure and that attitude together with curiosity and will to learn about the culture was I think absolutely the most important things which made my Indonesian experience as good as it was. [...] The locals hadn't gotten used to see while people. I felt I was like a monkey in a zoo; they took hundreds (that is no exaggeration!) of photos of us (the other interns), we were treated like princesses or royalties... At first it was nice and fun, but there comes a point that one just gets sick of being a center of attention ALL THE TIME. It was just exhausting! [...] [My host mum] was my "cultural guide"; always when I had something in mind that I didn't understand about the culture or the people, I asked her, and that was the number one thing which enhanced my cultural learning and adaptation.

R10: Each time that I have gone abroad I have adapted to the culture really well and later noticed that it has affected my personality. [...] In Switzerland challenges were caused by long work days and little social activity. Also the French mentality and language in Switzerland caused challenges, in the end I never adapted to Switzerland having already spent so many years in a Spanish-speaking environment.

One of the participants had very mixed feelings about adapting, even though they had previously lived in the same culture:

R7: During the most recent move abroad I had trouble adjusting to the new culture. For instance the dialect in my new culture was difficult at times to understand and it felt strange. It made me feel really different. It was challenging to fit into the new culture sine my home culture was quite different. [...] One positive thing about the culture was that people were very open and welcoming most of the time. But on the other hand, it seemed quite superficial and they did not necessarily want to be friends with you to get to know you better, it just seems like some kind of social act that didn't really mean anything.

Question 8 asked if the whether the participants felt at home in the foreign country and if yes, how long it took to feel this way. Nine out of ten participants said that they felt at home, and that the process took anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, and even up to a year.

R7: ...at first no. It took about one year until I started feeling at home. As I started getting to know the culture better, the people and started making friends I became more adjusted to the life there and didn't feel as anxious and uncomfortable as in the beginning.

R9: I did feel at home in the USA, but it took a while to get accustomed to everything. I think I started feeling at home maybe couple months/half a year after my entry to the country.

One of the participants said that although adapting to other places well, the most recent stay never felt like home:

R10: In Switzerland it always felt like a temporary stay, even though there was nothing wrong with it.

From Question 9 onward, the questions focused more on the reentry process. The participants were first asked how they felt about the idea of returning home. The feelings about coming home were very spread out. Four respondents felt happy and relieved to be coming home.

R9: I was ready to return home after 4 years of living in the States. It was sad to leave all the new friends and families that I had gotten to know in SC but I knew we would be able to keep in contact and meet each other again.

R7: I felt quite relieved because most of my friends lived here and I didn't really have anyone special I was leaving behind in the USA.

Three out of the respondents were torn between feelings about returning home:

R1: ...the idea of returning home was nice ... [however] I missed my host family, especially my ibu (= host mum), that it was breaking my heart. I wasn't crying etc not that depressed but I really found it hard to be back... I felt my family wasn't interested in hearing about my experiences, I felt I was talking all the time about Indonesia and that people got tired of listening me. I just wanted to go back.

R8: ...it was really hard to leave. I noticed that saying goodbye to these people and leaving Spain was even harder than leaving Finland. I felt so sad and empty and I didn't expect to feel so bad. However, returning home was also nicer than I thought. It was summer when I left and summer when I came back and all my friends and family were the same, so it felt like nothing had happened during the time I was gone.

Three out of the ten participants found coming home very difficult:

R3: I did not want to return home at all. I remember how I was thinking of ways to extend my stay abroad. I actually felt homesick in Finland after my return from abroad. It did not feel right to be back in my home country.

R10: Coming back to Finland felt uncomfortable and depressing every time in the long run, even though it was always nice to see family again. After the first weeks

came some kind of stagnation and I wanted to go away quickly. Even though I had kept in touch with my close ones in Finland it was difficult, especially when I was younger to adapt back home and to talk about experiences and life abroad, which friends had not experienced.

Question 10 asked participants about what kind of support they got during the reentry process and from whom they got it from. One person did not answer this question. Four out of the respondents felt that they received plenty of support. The main support came from close friends and family:

R7: My friends and my sister supported me by listening to my experiences there. It was more like mental support which I felt like I needed more than I could imagine. Later I realized that it was quite a hard experience to move back to Finland since I didn't have any sure plans of what was to happen in the future.

R8: My family and friends were the greatest support while I was gone and when I came back... a few friends came to visit me in Spain and they also were a great support as they knew how my life there was and we could talk about things that happen and people we met.

Three respondents said that although they did get some support they would have liked a little more understanding:

R10: ...many of my friends did not understand why I was so upset about being in Finland, because they had never travelled. The real support and understanding came from those who had gone through the same experience; left and then returned.

R3: Not many people understood how I felt. I think they were just so pleased that I was back at home that they forgot I had been away. Some were not even interested to hear how my year abroad had been... I received certain support from my cousin who had been living abroad in the same country before as well. She was the one who really understood how I felt.

Two participants said that they did not receive any support for their reentry adjustment process:

R5: My family and friends didn't really understand the situation so basically I was on my own with the whole adjusting.

In the next question, participants were asked whether they were aware that they might experience a reentry shock upon return back home. Half of the respondents said that they knew to expect the reentry shock upon return, but that the process went a lot smoother than they were expecting:

R10: I was aware and I didn't experience an actual shock, since I had kept close connections to Finland while I was abroad.

However, one respondent said that although they knew what return culture shock was, they did not expect to be a victim of it:

R1: I know a lot about re-entry, but I could not have imagined that I could experience it after such a short time spent abroad!! Actually it took 1 – 2 months that I realized why I was so tired etc.! That was after speaking with my friends who had been living abroad, and, with [my teacher].

