

MISJONSHØGSKOLEN

THERE AND BACK AGAIN:  
THE UNEXPECTED JOURNEY OF WORLDVIEW TRANSFORMATION  
THROUGH THE EYES OF ADOLESCENT PARTICIPANTS OF  
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGE

SUBMITTED FOR THE COURSE:  
MASTER IN GLOBAL STUDIES (30-MATH)

BY  
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*In loving memory of Terje Noddeland (1924-2013)*

*Who never let the truth get in the way of a good story*

## Preface

While I was working on this project, I re-read the journals I wrote while I was teaching English in the Czech Republic. The more I read, the more I realized that this time in my life was the catalyst for my interest in Intercultural Communication.

I came across an entry accounting a conversation with an astute young student. He was an extremely shy almost-ten-year-old whose family had moved back to the Czech Republic after nearly five years in Austin, Texas, who never had much to say except when I asked him about his life there. I suppose that's why I wrote it down then. I copy it here now, as the instigator of a much bigger question.

*Monday, April 04, 2011, 12:23:29 PM*

A recent conversation between me and a 10-year-old student in an afternoon English lesson:

"I don't know this word. What's *nationality*?" Adam asked, sounding out the word slowly, syllable by syllable.

"It's the word to describe the place where you're from. People from Italy are *Italians*. People from Germany are *Germans*. People from the Czech Republic are *Czech*."

"And, *Americans* are from the US?"

"Yes."

"So, I'm American."

"Uh...I think you're Czech."

"I'm American."

"Do you have an American passport?"

"Yes."

"Were you born there?"

"Yes. And I speak English."

Fair enough. "Do you speak English at home?"

"Sometimes."

"How long did you live in the US?"

"Five years."

"How long have you lived here?"

“Four years.”

He answered every question in his quiet demeanor. He wasn't being stubborn, I noticed; but honest.

“Ok, so write *American*,” I sighed.

How could I tell him not to? He has spent more of his young life there than here. He feels more American than Czech. Who am I to say otherwise? I live in a 'foreign' country. This means that I didn't grow up speaking the language, reading the fairy tales or eating the food. I don't share the same superstitions, celebrate the same holidays, or use the same idioms. But that doesn't mean I can't learn.

Now that I've lived abroad for a few years, I've noticed my grip on 'my' beliefs beginning to loosen, giving way to a broader mindset which now incorporates a few of these formerly 'foreign' aspects of everyday life. I look forward to holidays I hadn't heard of five years ago; cook comfort food my family didn't eat and sometimes have a hard time translating a word into English. How long will this continue until my 'foreignness' is rubbed out entirely? If my nationality can be so easily written over, what is it that makes me a citizen of my country in the first place? I have a passport, is that what it all boils down to? What's left of my identity if that's taken away?

I was recently introduced to another teacher who commented on my 'excellent English pronunciation.' He asked me where I'd learned.

“In America,” I replied.

“Oh, how long did you live there?”

“Twenty-four years.”

The shocked look on his face gave away his thoughts. “You're American?”

In a few ways, yes. Some days less than more.

“Know thyself,” Socrates instructed. But in a nation whose identity has fluxuated as often as its leaders, how are we to know who we are? And what does it actually mean to be 'from' somewhere? I found this description in a newspaper the other day: “To be Ukrainian is the cherry trees in blossom, the ripening wheat, our stubborn people who work so hard, and the language I love,” says lawyer Anatoliy Zhernovoy.

I asked another young student about it later in the week. His mother is Czech and his father is Egyptian. He replied, “Well I am like half, you know? When I get off the plane in Egypt, I smell the oldness, the dirt of the place and immediately start to feel my Arabian self.”

He drew an invisible line down the middle of his body.

“And when I come back here, and walk into the airport, I breathe in the Czech air and return to my Czech self. I can’t explain it.”

~

The topics contained in this research are massive, and undertaking this study often felt like scratching the surface of an iceberg. Perhaps it would be more apt to say that I felt like the captain of the Titanic. I owe much more than a curt acknowledgement to those who helped me stay afloat.

Thanks are in order. To my supervisor, Marianne Skjortnes, whose readings and advice provided objectivity and boundaries. To my informants, whose voices told me much more than they realized at the time. To my mom, Rhonda Gardner, for her help with the interview transcripts and the support she has offered throughout the years from so many miles away. And especially to my boys, Gjerulf and Jakob, whose smiles and support are inseparable from the end product. Without you, I would surely have gone down with the ship.

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## Chapter 1

### FROM MY PERSPECTIVE

*Every man is like all other men, every man is like some other men, every man is like no other man.*

*~Clyde Kluckhohn*

#### 1.1 Background

A friend of ours, an artist, paid us a visit after the birth of our son. As we sat sipping our coffee after dinner, he recounted an anecdote he had once come across. Babies, he said, spend the first few months of life fixated on their own reflection in the mirror, unable to comprehend that they are separate from it. Since the motions in the mirror move when they do, they are a simple source of endless entertainment. He laughed when he said this, since it is as fun for the parents as it is for the babies. Then he went on to explain that one day, they look in the mirror and realize that what's staring back at them is *themselves*, and that they and their reflection are two separate things. "Who am I?" they ask, and then proceed to spend the rest of their lives figuring that out.

As a parent, this was a sweet foreshadowing of the years of identity formation in our son's future. As a human being, it was sharp commentary on the perplexing and often muddled concept of the self. As a student, I want to know more. Those statements are a glimpse into the complex questions related to the identity and culture that we will approach in this research: Who am I—a mother, a student, a woman? Where, when, and from whom did I learn those roles? How do we become the people we are today, were yesterday, and will be tomorrow? Is there a common denominator? Allow me to explain my interest.

I grew up in an Eastern Oregonian hamlet, in the heart of what John Wayne fans would deem the Wild West. As children we rode horses, slept under the stars, swam in creeks and fished in the river that trailed behind our barn. I had a generally pleasant childhood; never wanting for much. And yet, as I grew older I became aware of a nagging feeling that there was more to the world than what I had seen in my little corner of it. When I got my first job I began to entertain the idea of traveling, dreaming that one day my feet would carry me to the exotic places I'd only seen in pictures.