Two respondents said that although they expected the possibility of reentry shock, they did not know how to prepare:

R8: I thought that I would be really miserable when being back, but I didn't really know how to prepare for that.

Three respondents did not expect any problems when returning home. One felt that it did not matter since they were ready to go back home. The two others were shocked at the problems of reentry:

R5: Well, somebody could have said something about the difficulties that might come from coming back. Everybody in school always remembered to warn about the culture shock you can run into in the foreign country. But what about when you come back?

Question 12 asked what the returnees thought coming home would be like and what it was actually like once they actually returned. Most of the

respondents said that returning home was what they had expected, whether positive or negative. Two people said that they hadn't given it much thought:

R2: I wasn't sure at all how returning home would be like, I was maybe a bit naive and didn't think too much about it at all. But still my return did seem easier than I expected.

Two respondents said that the reentry process was different from what they were expecting. Both with different results:

R8: ...I thought that being back would be miserable, although I was naturally very excited to see my family and all my friends. As it turned out the minute I was with all my loved ones, I was happy to be back.

R7: It was pretty naive thinking but I thought I would be able to continue living like in the USA, for instance when I returned I continued to think in English and even speak a mixture of Finnish and English which really set me apart from other people here in Finland. I think that I had changed a lot and also my home country had changed in some way. In the beginning upon arriving to Finland I just felt pretty much like an outsider or at least a bit anxious, especially with speaking Finnish fluently because I was used to speaking a mixture of Finnish and English with some other Finnish migrants in the USA. But all in all it was not like I had imagined when I returned to Finland.

In question 13 I asked the participants what shocked surprised them the most when returning to Finland. Four out of the ten participants said that they were not really surprised by anything upon their return. Six participants said that the Finnish culture surprised them after having been away in a totally different one. Also language and the way of life provided some surprises:

R3: I just found it really odd to be back in my home country. I felt that I didn't quite fit into the life there anymore.

R8: ...I really expected that getting back to work and normal life would have been way more difficult after such a hard goodbye. I was shocked in a positive way to find out it wasn't.

R7: What surprised me was the culture in general, the people were not the same.

Question 14 inquired as to what the hardest adjustment was when coming back to Finland. Two participants did not give an answer. Two said that getting back to the "normal" rhythm was a challenge. Two commented that speaking Finnish again was strange. Three participants felt that social contacts were the biggest adjustment:

R6: Not seeing my foreign friends anymore.

R10: The hardest part was the deterioration and lack of a social life.

Two people also made comments about the climate and that the change in weather was a challenge.

Question 15 focused on any issues that were still bothering the returnees. Seven out of ten said that nothing is bothering them anymore about being back in Finland. Three others said that they are still a little bothered by the shyness and distance of Finnish people:

R7: Still I feel that the people should be more open and welcoming here in Finland. [...] People are not just that easy to approach here.

R8: I really loved the relaxed and sometimes even crazy characters of most Spaniards, which I really missed in Finland as we tend to be more in our own space and more serious.

The final question in the section about the adaptation process of reentry asked the participants if there would have been something that would have made their return easier. Four respondents said that they could not name any specific thing that could have affected the outcome of the

process. One said that preparing for the reentry difficulties would have helped. Another said that more privacy and time to think would have helped. The other four participants said that better support from family and friends as well as from people with similar experiences would have been very helpful.

4.2 Perceptions of Personal Cultural Identity

The questions in the second section of the qualitative section focused on identity and how the participants have perceived the possible changes to their sense of self. The first question in this section, question 17, asked how the returnees felt about their own culture and furthermore how they related to the new culture abroad. Seven of the ten participants said that they were very proud of their Finnish culture; however, they still appreciated the new culture. Being submerged in the new culture sometimes even emphasized their Finnish ways:

R7: When I moved to America, I felt that my Finnishness was emphasized. I became even more aware of my own culture.

R10: Abroad I have always felt a strong sense of Finnish identity and have been able to examine Finnish culture from afar. However, at no point have I felt that one culture is better than another.

Two people said that although they felt their Finnish identity the strongest, they found that they also experienced some form of acculturation:

R1: I felt very Finnish ... at the beginning of my Indonesian stay, I think I was much more ethnocentric than later. [...] I thought Finns 'do it better' but the longer I stayed there more I got convinced that Indonesians' way of doing things work as well very good.

R9: I think Finnish culture is a big part of who I am and where I come from and I believe it showed in my living in the USA. I believe the new culture in the USA formed me to a more outgoing person. I believe I also became more self confident, in a good way, and lost a bit of the Finnish modesty.

One person said that they identified themselves more closely with the foreign culture:

R8: Finnish people are usually considered to be more serious and shy, however I'm not. Thus getting into the Spanish way of living was very easy and felt like home.

The next question asked which culture the participants identified with more with upon return to Finland, or whether they felt as if they belonged to both or to neither one. Three participants felt strongly that they still identified mainly with the Finnish identity, however one respondent said that they actually felt that they had a stronger tie to the foreign identity than to a Finnish one:

R1: When I returned home, I actually felt I belonged more to an Indonesian than to a Finnish culture. All the Indonesian habits e.g. greeting rituals were still in me; I was bowing and putting my palms together to say thanks. Finland and Finns just felt so cold and thought Indonesian friendliness is more 'me.'

Four participants said that they identified with both cultures:

R10: I at least strongly feel the Latin cultures affect on my own personality, self expression and a certain sense of carelessness. I've always been social, but that too has certainly gotten stronger during the time abroad. I still feel a strong connection to Finland, as well as to Spain, but a compromise to find a happy medium is very challenging.