Fast forward fifteen years and the reality is not so different from my adolescent dreams. I have lived abroad for nearly six years in three different European countries, and have exercised both my passport and my sense of adventure. I spent two years as a youth exchange coordinator in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia; two as an English teacher in the Czech Republic, and a year and half as a student (and now mother) in Norway. Now that my twenties have nearly passed me by and I have started a little family of my own, I reflect fondly on the vague notion of home, the new corners of the world I've seen and the people of so many different nationalities I call my family. As an American, I am the exception rather than the rule. This doesn't make me exceptional, but it does give me a unique view of my own culture from beyond the borders. And the view is not always pretty.

The United States is famously isolationist,<sup>1</sup> and 'particularly resistant' to recognizing the national culture, despite the fact that nearly everyone else in the world recognizes them as Americans (Bennett 1998, 4). Failing to acknowledge this unifying cultural force "leads them to see ethnic and other cultural differences as more of a threat to national unity than they are" (ibid.). As a result, U.S. Americans are brought up believing 'we are the best and the rest of the world envies us for it,' speaking one language, and not take kindly to immigrants and others who do not learn it. Many of my European friends have chided, "Who else has a 'World' Series and doesn't invite anyone?"

My time outside of my 'homeland' has made me question the effects of a 'single-context' upbringing for any nation- always with my background as an American in mind. The search for answers in this research was as much an examination of myself as it was of my informants.

## 1.2 Adventure amidst Globalization

An article recently published in *National Geographic* explored the changes a thirty percent rise in cell phone usage has made amongst Ethiopian tribesmen (Afar pastoralists). In the past year, power stations have begun popping up in the middle of the desert. On top of that, cell phones have changed basics of communication for the Afar. "When two Afars meet in the desert, they often conduct a *dagu*, a formal exchange of news with a lengthy call-and-response greeting. "Now we dagu, dagu, dagu all the time on the phone," Ahmed Alema Hessian says" (Salopek 2013). This seemingly minute change has impacted the ways the tribesmen trade, and cut down

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<sup>1</sup> Or as Woodrow Wilson said, 'ruggedly individualistic.'



on the need to travel long distances in the hottest desert on earth. They see it as, “A headlong sprint into the digital age that leaps over a century of analog technology. Exploding aspirations. Consequences unknown...Twenty years from now? There will be a different Afar people. Life won't be camels and sheep anymore” (ibid.)

We are living in what is often called a ‘global village,’ a time when people are more interconnected than they ever have been before. The driving force is *globalization*, which broadly refers to ‘all the processes of modernization and postmodernization’ (Shirato and Webb 2003, 2). The term globalization has come to describe the unprecedented spread of markets and democracy, and an intensification of worldwide social relations (Jandt 2007, 14). These relations link localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away (Giddens 1991, 64). Supporters see it as a positive and efficient change, while opponents argue that it is destroying local traditions: “Globalization has given Mexico frappuccinos at Starbucks and the United States the novels of Carlos Fuentes” (Jandt 2007, 12). Some go so far as to predict the homogeneity of a world without borders; a single world culture.

Whether you love it or loathe it, globalization's reach is undeniable. The impact it has had on the Afar is but one tiny dot on a large globe in which travel is easy and inexpensive, and business is exported to countries that many consumers have never heard of. “Components are being manufactured in different parts of the world and assembled and marketed elsewhere, while women and men are being forced into an international wage labor force where workers must migrate away from their cultures of origin” (Lamphere, Ragone and Zavella 1997, 2). Advances in technology are questioning the restraints of time and space. It is now a given that business can be done and relationships maintained regardless of which continent you live on or the hours you sleep. Send an email, an SMS, MMS, set up a Skype call, Gmail chat, Facebook, etc. The Afar are not the only ones who ‘dagu, dagu, dagu’ all the time.

Some see globalization as the reinforcing of American wealth and dominance (Jandt 2007, 14). The Internet has made pop culture instantly accessible worldwide and has led many to believe that, “The conglomeration of media industries further contributes to the U.S.’s hegemony in the circulation of film, music, and television, including the creation of media icons” (Lamphere, Ragone and Zavella 1997, 4). In real life this means that Romanians keep up with the antics of Britney Spears, Malays watch True Blood, Czechs watch films starring Julia ‘Robertsová,’ and a surprising number of teen girls worldwide nowadays consider themselves

‘Beliebers.’<sup>2</sup> Globalization has erased many of the neat divisions of national and continental borders, challenging our notions of who we are and why. What does it mean to be ‘from somewhere,’ when we live in multicultural societies?<sup>3</sup> It means that, “identity, always multiplex, has become even more culturally complex at this historical moment in which global flows in trade, politics, and the media stimulate greater interpenetration between cultures” (Lamphere, Ragone and Zavella 1997, 36).

With ubiquitous complex forces making up our cultural identities, we must be held responsible for being aware of the ways our worldview is being shaped. We cannot afford to maintain prejudice when the ‘outside’ world is on our doorstep; when culture clashes make front page news on a daily basis. We must take responsibility for the ways our personal locations feed into our view of the world and of others; and thus our actions. “The future depends on man’s being able to transcend the limits of individual cultures,” anthropologist Edward Hall warned nearly fifty years ago. “To do so, we must first recognize and accept the multiple hidden dimensions of unconscious culture” (E. Hall, *Beyond Culture* 1976).

This is not something you can do from your armchair. As the Center for Global Education states, the proverbial ‘well-rounded education’ needs not only to be higher, but “deeper, broader, less nationalistic and monocultural than that which has served past generations” (Hoffa 2000-01). A newsletter to parents says, “It is important to learn about the ‘foreignness’ of other lands, cultures, and people, but it is also important to learn invaluable lessons about what it means to be ‘*insert nationality here.*’ This degree of personal and national self-knowledge simply cannot be gained at ‘home’ (ibid.).

What do we gain from going abroad? What are these ‘invaluable lessons?’ An excellent fictional account which portrays the effects of travel through narrative is JRR Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. The protagonist, Bilbo Baggins, is opposed to the idea of leaving home, or ‘going on an adventure,’ to use Tolkien’s words. For a Baggins, adventures are ‘nasty, uncomfortable things that make you late for dinner.’ When he is finally swayed to consider it, he asks his mentor

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<sup>2</sup> Justin Bieber fanatics.

<sup>3</sup> Salo-Lee asks, “Who are the Finns?’ and ‘What is Finnishness?’ when the winner of the Finnish National Athletics Championship is a Finn called Nghivinh Tran of Vietnamese origin, and the winner of the 2006 National Poetry Reading competition was a Finn called Noora Dadu, whose father is Palestinian. (Salo-Lee 2006) We might also ask what it means to be Norwegian when the Eurovision song winner for Norway, Alexander Igoryevich Rybak, was born in the Byelorussian SSR and the current minister of culture, Hadia Tajik, was born in Norway to Pakistani parents. Who is ‘qualified’ to wear the *bunad* (Norwegian national costume)?

Gandalf if he can promise that he'll come back alive. Gandalf replies that he cannot, adding: "And if you do come back, you won't be the same" (Tolkien 2012).

The adventure Bilbo embarks on encapsulates the joys and pitfalls of the journey: leaving the comfort of our 'hobbit holes' and pantries and venturing forth into the world (with or without a decipherable map), uncertain of the end result. When we come home, we have the odd feeling that *something* has changed. Something we cannot put our finger on; just can't *quite* put into words. Author Michael Crichton's summarized his experiences in his memoirs *Travels*:

Often I feel I go to some distant region of the world to be reminded of who I really am....Stripped of your ordinary surroundings, your friends, your daily routines, your refrigerator full of your food, your closet full of your clothes, you are forced into direct experience. Such direct experience inevitably makes you aware of who it is that is having the experience. That's not always comfortable, but it is always invigorating. (Crichton 2002)

When one considers the implications of globalization, going abroad becomes an act our future depends on: crossing borders and taking off cultural blinders, becoming aware of who we are in relation to our neighbors. We must also be responsible for finding the words to describe the processes involved, and identifying the 'invaluable lessons' learned. Thus, the central question of my research is: "*What happens to our worldview when we travel?*" with the sub-question of, "*can we identify and describe tangible, concrete changes that affect our identity and culture?*"

In order to answer these questions, we must first define the key terms of *identity* and *culture* within the boundaries of this research.

### 1.3 Defining the Concepts

On the first day of my Freshman Social Studies class, our teacher asked us list the numbers from one to ten on a blank sheet of paper. Then, we were to title the page 'Who I Am' and fill in the blanks. 'I am a daughter,' I wrote. 'A young woman, a student, a basketball player, a Christian, an American...' When the time was up, he told us to cross off anything that was dependent on the time in history we were born. Next our country; families; friends. No one in the class had a single item left.

To this day I can remember the intense feeling of frustration I felt as I struggled to define myself outside of my small town upbringing. I have felt this frustration all over again as I have grappled with the concepts of identity and culture, coming to terms with the fact that they are not

only inseparable concepts but also inseparable from the perspectives of the world we have received at birth. They are divided here only in order to define the limits of my research.

### 1.3.1 Identity

*Il suffit qu'on me regarde pour que je sois ce que je suis.*

*It only needs someone to look at me for me to become what I am.*

–Sartre

What is essential to remember in a discussion of the concept of identity is that the definition varies with perspective; the two most common being personal (intrinsic) and social (extrinsic).

Ethno-linguist and Professor Philip Riley says:

On the one hand, we use 'identity' to talk about what makes individuals just that-individual. What makes 'me' *me*... On the other hand we use 'identity' to talk about what makes the individual like other individuals in terms of shared characteristics, memberships, the 'you' that others address and construct, report on and to. (Riley 2007, 88)

In other words, we can take the philosopher's route and define 'identity' as an intrinsic entity: a soul, a conscience, a personal pronoun, an "I," something which stands alone. Uncountable volumes have been written concerning this definition and I have no intention of questioning, nor summarizing, them here. For the purposes of this study I will use Riley's second example: the social, extrinsic definition of identity. That is, who we are in reference to others. These are separate views but not opposing. Riley points out that discussing social identity as if it were an intrinsic quality of one person "makes about as much sense as discussing the sound of one hand clapping," and that, "Identity is as much the product of the gaze of others as it is of our own making" (ibid., 87).

Professor and political scientist Richard Ned Lebow asks why identity has become so important to us in the modern era. In his latest book, *The Politics and Ethics of Identity*, he rejects the term altogether, claiming that 'by attempting to explain so much it explains nothing' and instead adopts the term 'self-identifications:'

We do not have identities, but rather a number of roles and affiliations. Those we feel positive about- and some we do not- provide a diverse suite of self-identifications. Our self-identifications in turn provide the basis for the stories we tell about ourselves to gain acceptance by others and to make our lives meaningful. (Lebow 2012, 17)

Through his definitions, Lebow debates four assumptions about identity that are prevalent in the West: 1) we have a self, 2) we are able to sustain a continuous identity, 3) our identities are

unique, 4) we have the potential to remake ourselves, or discover our ‘true’ selves. “At best,” he posits, “We have multiple forms of self-identification that shape our evolving understandings of who we are” (Lebow 2012, 38). Like Lebow, I challenge these assumptions. From the perspective of social identity, multiple, fragmented selves are not a cause for crisis but a chance to experience a number of evolving roles.

Another helpful illustration is to see our identity as a narrative, an idea first described by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. He suggests that identity is little more than a ‘continuously reconstructed biography’ which sustains continuity by virtue of its ongoing nature (ibid., 42). Thus, as a narrative, our identity accommodates change through frequent revisions and consists of experiences and knowledge acquired as a member of a group (Riley 2007, 113). I vacillate between Ricoeur’s definition and that of pragmatists like William James, who believed that we have as many social selves as people who recognize us and carry images of us in their minds (Lebow 2012, 32). We show different selves to different people.<sup>4</sup>

Like Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, we show up for life every day asking others to help us write our story. We are constantly evolving and reflecting on our experiences, changing our back story and the direction our plots are headed. We do not play the same role in every situation (especially when it comes to virtual identities), and make independent choices to behave in a certain way. Or, as the linguist Mikhail Bakhtin would say, “We have no core self, but many ‘inner selves’ who play different roles and interact with one another through dialogues as characters in novels do” (Lebow 2012, 34). We do this through cues given to us by those around us and the rules of the societies we live in. Giddens believes that our identity depends on our capacity to ‘keep a particular narrative going,’ and calls identities reflexive biographies (Giddens 1991, 54). Stuart Hall goes a step further, arguing that as subjects in complex societies, we have contradictory identities pulling us in different directions, which are ‘transformed continuously’ in a ‘moveable feast’ (Hall, Held and McGrew 1992, 277).