R8: I noticed myself being more relaxed and taking a different attitude towards life. [...] I feel that I'm Finnish, but with a little bit of Spanish touch.

Two respondents said that they felt they did not belong to either culture upon reentry.

R7: When I returned home, at times I felt that I identified more with the Finnish culture and at other times I felt I identified with the American culture. But generally I felt I didn't belong to either one.

R3: I felt like I no longer belonged to Finnish culture.

Question 19 asked about how relatives and friends reacted to their return, and whether the returnees felt that they were understood. Two participants said that their loved ones were happy that they came back and that they felt that they and their experiences were understood well. Six participants said that they encountered some sort of problems with loved ones not understanding what they have gone through and experienced:

R7: My friends and siblings were interested in my experiences and this gave me a lot of support. But also it made me frustrated when they could never know what it was really like and how difficult it was for me to adapt to some things here in Finland.

R4: They were happy to see me again but weren't too eager to ask questions. The questions that I get are often quite superficial and more like 'How was it?' type. And it's difficult for me to answer interestingly to that sort of general questions.

Two respondents answered that they felt that they did not get much understanding from loved ones and that they were not understood:

R3: ...people did not show much interest towards my experiences abroad but wanted me to concentrate on starting my life again back home in Finland. I did not feel understood and that was very frustrating to me.

Question 20 inquired from the participants whether they or others have noticed changes to their personality or behavior as a result of staying abroad. Nine out of ten respondents said that they had noticed changes. One person left this question blank. The nine respondents all viewed the

changes as being positive ones, saying that they have become more open and confident as well as noticing an improvement in their language skills.

R8: I am being more open to new things and new people and also including communicating with new people more openly. In addition, my language skills improved. I actually didn't notice these things myself, but friends told me they noticed these changes in me and my behavior.

R7: I have definitely noticed a change in my personality, communication and behavior. I have always been a straightforward person and not very shy but I think that I am able to talk more to strangers as a result of my time abroad. For instance I have no trouble saying something to a stranger for instance in a shop or on the bus stop. Also, one part of American culture is to give positive feedback and give compliments (more than in Finnish culture) so this is something that I do more as well.

The final question in this section asked at what point the participants noticed these possible changes to their personality. Two people did not answer this question. Three respondents said that they noticed the changes already during their stay abroad. Also, three respondents said that they became aware of the changes when they arrived back to Finland; some right away and some not until months after.

R3: I think I realized the changes in me on the same day when I arrived to my home country. It was a bit of a frustrating feeling as I didn't feel comfortable in my home country.

R8: After being back home for months and getting back to my normal life.

Two respondents said that they noticed the changes already abroad, when they got back home, and that they are still noticing changes today.

R4: I feel that I changed a little bit all the way and thought that these little changes were mostly positive. So I became aware of them all the way, during and after.

R10: I notice them constantly and there are always more, and I regard them as more positive than negative things.

4.3 Communication Strategies Used in the Adjustment Process

The final section of the survey, questions 22 – 30, focused on forms of communication and possible communication strategies that the participants used in their adaptation process. In the first question of the section, the participants were asked how they kept in touch with friends and family while they were abroad. All of the participants said that they used some form of electronic communication to keep in touch with loved ones. E-mail, Skype and Facebook were on the list for everyone. Also phone calls, letters and instant messengers were mentioned by many respondents. Eight of the respondents said that physically seeing family and loved ones was an important way to communicate and keep contact during the time abroad. They either visited their home country themselves, or family came to visit them abroad.

R10: E-mails, Facebook, phonecalls, Skype + family visiting from home regularly + visiting home myself.

R9: E-mail and phonecalls or Skype with family. Facebook with friends. I also visited my family at home during summers and Christmas. They also visited me.

The next question asked if the communication with loved ones changed during their stay abroad. Half of the participants felt that they communicated the same amount and with the same means throughout the stay. The other half of the participants experienced some kind of change in their communication.

R2: Old friends that I had had before moving to the States kind of faded away and we stopped writing at some point. But with family the communication didn't change from where it had started.

R3: I stayed in touch with family and friends more in the beginning than later on. At the early stage of my stay I needed more support but later on I felt more comfortable of staying abroad and thus there was less communication in between us.

Question 24 asked the participants which form of communication was most valuable to the participants. Five out of the ten respondents said that phone calls and e-mails were the most important forms of communicating with loved ones. Three people identified Facebook and Skype as the most convenient. One person said that people coming to visit them abroad was the most important aspect. Also, one person said that getting letters and packages from the home country were important, as they helped with home-sickness.

Question 25 went more into detail about how people were able to express themselves after reentry. It asked how the returnees were able to express the changes they had gone through during the time abroad. Three people did not answer this question. Four people said that they didn't really talk about these things with anyone. One person felt that they maybe could have expressed themselves better:

R7: I don't really remember, but I don't think I expressed them enough. Later on I realized them a bit better.

Three participants said that they tried to tell about their experiences and feelings to family and friends.

R3: I tried to tell them about the things I had experienced while abroad, why I really enjoyed it and why I did not feel comfortable of being back in Finland.

R8: I was really open about how sad I was when leaving Spain and if I missed it I let them know. I also told them to shut me up, in case I started to talk too much how great it was or how much I miss it.

Question 26 asked what factors helped the returnees readjust to life back in Finland. Two people said that friends helped them adjust as they could share their experiences with them. Seven respondents said that it was family, social networks and getting back into the normal routines that helped to adjust back to life in Finland:

R2: Adapting to the [Finnish] culture was easier than I expected, most probably due to the fact that I visited Finland every summer during the summer holidays, and because I had family living in Jyväskylä (sister, grandparents) who helped me out. I also started school almost right away where I made close friends right away.

R7: My friends and siblings of course. Also getting a temporary job helped me very much to adapt to Finnish culture since I was involved in the work every day. Making a couple friends definitely made the adjustment easier and quite exciting. So, getting settled and moving on my own helped a lot.

Question 27 asked who the returnees felt was the easiest to talk to about their experiences. Three said that family was the easiest to talk to about all that had happened to them. Seven participants said that it was the easiest to talk to others who had gone through a similar experience. They felt that the people who had gone through the same process could relate to them the best:

R6: My boyfriend who went abroad the same time as I, so we could understand each other's experiences.

R4: It was easiest to talk to my friends and family who had visited me since they had context of the place and my experiences.

Question 28 asked the participants to reflect on their experiences abroad and during reentry, and asked them what they would do differently, and what they would keep the same if they went abroad again in the future. Four people said that they wouldn't change anything and that they would do the same things in the future if the situation presented itself. One

person said that learning the foreign language would be beneficial. Five participants said that they would try to keep contact better with people at home and share their experiences along the way so that the people would be better able to share their experiences and understand how they feel:

R5: During the stay abroad I would communicate more openly with my family so maybe they could relate better to my life abroad.

R7: I would read more about the target culture and if the language is new to me I would learn that. Also, I would try to be even more open-minded and take part in unfamiliar things that seem strange and uncomfortable at first. I would basically try to be more social. I can't think of anything that I would keep the same, probably just being in contact with old friends in my home country as much as before. I would probably try to explain my home culture to the people in the new culture so they could learn more about me. Also I would be more aware of the problems in intercultural communication and how easy it is to misunderstand someone coming from another culture.

Question 29 was a free response section that gave the opportunity for the participants to give any further comments that they wanted to say about the experience, that I may not have asked already. Three participants gave some comments that were on their mind.

R1: My Indonesian experience is absolutely the best thing that has happened for me this far in my life. Even though I fell in love with the country and their culture I learn to appreciate Finland. After seeing all the poor people I feel now ashamed of complaining about things I used to. For example Finnish social security system is absolutely outstanding and people in Indonesia can only dream about that. I feel I have second home and second family now.

R2: I think the most recognizable and significant way that living abroad affected my life was the relationship that I had with my father who I only got to see once a year for 11 years.

The final question of the survey asked the participants to name the most important thing that they have learned from the entire experience of going

abroad and coming back home. All of the participants said that the entire experience was an important learning point. Many said that they valued the change to their personality the most, by becoming more confident and finding out that they are capable of going abroad and then coming back home successfully. Also, learning new things about themselves was an important experience.

R5: The whole staying abroad, that you can do it and you can still come home and continue your life. And all the experiences you get from living in different culture. How it opens your eyes and your mind. All the small things you used to complain and worry about suddenly seem so meaningless and silly. Also the thing that you realize how you cope abroad even though you might not know the language so well.

R2: The most important thing I learned from this whole experience was that I realize how lucky I have been to have had a chance to have such an experience, even though it meant not seeing people I love for long periods of time. But I would definitely not be the same person that I am now, if I had not had these experiences abroad!

In short, one can say that the participants of the study were able to reflect on their experiences very well. Many had noticed changes in their personality as a result of the experience abroad. There were visible differences between the processes of adaptation to the foreign country, as well as adapting back to their home culture in Finland. Many also commented on the changes that they and others have noticed in themselves as a result of the experience. All of the participants who noticed changes in their sense of self found them to be positive changes. Communication and contact appears to be important to all of the participants in making the experience a successful one. Some were able to

identify the weaknesses in communication that added to the difficulty of reentry, and others described which factors made the process easier.

In the following section, I will further discuss the results and relate the finding to the theoretical background I will attempt to identify possible phenomena in the experiences of the participants. I will try to find further reasons and patterns within the data, to see if similar experiences yielded to the same kinds of feelings about the overall process.

5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section, the data of the study will be discussed in further detail. The resulting insights gathered from the data will also be compared to the theoretical background of the study.

5.1 Conceptualizing the Reentry Process

The attitude and motivation about going abroad could have a significant influence on the whole reentry experience, as was discussed by Martin and Nakayama (2004) in their work (Martin and Nakatama, 2004: 406-434). In the study, none of the respondents felt negatively about going abroad. Participants were looking forward to the new adventure ahead and even commented that the fact that they knew they would be coming back was something that made leaving easier. However, participants said that they felt a certain amount of doubt about leaving. Worries were caused about the experiences they would miss out on at home and feelings of unpreparedness to leave. An individual's preparedness to leave was one of the factors in Kim's (2003) model that might influence the adaptation process (Kim, 2003: 215). These feelings were reflected in the study when the participants were asked how well they adapted to the new culture abroad. The individuals who had expressed some doubt about going abroad said that the adaptation process went better than they had expected. In fact, half of the respondents said that they found adapting to the new culture rather easy. The reason the process was perceived to be easy, was due to the fact that they had prepared themselves for a possible culture shock. Participants mentioned that previous experiences of living

in another country helped them adapt. However, the other half of the participants said that they did experience some difficulties getting used to the new culture. Interestingly, the uniting factor for all of the participants was that no one was taken by surprise by the difficulties that they faced. Although the adaptation process might have been harder than expected, some level of culture shock had been expected before departure. The feeling of doubt in was directly reflected in the difficulties faced adapting abroad, when participants expressed the fact that they felt very homesick and missed the physical presence of loved ones.