This is not to say that we should all be diagnosed with multiple personality disorder. What I mean to show through these examples (and is backed up in my field work) is that we are

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<sup>4</sup> One way of looking at it is through the Internet meme ‘What People Think I Do/What I Really Do,’ which is a series of visual charts depicting ‘a range of preconceptions associated with a particular field of occupation or expertise...which compares varying impressions about one’s profession held by others, self-image and the often mundane reality of the job’ (Brad 2012). (See Appendix A)

layered and complex; coherent in the narratives we construct. Lebow uses the terms *multi-faceted*, or *multi-dimensional*: “a finely cut gem, whose complexity could only be appreciated by examining it through its many facets” (Lebow 2012, 38). French sociologist Daniele Hervieu-Leger uses the French word *bricolage*, which loosely translates as ‘tinkering:’ ‘As when a child puts together and takes apart a Lego construction’ (Ammerman 2007, v). Bricolage is a piecing together of a form using whatever is available. Lebow uses the term to conclude, as I do, “Identity is thus a kind of *bricolage* that builds on life experiences, cues from others and reflections on both” (Lebow 2012, 49).

In summary, identity is a social term and depends on others for its construction. It is not a ‘given structure that exists in itself, but a process; constantly modified and changed’ (Svane 2004, 213). It is negotiated through relationships and dialogue, and is thus ‘our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others’ (Jenkins 1996, 5).

### 1.3.2 Culture

*In a funny way nothing makes you feel more like a native of your own country than to live where nearly everyone is not.*

~Bill Bryson, *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*

How do you count to five? What pose do you strike when someone takes your picture? What kind of cutlery do you use when you eat? How do you get from point A to B? What do you say when you meet someone for the first time, or goodbye to a good friend? Your answers to these questions tell more about who you are than you might realize: what you are used to, what you consider normal, and the (seemingly) mundane rules which govern your life. They are how you make sense of the world. All these small parts make up the whole of what we call *culture*, a human experience so innate that, like our shadows, usually goes unexamined. As Edward Hall explains, it is what gives man his identity no matter where he’s born, and makes up his “total communication framework: words, actions, postures, gestures, tones of voice, facial expressions, the way he handles time, space, and materials, and the way he works, plays, makes love, and defends himself” (E. Hall 1976, 42).

‘Culture’ has been called many things: world metaphor, outlook on life, zeitgeist, root paradigms, collective unconscious (to name a few). Paul Hiebert used the term worldview,<sup>5</sup> which he defines as, “The fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives...what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living...what we use to think with, not about” (Hiebert 2008, 15). Every culture has both external representations (e.g. roles, institutions) and internal representations (e.g. values, attitudes, beliefs), which are most commonly illustrated as an iceberg (see Appendix B). Hall calls the underlying, out-of-awareness information ‘tacit:’ “In humans, tacit-acquired culture is made up of hundreds and possibly thousands of micro-events comprising the corpus of the daily cycle of activity, the spaces we occupy, and the way we relate to others; in other words, the bulk of experiences of everyday life” (E. Hall 1998, 55). The external representations are just the ‘tip of the iceberg’ as it were, with the internal lying beneath what we often perceive.

Another of Hiebert’s examples is that culture is a pair of glasses that we wear but are not aware of. Like glasses, our culture is often something others can see better than we ourselves do. (Hiebert 2008, 46). This is not the most widely-accepted definition, especially since the word ‘culture’ is most often associated with cultural events like opera, or that it can be contained to a geographical area. “We have been trained to think about culture as a thing that belongs to a people, which has physical borders and which builds on the past,” Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen critiques (Eriksen 1993, 10, apud Dahl 2008, 3). Professor Øyvind Dahl uses these words to point out that the conception of culture as a ‘bounded whole, in the functionalist research tradition’ makes it a barrier to be overcome (ibid.). In reality (and especially in a globalized world), he says, “Cultures are not islands or boxes in which we can sort human beings. Culture is embodied and subjective. The person is culture, by incorporating tradition, history, time, and language. Culture in this phenomenological understanding is an *interpretation of the world*” (Dahl 2008, 4).

### ***1.3.3 Worldview***

Identity and culture, as defined here and as I will use the terms in my research, are inseparable parts of the experience of ‘being human.’ The outlook on life that is a result of the amalgam of

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<sup>5</sup> We will use the term ‘worldview’ to describe culture+identity, or *cultural identity*.

both is cultural identity, and it is what I seek to research. In my central question I use the term ‘worldview’ to encompass both terms. Thus, when I ask, ‘*What happens to our worldview when we travel?*’, I am asking what happens to our perceptions of identity and culture. The terms are identified in the sub-question, ‘*Can we identify and describe tangible, concrete changes that affect our identity and culture?*’

#### 1.4 Previous research

Research on the topics of identity, culture, and worldview can be found in many fields; namely anthropology, psychology, and linguistics. Much of this research has been quantitative or textual (hands-off), and has considered the ‘affective, behavioral and cognitive consequences of cross-cultural transition’ (Jandt 2007, 6). Many businesses and even the military have attempted to find factors which can predict successful adjustment, often under the auspices of ‘intercultural competence’ (Salo-Lee 2006). Copious amounts of training materials have been published under this title, which have recently come under scrutiny.

In contrast to these approaches is that of intercultural communication, which is the field from which I approach my research. It is from the intercultural perspective that we examine the daily givens that we use to make sense of our worlds; the tacit information Edward Hall sought to unearth and the ways it affects our interactions. Jandt’s introduction to the subject highlights several approaches. The first is to learn the barriers to intercultural communication, such as ethnocentrism and nonverbal misunderstandings, and try to overcome them. The second, the *cultural approach*, develops an ‘ideal personification’ of the culture in order to understand its people’s behaviors. The final approach is *ethnography*, which Jandt defines as: “The direct observation, reporting, and evaluation of the customary behavior of a culture” (Jandt 2007, xv). Ethnography then strives, ‘to learn the unwritten rules for appropriate behavior’ and is a ““common sense way of learning, one that often seeks out knowledge that others already have” (ibid.). Riley compares it to anthropology by pointing out that, “The whole aim of anthropology is to ask ‘What does it mean to be a human being?’...So it is not surprising to find the self, personhood and identity at the very centre of anthropological inquiry, with its sister discipline, ethnography adding the question ‘-and what does it mean to be French, English, or Cantonese’ (Riley 2007, 78)?



Entering into an ethnographic study was then entering a vast research tradition. The beginning of the formal study is most often attributed to Hall's 1959 publication of *The Silent Language*. Clifford Geertz's 1973 *Interpretation of Cultures* perceived culture as semiotic, thus setting off the study of cultural symbolism. Geert Hofstede's perspective of cultural anthropology and social psychology contributed his research on the dimensions of culture in *Culture's Consequences* (1983). Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf made waves in the field of linguistics with their theory of linguistic relativism, and Clyde Kluckhohn's work with the Navajo led to his 'Values Orientation Theory' of cultures. Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical principles of understanding have recently been applied to perspectives on cross-cultural encounters (Hiebert 2008, 16-25). This abbreviated list points out the diverse fields that have contributed to the study of intercultural communication.

My search for ethnographic, qualitative research on sojourning youth has come up almost empty. Most of the literature on international students is culture-specific and generally covers four areas (Hammer 2005): the problems of sojourners, psychological reactions in a new cultural environment, the influence of social interaction on adaptation, and the learning process in the cross-cultural sojourn (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 143). Ward claims that overseas students are the most intensely studied group in culture contact literature and yet concedes: "There has been relatively less research on re-entry compared with sojourning abroad" (ibid., 167). To me, this is stopping short of examining the crux of the experience, and the primary motivation underlying my research. My contribution to the field is then the intercultural perspective on the *whole* experience of traveling abroad; with the return home seen as the true beginning of a shift in perspective, not the end as is normally assumed. I have chosen my theoretical perspectives to illuminate the interconnectedness of identity, culture, and worldview.

## 1.5 Method

I approached my research with a two-fold goal. First, I was looking for tangible ways in which travel abroad influences worldview. Second, I wanted to know how this impacts adolescent identity formation. From the outset, I intended to use qualitative research methods, which meant I would be conducting field work through small samples of interviews rather than large numbers surveys, and would analyze them in-depth in order to get to the 'why' and 'how' of decision-making of my informants. (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007) This meant using grounded theory

rather than statistics, as I conducted my field work first and developed my theories through its analysis.

As I considered these goals, I began to define my topic. For the purpose of my thesis, adolescence came to mean the ages between sixteen and twenty. This is the age most students spend in secondary (High) school after graduating from primary (Elementary) school, and are still living at home with their parents. Their degree of autonomy increases, they start to make their own judgment calls and create a personal decision-making process. Erik Erikson's theories on development refer to this period as a 'crisis' of identity. Adolescence is the most malleable time in our psychological development, and thus when our identities are impacted most deeply.

After defining adolescence as the ages between sixteen and twenty, I considered the length of time spent abroad. I began with the word 'significant,' deciding that the trip needed to have the purpose of cultural learning and the intention of returning home at the end. I planned to analyze the period of readjustment both in the host culture and upon returning home. I found as I began my research that cross-cultural travelers can essentially be grouped into five categories: tourists, sojourners, immigrants/migrants, refugees or expatriates (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001). Liisa Salo-Lee categorizes them as 'we there' (the expatriate perspective), 'they here' (the immigrant perspective), 'we all here' (the local inclusive perspective), and 'we all here and there' (the global inclusive perspective) (Salo-Lee 2006, 129).

Short-term travel is one version of 'we there.' While many people associate the term 'travel' with tourism, the motives are unlikely to be intercultural contact and the length of time typically too short to make a deep impact. On top of that, it has been proven that, "Tourists are unlikely to experience any genuine or intimate intercultural contact or to have any of the pleasure and pain associated with it...many opt for travel where the amount of contact with members of the host culture is limited. They choose to stay with other co-nationals in hotels and resorts where the staff speak their language and accurately anticipate their needs" (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001). Short-term travelers and tourists then generally have different motives than I was looking to study in my research.

The other end of the 'we there' perspective is long-term travel. This category incorporates only a small minority of people who have the opportunity to travel for long periods of time as expats, global nomads, or 'third culture kids,' to borrow the term from Pollock and Van Reken. Another long-term or permanent 'they here' perspective is that of immigrants, refugees or

asylum seekers. The intentions are often to leave home and never return, and the motivations and home situations vary considerably. From the perspective of research, contact with the host society is difficult to measure. Consider, for example, the differences between a Polish migrant worker coming to Norway and living with other Poles, and an Indonesian woman who comes for work and ends up marrying a Norwegian man and having children together. The differences are literally a world apart. Thus, long-term travel did not fit the goals of this research.

So in the end, I found that short-term travel had the wrong goals and the motives of long-term travel and relocation too broad. There was, however, another option: a sojourn, or a mid-range, temporary, voluntary stay: “A sojourner, therefore, becomes a temporary resident” (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 15), representing the ‘we all here and there’ perspective. Sojourners interact with the host culture for a long enough period of time to be capable of learning the language, and have the intention of returning home when the contract or task has finished. In addition, “It is the sojourner who produces effects on a society which challenge its unquestioned and unconscious beliefs, behavior, and meanings, and whose beliefs, behaviors, and meanings are in turn challenged and expected to change” (Byram 1997, 1). Examples of sojourners could be a volunteer with the Peace Corps, a business person on a foreign posting, a missionary, military personnel or an international student. Since I had already decided to focus on adolescents, international students fell into the right category. I then chose to focus on secondary/High School youth exchange programs, as they are an easily definable (and, I assumed, reachable) group, and one I had experience with in my job as an exchange coordinator. Additionally, their experience is an interval in their life experience and one they choose to participate in (in contrast to refugees or immigrants). Their emotional ‘baggage’ is then lighter and as a result, “their integration into a different environment might prove easier, faster and more comprehensive” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 6).