Even with the participants saying that they went through a period of culture shock and experienced some problems in adapting, most of the participants said that they did feel at home in the foreign country at some point during their stay. This however cannot be generalized because of the nature of the study and through comments that some participants felt like temporary visitors throughout the time spent abroad, and never quite settled in. Through the answers in the survey, it was clear that many people felt that the environment abroad was very welcoming. Participants felt that the host culture was very warm and open, and the relationships that were made abroad were very important to many of the respondents. These aspects of the host environment were also present in Kim's (2003) structural model for successful adaptation (Kim, 2003: 251.)

The feelings about leaving the foreign country and returning home received mixed feelings among the participants. Although participants felt happy about returning home and felt ready to go back, most of the respondents had either mixed feelings or completely negative feelings about going back home. A possible explanation for this could be the fact

that the respondents felt that they had adapted so well to the foreign country and they felt that the new culture had become like a second home to them. Naturally, participants who did not feel at home in the foreign country were happy to return home. Most of the anxiety about returning home was caused by the thought of leaving the new relationships they had been able to build abroad. Already in this part of the survey, some participants commented that coming home was difficult since they were not able to share their experiences with the people at home. Participants felt that family and friends were not interested in hearing their stories and some could not really relate to the stories since they had not experienced the time abroad. Sussman (2001) talks about this challenge in his text, and says that this gap in understanding is not surprising since both sides have had a long period without shared experiences (Sussman, 2001: 110 - 112).

Most of the respondents said they received some form of support in the reentry process. Participants said that their friends and family helped enormously. Also, many said that the best support came from those who had gone through similar experiences. However, the participants said that even though their family was happy to have the returnees back home, they seemed very distant and were not very interested in all the things that they had experienced abroad. The participants felt that they were not understood, even when they did get the chance to share their experiences. Support received upon reentry is not a given, as was seen in some participants saying that they do not recall receiving any support from people back home and that they were on their own with the reentry adaptation process.

Participants said that they had been preparing for some kinds of difficulties during reentry. They mentioned that in the end the process went a lot more smoothly than they had anticipated. However, the knowledge that reentry shock is possible did not avoid the actual magnitude of the shock to be a surprise. The participants were surprised at how difficult the adjustment process was, and did not even realize that the difficulties were in fact a form of culture shock. After speaking with other returnees and a teacher, participants realized that the emotions were actually caused by difficulties to adjusting back home. Participants claimed that they knew that reentry might be difficult, but they really did not know how to prepare for a possible shock. Some participants said they were not aware that coming home might be difficult. Participants even stressed that it would have been nice if someone had warned about return culture shock. The unexpected shock that comes when an individual returns home was discussed by Storti (1997) in his text. His comments that individuals are prepared and willing to adapt to the host culture abroad, but do not really think that coming home would require similar adaptation, seem to hold true for participants in this study as well (Storti, 1997: 14).

Participants answered that the experience of coming home was what they expected. This included both positive and negative expectations about what home would be upon return. Respondents said that they had not really given any thought to the fact that home might have changed while they were gone. They even admitted that it may have been naive, but that they expected home to be the same as always. And in fact some found home to be surprisingly familiar and easy to get back to, while the others thought that nothing would be different, when in fact the respondent felt

like an outsider in what they had thought to be home. The different experiences these individuals had between what they thought home would be like and what it actually was, was discussed in Storti's (1997) text. His statement that home is not a specific geographical location, but rather a place where one feels at home (Storti, 1997: 15-16). Based on their feelings about how they imagined home would feel the participants had different experiences about how the reality corresponded with what they expected. Some expected to feel even more like a stranger than what actually played out, while others thought that home would be the same as before and felt no need to prepare for anything else.

Participants recalled being surprised by something upon reentry. Most people were surprised by the Finnish culture, after being submerged in a different culture for so long. Also participants were surprised that they felt like such an outsider in their home culture. Mainly, the participants said that getting back to their normal rhythm was hard. This idea was also discussed by Storti (1997), who said that a home is a place where an individual has a feeling of routine. When the normal routines are disturbed, it will take a person a little while to get back into the normal rhythm of life. (Storti, 1997: 15-16). Others commented that the changed relationships were hard. They found it hard not being able to be in touch with their foreign contacts as much, and realizing that the relationships back home had also changed.

Upon reflecting on their reentry experience participants said that some aspects of the Finnish culture bother them. They said they hope that Finns would be more open and welcoming. Other than the comments about culture, no one else expressed any lingering issues about the reentry

process. This seemed to indicate that all of the participants have adapted well back to life in their home country. Finally, the respondents were asked if they could name something that would have made returning to Finland easier. As already apparent through earlier answers, a few of the participants said that better support and understanding from friends and family would have helped to make the process easier. Participants also said that preparing for the reentry process would have helped from being completely taken aback by the difficulties to adapting to life at home.

Overall from the results of this section, it appears that most of the participants experienced some types of difficulties when returning to Finland. Most difficulties seemed to be a result of family and friends not understanding and relating to their experiences. Also, the lack of support in adjusting to life at home seemed to be an issue. The participants who found that they did not really have a hard time to adjust back home also did not express difficulties in communicating with loved ones about their experiences. In both cases, the family members seemed to be either the biggest help to the adaptation process or the source of the most frustration due to lack of understanding and interest.

Another factor that seemed to add difficulties to the adaptation process was the unexpected shock of feeling like a stranger in the home country. Participants found it difficult to jump back into the Finnish culture after being influenced by another culture for a longer period of time.

5.2 Effects of Acculturation on Cultural Identity

In the questions about identity and whether participants noticed any changes in their personality or behavior, most commented on perceiving some types of changes as a result of the time abroad. The majority of the participants felt strongly connected to their Finnish culture, and some even to the point of feeling proud to be Finns while abroad. Some said that they were able to notice their Finnish culture better when examining it from afar. Participants noticed the acculturation into another culture during their stay. Although participants felt Finnish and that is their strongest identity, they also took on some aspects from the host culture as well. It was even apparent that a participant actually felt a stronger connection to the new culture than to their Finnish culture.

After the time abroad some participants felt that they still only identified with the Finnish culture, and the stay abroad had not changed that in any significant way. However, it was also evident that once returning home, some actually felt like they would have fit better in the new culture and that it was a better representation of their sense of self at the moment of reentry. Respondents felt that their new cultural identity might now consist of a mixture of the two cultures, and that the traits which had blended with their Finnish identity were a good thing. They recalled becoming much more open and confident. Some, however, expressed that finding a good compromise between the two cultures was very challenging. Through the responses it was clear that participants felt like they might not belong to either culture upon reentry. Kim (2003) commented that a balance between two cultural identities can be difficult to find (Kim, 2003: 244-246). However, although it may be a difficult

process, this state of confusion is not permanent, as Erikson explained in his text. The confusion will in fact push an individual to work through the period of uncertainty in order to gain a new perspective on how an individual sees their new self. (Erikson, 1968: 15-19).

Participants had mentioned feeling that family and friends were not very interested in their stories and that they could not relate what they have experienced. The responses were that of frustration at the fact that family and friends could never really know everything they had experienced abroad. Further frustration was caused by what the participants felt were superficial questions about their time abroad. Some family members were not interested in hearing any detailed stories, but just wanted to quickly catch up. As already discussed in the theory, Storti (1997) stated that merely catching-up after such a long time abroad is not enough for the individual. They need to be able to express themselves much more specifically through telling stories about their experiences, in order to feel that they are understood. (Storti, 2001: 30-31). This could explain why respondents felt a complete lack of understanding from family and friends. Loved ones assumed that once they got back, everything would continue as if they had never left in the first place. The families appeared to assume that now that the participant was back home, they could simply pick up where they left off and did not appear interested in any specific details about what the returnees had gone through during their stay abroad.

It is evident that the participants noticed changes in their behavior and personality. All of the changes were perceived as being positive. The changes the participants saw were related to becoming more independent and more confident in communicating with other people, as well as

gaining better language skills. Most of the participants noticed these changes themselves, but some said that family and friends pointed out these changes when they got back home. Continuing this thought, the participants said they noticed the changes already during the stay abroad, and at the latest that they noticed them once they returned to Finland.

From an identity point of view, it can be seen that the time abroad definitely has some effects on a person's identity. If nothing else, it makes individuals reflect on their own cultural identity and see it more clearly when submerged into a new culture. Some participants expressed noticing an actual acculturation pattern in their adaptation, by saying they lost some of their Finnish culture and habits and took on those characteristics from the new culture. As Kim (2003) brought out in her writing, true acculturation will cause the learning of new traits as well as the unlearning of old ones. No individual will adopt all of the host cultures characteristics, nor will a person lose all of their home culture's qualities. (Kim, 2003: 244-246). All of the participants felt that the changes to their personality or behavior were very positive and made them a better person. From the responses it can be stated that the participants felt that they were able to eliminate some of the weaknesses of Finnish shyness and tentativeness by a more open attitude and courage after being in another culture.

5.3 Effective Communication Strategies in the Adjustment Process

In the last section of the study the focus was on communication. The most popular methods of communication were electronic ones, including e-mail, Facebook, and Skype. Some also said that family and friends visiting them

abroad, as well as they themselves visiting home during the stay abroad were important ways to keep contact. Although participants felt that the communication frequency and methods stayed the same throughout the stay abroad, they felt some changes in the course of time. They commented that communication from some friends at home stopped all together, but that communication with family stayed the same. It was apparent that this change in communication frequency was largely due to the adjustment process abroad. In the beginning they felt that they needed support from home in order to adapt to the life away from them. Once they got settled into the new culture, the need for home-front support was less vital.

Communication and discussion about the changes the individuals has gone through seemed to be challenging to the participants. In worst cases they did not discuss the changes they had gone through with anyone. In reflecting on the experience some did note that it may have been helpful if in fact they had talked to someone about what they had experienced. Once again, the participants seemed to be challenged in communicating and expressing themselves due to the lack of interest from their family and friends.

Family and friends were mentioned as the key to a smooth adjustment during reentry. Participants further identified not only family and other social networks, but getting back to normal routines as a factor which helped them adjust. The participants said that things such as continuing studies, a job, or other everyday routines helped them catch up with the life back home. Some said it was because it gave them something to do rather than sit at home alone and think about missing the people and

places abroad. This was important since they were able to quickly build new social contacts and relationships through working and studying.

Participants, who had some problems communicating with family members, said that it was easiest to talk to people who shared similar experiences of going abroad and returning back home. Family visiting the participants abroad had helped the reentry process, since the family members could better relate to their experiences after getting to know the place themselves and meeting some of the important people that the returnee had met abroad. In these cases the shared experiences could mean some form of shared identities. If this was the case, identifying with someone during the reentry process on an identity level could be a very strong tie, as a person seeks to be accepted in a group and feel like they belong (Sussman, 2001: 112).