After deciding who my informants would be, I began to research youth exchange organizations. I looked for those whose participants stayed in the host country for one school year, and contacted approximately ten in Europe and the US (mostly because I had previous experience living and working in those two places, and was a way of limiting the scope of my research). I contacted them by email and Facebook, with follow-up phone calls and Skype connections as necessary.

I did not anticipate how difficult it would be to get in touch with students through the organizations, especially the American offices. In the end, I heard back from various international offices of only one organization, AFS-in Oslo, Ljubljana, Prague, and New York. The first reply was an AFS staff member in Oslo who was a former exchange student, who volunteered for an interview and then put me in touch with volunteers in the Stavanger volunteer chapter. I was able to interview all five of them face to face, one of whom put me in touch with a girl who had gone on exchange near him. The office in Ljubljana sent me a list of returnee's email addresses, and after writing to the whole list I heard back from one. The Czech informant is one of my former students, whom I contacted through Facebook and asked permission to interview. It was a coincidence that he also went with AFS (and is the Prague chapter coordinator). I contacted my American informants through an administrator at the New York office, who added me as a member of the American Returnee Facebook group. Interestingly, I never heard back from any of the other offices or organizations. This is significant and I believe the reason is that AFS relies almost entirely on student volunteers who are naturally very involved and were eager to participate and talk about their experience- a point we will return to. I am also aware that my analysis is based only on participants from one organization; and one which is quite aware of the need for orientations and reflections on the part of the students. Participants from other organizations might well have worded their answers in other ways, although in comparing my results to those of Murphy-Lejeune's I have found striking similarities in our analyses.

In my ethical role as a researcher, I sought to protect the views and identities of my informants. My research proposal and interview guide were approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) before I began my field work, and were not altered at any point. Each of the participants received a detailed description of my research and knew my goals before agreeing to the interview. I have changed their names to Informants A-J and refer to them as such in my descriptions in order to maintain their anonymity. Due to the deeply personal nature of the exchange experience, I did not pry into the details student did not offer to share. On one occasion an informant chose to keep information about the family life private, a wish I respected during the interview.

When I applied to NSD, I developed an interview questionnaire which I used with each of my informants. It guided the conversation in four stages: pre-departure and motivations for

participating, arrival and adjustments, post-return, reintegration and assessments, and finally outcomes and goals for the future (see Appendix C for complete guide). I interviewed ten informants who had participated in youth exchanges and returned home (the majority of whom completed their exchange within the past three to five years, apart from one woman who went more than forty years ago). Six were from Norway, two from the US, one from the Czech Republic, and one from Slovenia (see Appendix D for a detailed list of informants). All of the interviews in person lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half. Those who lived in Stavanger met me in cafes and allowed me to record the conversations for later transcription. The rest were over Skype and gave me permission to record them at the beginning of the conversation. The final two interviews were conducted via email due to conflicting schedules with time zones. All of the interviews were done in English. The English level of the informants was at a minimum conversational, or (for the American informants) native speaker. It was not a barrier to communication.

Throughout my research, I have kept Gadamer's concepts of 'prejudice as a pre-judgement' in mind. He warns in that every interpretation begins with a 'fore-conception' and that every interpretation includes a personal one (Gadamer 1975, 267). Thus, from an ethical perspective in my role as a researcher, I have been aware of my personal assumptions. Primarily, this was the assumption that travelers become 'better' people by developing an open-minded view of the world. I let my informants tell their own narratives rather than influencing them with my own. This has meant a constant questioning of my own motivations and 'prejudices,' and not allowing myself to lead questions in the interviews, give encouragement for an opinion because it is like my own. In the analysis of the transcripts, I saw that on a few occasions I shared information from other interviews when the informants shared similar experiences, but only after the answer to my question was given.

Central to my role as a researcher was my position as an outside observer. While I have traveled quite a lot as an adult, I did not go on an exchange year as a teenager. The extent of my interaction with exchange programs has been as an organizer of short-term summer trips, which, while valuable, was as a leader and not a participant. This meant I was at a distance from my informants during the interviews and analysis, and especially when researching exchange organizations- I had no impressions to shape my opinions of any particular organization, and this

helped me stay reflexive. My research of them began from the outside looking in and any opinions I have formed have been a result of completing my analysis.

Choosing supporting literature was a sort of ‘raking in’ and whittling down of applicable resources. I started with those I was familiar with and used the secondary sources found within them on a ‘treasure hunt’ of sorts, leading me to sources and theories I had never heard of before setting out on this research project- old and new- and some I had not planned on using. As a result, the theoretical perspectives I have come to rely on provide a broad picture of the processes (and fields) involved in intercultural encounters. From ethno-linguistics, I use Philip Riley’s perspectives on the sociology of knowledge and the concept of ethos in identity. From cultural linguistics, Guy Deutscher’s theories provide insight into how language influences the way we see the world. From cultural anthropology, Edward Hall’s perspectives on the tacit and unperceived aspects of everyday life reveal an intimate glimpse into the unaware. These have been the three main contributors to my theoretical perspective. Others include Ward, Bochner, and Furnam’s (2001) research in cultural psychology, Fred Jandt’s introduction to intercultural communication, and Lebow’s perspectives from political science. My conclusion will also use perspectives from Pollock and Van Reken’s work with third culture kids (TCK’s), (as it is the only research I have found which takes into account the difficulty associated with reintegration and grief), as well as Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) research on student travelers and perspectives on ‘The Stranger’ as a sociological type. As far as I have seen, Murphy-Lejeune’s is the only research which directly applies to my own and uses many of the same researchers and methods I have just listed.<sup>6</sup>

I did not see the analysis of my field work and supporting literature as a separate phase of research, but a living process that took on its own meaning throughout. I mentioned that I used grounded theorizing, which meant I did not develop a hypothesis until after my field work was finished. It was then a reflexive process of testing and retesting theories; in constant transition between interviewing, transcribing, reading, and writing. Each step of the way, I considered my central assumptions, the questions I was asking and what new insights meant for my research. This type of analysis is often called ‘eclectic’ (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 115) My approach was to follow their advice of carrying on a dialogue with my research, considering it a living

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<sup>6</sup> It is also one I have come across quite late in my research and thus was a backing-up of my own theories rather than the foundation for them.

conversation between me, my interviewees, my transcripts, and the texts. Gadamer called this process the *circle of understanding*, which is a constant movement from ‘the whole to the parts’ (Gadamer 1975, 190). In this way, the parts can only be understood as parts of the whole and the whole can only be understood as composed by the parts (Dahl 2008, 2).