After the reentry experience, it seemed that the participants felt that they would not change anything if they were in the situation again. They felt that they had done all they could and all that they felt they needed to do that might influence the outcome and experiences of the process. It was mentioned that learning the language would be an important thing to do to make the adaptation to the new culture easier. The reentry process might be easier for the participants in the future through better communication with their loved ones at home, since this seemed to be one of the most highlighted issues discussed by the respondents. They should try to tell their family and friends more about the experiences along the way so that there would not be so many new things to tell all at once when going home. Regular and effective communication would also ease problems they experienced with family members not understanding. An

interesting thing to note from the research was that people felt that the problems they faced with communicating with family and friends upon reentry were something that they could work on in the future. Participants also noted that they would try to keep in touch with what is happening in their loved ones lives as well. As mentioned earlier in the discussion, Storti (1997) emphasizes the importance of communication with friends and family during reentry. It important for the returnee to be able to share their new sense of self through the experiences they have had. He also notes the problem of the lack of interest from family members, which surprised many of the participants in this study. (Storti, 1997: 30 – 31).

Many of the participants held their new cultural identity as the most important thing they got from the reentry experience. They said that they enjoyed learning about themselves during the process. This type of self reflection is a good sign of intercultural competence. As brought out through the theses by Deardorff (2006) this process of reflection will help individuals to see how future interactions can be improved. (Deardorff, 2006: 5).

After reviewing the data from the final section, it appears that most of the participants had some problems with communicating. Although all of the participants kept in contact with their family and friends throughout the period abroad, some felt that they could have done it a better way to help their family relate to their experiences. The people who were most effective in communicating and sharing their experiences during the stay abroad, for example by physically visiting home or having family come visit them abroad, seemed to be the people who had the easiest time with communicating with their loved ones once they got back. The final chapter

of this study will conclude the main thoughts resulting from the research data analysis and discussion.

6 CONCLUSION

In this section, the final thoughts on the discussion of the findings will be presented. Also, the research method of this study will be evaluated and the limitations of this study will be discussed. Finally, ideas for further research will be presented.

6.1 Reconstructing Cultural Identity Upon Reentry

In the introduction to this study, I put forth three research questions that I hoped to answer as a result of performing this research. After analyzing the results and comparing them to the theoretical background, the information yielded insights into all of the three research questions. The first question aimed to find out if participants would be able to recall the difficulties they faced during reentry. From the data it appears that the participants were able to describe some challenges that they have gone through during reentry. In fact, most of the participants were able to describe in detail the difficulties that they not only faced during the adaptation to the new culture, but even more so during the process of reentry and adaptation back to their home. The main difficulties that the returnees faced were the lack of understanding and interest from family and friends about their experiences as well as reentry shock even though participants seemed to be expecting it at some level. The culture shock that surprised even the prepared individuals might indicate that the individuals were surprised by the fact that they had changed as individuals. Coming home was not the same since they themselves were not the same and therefore found it difficult to explain their new sense of

identity to family and friends. The preparation for the culture shock was made before any possible changes to their identity and therefore perhaps from a different perspective from their actual reentry state of mind. The majority of the participants mentioned that they felt at home during some point of their stay in the foreign country. This could be a key factor in coming back to their home country, as the returnees may be torn between the idea of new and old homes. However, based on the responses, even though facing some difficulties during reentry, all of the participants have been able to adapt to life back at home. This would indicate that all of the participants were able to make sense of their newly acquired identity traits. They had changed while abroad, but they had all been able to adapt to life back at home with their new more intercultural identity.

The second question for this research aimed to examine if individuals can sense changes in their identity after they have gone through the acculturation process to another culture. Participants recalled that their behavior and personality had changed in some way. The changes were viewed as positive, but processing these changes proved difficult for some participants. It was interesting to see that the participants were able to describe some of the changes they had seen in their personalities and behavior. This means that the change in their identities could be explained to others, as opposed to changes that even the individuals themselves were not aware of. A few of the returnees felt like strangers when they returned home and also had a feeling that they did not belong there anymore. One respondent also commented that understanding their new sense of self with the influence of two different cultures was very difficult. This would indicate that understanding their changes identity did take some work.

Reconstructing their identity and accepting the changes provided some level of reentry shock in itself. Some are still going through the process of finding new characteristics about themselves that have most likely been a result of their international and intercultural experiences.

The third question aimed to find different adaptation and reentry experiences of individuals depending upon what kinds of communication methods they have used. The participants who felt that they were able to communicate most effectively with their loved ones also appeared to have the easiest time in adjusting back to life at home. The biggest issue in communication seemed to be that family and friends were not interested or did not understand the returnees when they told about their experiences abroad. Also, some loved ones seemed not to understand why the returnees were having trouble getting used to being home. The participants who were able to physically share experiences with family and friends during their time abroad seemed to have the easiest time with communicating about the experiences after coming home. This was done either through the family visiting the participant while abroad, or the person regularly visiting home during their stay abroad. Through these experiences, it is apparent that shared experiences are very important in order to form a common ground for understanding. When family and friends see the actual culture in context that the returnees have been in, it is easier to put their changed personalities into perspective. Mutual understanding seemed to be the key to communicating the returnee's new identity as it seemed to be easiest with people who had gone through the same experiences.

From the answers to the research questions, it can be concluded that when comparing the participants attitude to the attitude acculturation model by Spitzberg and Changnon (2007), the sample as a whole seemed to be at the integration stage (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009: 27). This conclusion was reached since most of the participants felt that the maintenance of a cultural identity was very important and they valued the marks that their intercultural experiences had left in their personality. Furthermore, the participants felt that the maintenance of relationships was very important, not only to friends and family back home, but also to the relationships that were left behind in the host culture. At this integration stage, it is evident that the participants were all aware that they probably changed as individuals as a result of the time abroad. This acknowledgement means that they are capable of understanding their identity before the time abroad and compare it to the identity they have upon reentry.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the participants in this study went through a period of adaptation upon reentry back to their home country as they tried to find their place in their home culture with their new cultural identity. Most participants felt that their sense of self has changed in some way as a result of the time abroad. From the results it is evident that the participants went through some degree of deculturation from their native culture as well as enculturation of the new host culture, in turn altering their own identities. This change in identity brought not only difficulties in comprehending the changes, but also communicating them to their loved ones. One of the biggest issues highlighted in the results of this study was the importance of the support and understanding provided by friends and family. If they understand and are willing to listen to the returnee

experiences, they will be better able to adapt back to their home and come to terms, not only with changing cultural environments, but the effects that these changes has left on their identity.

6.2 Evaluation of the Method and Limitation of the Study

Through the qualitative data, the three themes of the research yielded valuable information about how returnees experience their reentry, how identities can be affected by intercultural experiences, as well as what kinds of communication are valuable in order to make reentry easier on the returnee.

However, limitations of this research method also exist. Due to the nature of a qualitative survey, the sample was quite small, consisting of 10 respondents. Therefore, although some emerging phenomena can be examined, no generalizations can be made from the data. After all, generalizations are not the aim of a qualitative study, but rather the results should be used as one example of how the reentry process can be experienced. Also, all of the 10 respondents were female. It has been acknowledged in previous studies that men and women perceive the reentry process differently (Ward, Buchner, & Furnham, 2001: 164). Therefore the intensity of the reentry shock and the perception of cultural identity might be significantly different with males.

Another limitation was the decision to use the questionnaire as a method or research. Although the questionnaire revealed great insights through the detailed answers of the participants while guaranteeing their anonymity, an interview could have provided even further details about the experiences. After going through the results, some further questions

could have been asked from some participants, which was not an option with the method chosen.

The participants of the study had spent various lengths of time in the foreign countries, the shortest periods being a few months and the longest being 11 years. The amount of enculturation into the host culture and deculturation from their home culture may be affected by the length of the stay abroad. However, for the purpose of the study, it was assumed that the shortest amount of time was long enough to get a deep enough understanding of the culture for some form of enculturation to happen and therefore reentry difficulties could appear due to possible changes in identity. It was interesting to note, that regardless of the time spent abroad, some had very minimal difficulties during reentry where as others had very significant problems adjusting back to life at home.

In the end, however, the data collection method chosen for this study provided fruitful and detailed information about the experiences of the participants. The questions seemed to be clear since the answers received provided the answers that the research questions were searching for. When kept in mind that the results of this survey are trends that appeared from the small sample in this study, they can be used as a general guideline for what factors may have an effect on the reentry experience. When viewed objectively, the results can be valuable for someone who is about to return home from a period abroad. In the following section I will further discuss possible future areas of research as a continuation of this study.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

This study provided a look into the reentry process of individuals returning home from abroad. The study focused on participants between the ages of 18 – 27, but another study could be done to look at returnees who are much younger or much older. What would the effects on identity be if a younger or older person had to adapt to a once familiar culture after the influence of intercultural experiences.

Another area for further study could be the reentry process from the family and friends viewpoint. It would be interesting to find out why the participants of this study came home to a family that quite often did not seem to be interested in the returnee's experiences, and not understanding his/her experiences.

Furthermore, this same study could be conducted through the use of interviewing as a research method. The insights brought forth through this study could then be focused on in more detail which might yield further knowledge of the reentry experience.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE:

General information:

Age upon return to Finland

Gender

Foreign country where you lived

Time spent abroad

Was it your first time abroad. If not, where else have you lived?

About adaptation and repatriation:

1. How did you feel about leaving home?
2. How did you experience adapting to the new culture?
3. Did you feel at home in the foreign country? If yes, how soon?
4. How did you feel about returning home?
5. Did anyone support you during the repatriation process? What kind of support did you get?
6. Were you aware that you might experience a re-entry shock? How did you prepare for the possible re-entry shock?
7. What did you think returning home would be like?
8. What was it actually like?
9. What surprised you the most? Why? Was it a shock?
10. What was the hardest adjustment, if anything? Why?
11. Is there anything that still bothers you?
12. Is there something that would have made the return easier?

About identity:

13. During your stay there, did you feel about your Finnish culture and the new culture,

14. What about when you returned home? Did you identify yourself to one culture or both cultures or did you feel you didn't belong to either one?

15. How did the people at home react to your return? (Family, friends, relatives) Did they understand what you have gone through? Did you feel like you were understood?

16. How do you think your personality, behavior or communication style has changed?

17. When did you become aware of the possible changes? How did you feel?

About communication strategies:

18. When abroad, how did you keep in contact with your friends and family in Finland?

19. Did the contact with them change during the duration of your stay abroad? How?

20. Which type of communication was most valuable to you? Why?

21. Upon returning, how did you express the changes you went through to your family and friends?

22. What helped you readjust to life in Finland?

23. Who did you feel was the easiest to talk to? Why?

24. If you were to go abroad again, what would you do differently and what things would you keep the same?

25. Is there anything else that you would like to say that I have not asked already?

26. What would you say was the most important thing you learned from the whole experience?