The chapters are the parts that make up the whole of this thesis, and are thus divided into four complimentary perspectives: 1) My Perspective, 2) The Theoretical Perspective, 3) The Student’s Perspective, and 4) The Intercultural Perspective. They are intended to provide a background and context, theoretical foundation, description of the field work, and finally analysis. Like the concepts of identity and culture, they are inseparable narratives that provide the answers the central question: *What happens to our worldview when we travel?*

## Chapter 2

### FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

*It is a somewhat paradoxical observation that we manage to express ourselves with wondrous subtlety—and simply breathtaking speed. By variously pursing our lips and flapping our tongue around in our mouth rather in the manner of a freshly landed fish, we shape each passing puff of air into a continuous blur of sound...which runs together like a watercolor left in the rain. To understand what anyone is saying, we separate these noises into words, and the words into sentences so that we might in our turn issue a stream of mixed sounds in response. If what we say is amusing, the listener will show his delight by emitting a series of uncontrolled high-pitched noises, accompanied by sharp intakes of breath of the sort normally associated with a seizure or heart failure. And by these means we converse. Talking, when you think about it, is a very strange business indeed. ~Bill Bryson, Mother Tongue*

We spend large parts of our lives communicating, and very little time thinking about how.

Communication is left to the realm of common sense. When we stop to think about it, as Bryson points out, it is a strange business indeed. It involves wondrously subtle elements. Even stranger still is communication between cultures.

There is a tendency to approach the concepts of culture and identity from separate fields, ignoring their interconnected elements. If we look closer at the ways we communicate, we find that speaking plays a very small part. Language, culture, and identity are threads of a ‘finely knitted fabric’ which cannot be pulled apart, as Bakhtin remarked, without ‘threatening the integrity of the whole’ (Planchenault 2007, 285).

How can we attempt to understand the links between them? They are often most pronounced in intercultural encounters, forced to the forefront and dissipating the fences of compartmentalization. “Life abroad offers a unique experience where identity, culture, and language learning are simultaneously energized” (Murphy-Lejeune, *An Experience of Interculturality: Student Travellers Abroad* 2002, 221). The theoretical perspectives I have chosen paint an intimate portrait of the subtle expressions of culture and identity. They illustrate the interconnected nature and provide a closer look at the processes involved in communication that we are largely unaware of, the threads of this finely knitted fabric. From the ethnolinguistic perspective, I use Philip Riley’s approach of ‘culture as knowledge.’ From the linguistic perspective, I use Guy Deutscher’s approach of ‘culture as language.’ And from Edward Hall’s



anthropological perspective, I approach ‘culture as communication.’ As we will later discover, unraveling all of them is the sociological role of *The Stranger*.

## 2.1 Philip Riley: Culture as Knowledge

Philip Riley has spent much of his life living in southern France working as a Professor, as well as brief stints in Finland and Malta. He uses these experiences and the work of previous researchers in his examination of language, culture, and identity. The terms discussed here are the social knowledge system, communicative and rearing practices, phatic communion and membership strategies. Each term supports Riley’s ‘architecture of identity’ and help unearth tacit methods of communication we employ.

The foundation on which Riley’s theories are built is his definition of *culture*. While the three main concepts are naturally intertwined,<sup>7</sup> as a separate term he defines culture as “knowledge, in the widest possible sense,” claiming that it is “what members of a society need if they are to participate competently in the various situations and activities life puts their way” (Riley 2007, 36). He divides cultural knowledge into three categories labeled *know-that*, *know-of*, and *know-how*.

*Know-that* is what the members of a society believe to be true (ibid., 40-41). It includes political and philosophical values, versions of geography or history and especially child-rearing. For example, students of American history learn about the ‘Vietnam War,’ while students of Vietnamese history learn of the same events as the ‘American War.’ Redfield (1922) called this *Weltanschauung*, or ‘vision of the world, definite zest of life’ (Hiebert 2008, 18). Examples might also be found in proverbs, such as ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ or given truths like ‘lying is bad’ and ‘big boys don’t cry.’

*Know-of* consists of current events, what’s going on at the moment: who’s who, the news, the weather, pop culture (Riley 2007, 41). Examples might be President Obama’s re-election, the Chernobyl explosion, the recent extension of parental benefits or the latest Nobel prize winner.

*Know-how* is all the things you are expected to be able to do: “The individual’s skills, capacities and competencies...or more simply how to do and say things in the way things are

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<sup>7</sup> Or, as one reviewer commented, give the reader the impression that they are dealing with a three-headed Hydra. (Planchenault 2007, 286)

said and done” (ibid.). This could be skills like skiing, rowing, driving, or doing the tango; how to choose a spouse, table manners, how to tell a joke, or greet someone.

As a unit, Riley says these three categories make up a person’s *cultural competence*, or what is required to function in a society. Our *social identity* depends entirely on these interactions and the knowledge, or culture, available to us at any given time or place. We simply grab what is available to us. He illustrates:

Acquiring culture is not like serving oneself from a soup tureen, where every bowlful has identical contents, it is more like lunching from a vast smorgasbord. Each of us puts together, through choice or chance, a personal selection of the dishes, but there are far too many for everyone to have everything. We each construct our own culture, just as we construct our own language, on the basis of the materials available to us. (Riley 2007, 39-40)

### 2.1.2 The Social Knowledge System

Having defined culture as knowledge in its three categories, Riley examines the process of creating knowledge in a society. The impetus is survival, because “if a society is to continue, it must reproduce itself by teaching its values to its members”<sup>8</sup> (ibid., 46). Culture-as-knowledge must then be transmitted, or communicated, to others within that society. “Any theory of ‘culture’ is necessarily a theory of communication,” he says. “Of the ways in which a group survives *qua* group, preserves its identity, by transmitting its knowledge to new members. Man exists in society only to the extent that society exists in man” (ibid., 35).

He calls this transmission the *social knowledge system*, building on the work of Mannheim (1938). To briefly summarize: (a) knowledge is first *produced*, (b) later *organized*, (c) *stored*, (d) *distributed*, (e) *legitimized*, and finally (f) *used*. Fads and fashions are created in the final stage (f), which begins when one person decides, for example, to wear a safety pin on their jacket (a). This is organized into punk fashion (b), and stored as knowledge through newspapers and music (c). It is then distributed (d) “differentially, creating epistemic communities, i.e. social groupings based on shared knowledge” (ibid., 31). Then, the knowledge (or in this example, using safety pins as a punk fashion statement) is legitimized (e) through discussion, interest, power, and ideology- and justified through consensus (everyone at the latest music festival wore safety pins as a punk fashion statement, now it’s something everyone ‘just

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, empires have been built through what is known as ‘cultural imperialism,’ or the importation of values of the dominant society, mostly through importing language and religion. (Jandt 2007, 54)

knows’). Finally, it is used (f) by being demonstrated and applied. Now in order to be a proper punk, you must use safety pins in your outfit (or have a mohawk, or wear army boots). This is what punks ‘do,’ as a result of the social knowledge system.

This is the briefest of summaries, and while it seems abstract, the process is a fundament of everyday cultural life. Often the best examples are found in humor, which often brings ‘given’ aspects of culture to the forefront (ibid., 32). An example in Norwegian culture is the comic book character *Pondus*, which I had never heard of it before living in Norway, and as such is an example of knowledge produced through and used within the Norwegian social knowledge system. The introduction to the most recent publication, stated:

One day we woke up and discovered that Pondus was a ‘given.’ He was in the public domain, he could be used in everyday speech as a natural reference point... Without any big gestures or public declarations he had (Pondus) placed himself between Peer Gynt, Espen Askeladd and Politimester Bastian, as an example of something typically us. Pondus had become a part of national identification.<sup>9</sup> (Øverli 2013, iii., my translation)

The process of becoming identified as a national reference point is not an overnight occurrence, as the author leads us to believe. Pondus did not ‘suddenly’ reach this identification, but grew as a reference point, gradually and consistently, until enough Norwegians knew about the comics that they could talk about them without providing context. The same might be said of Coca Cola or Calvin and Hobbes on an international level.

Riley theorizes that the distribution of knowledge (on at least three levels: family, community, and nation) occurs through conversation. In particular, through the kind of conversation we often denigrate as ‘gossip,’ which is “by far the most important channel for the constant reaffirmation of shared values,” values which are in fact *cultural*: “and when we gossip we are continually referring to them to assess things, ideas, and people. These assessments are the very substance of social solidarity, that is, the feeling of sharing common cultural identities and values, of *belonging*” (Riley 2007, 49).

Consistently communicating cultural values through conversation and gossip is how we apply their existence. In this way, we *will* knowledge into existing (just like Santa Claus, the tooth fairy or the gods of the *Discworld* series).<sup>10</sup> “We believe in them and behave as if they

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<sup>9</sup> En dag våknet vi og oppdaget at Pondus var en selvfølge. Han var allemannseie, han kunne gå inn i dagligtalen som et naturlig referansepunkt. ... Uten store fakter eller offentlige deklarasjoner hadde ...[Pondus]... stilt seg mellom Peer Gynt, Espen Askeladd og Politimester Bastian, som et eksempel på det vi betrakter som typisk oss. Pondus var blitt en del av den nasjonale identifikasjon.

<sup>10</sup> Terry Pratchett’s fantasy book series of the same name.

exist: they are cognitive constructs which provide the rules and materials for our daily behavior” (ibid.).

### ***2.1.3 Communicative and Rearing Practices***

A common thread which ties together Riley’s theories on language, culture, and identity is that of *communicative practices*, or what he calls ‘culture-specific forms of language use’ (ibid., 93). He points out that as humans, we all have the same physical resources (body parts like hands, feet, and vocal chords) available to us, but different cultures do not use them in the same way. Thus, communicative practices do not communicate only a message, but identity, because “speaking and communicating in cultural and group-specific ways proclaims membership of that culture and group” (ibid.). We will expand on strategies of membership in the following section.

In order for a society to transmit its knowledge through communicative practices, it must develop a *social learning process*, in which the distribution and acquisition of knowledge takes place. Participants enter a ‘state of shared meaning,’ or *intersubjectivity*, (a term Riley borrows from Trevarthen’s ‘Innate Intersubjectivity Theory’).<sup>11</sup> He also uses Simmel’s term *dyad*, which simply put means discourse, or ‘language in use.’ Dyad, or discourse, provide the tools for negotiation of meaning in interaction (ibid., 36), and is thus intrinsically tied to communicative practices and identity:

It is our ability to form dyads, to enter into intersubjective couplings, which makes identity possible. No account of identity which fails to take this aspect of human nature into account can be considered even remotely adequate. (ibid., 18)

He synthesizes the terms and says that *intersubjective dyadic couplings*, or interactions which produce a state of shared meaning, play a primary role in the transmission and distribution of knowledge, which begin in infancy: “We are taught how to communicate from birth, in and through the ‘rearing practices’ our parents use. Our societies approve and disprove of various practices which represent their ideal, competent adult member” (ibid., 133). We learn these practices as infants and continue to use them throughout life. In this way, the communicative practices we employ are considered innate but are in fact a representation of cultural values and

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<sup>11</sup> “It claims that infants possess an inherent readiness to link the subjective evaluation of experience with those other persons. It sees children starting cognitive learning in a cooperative and imitative relationship to other more experienced companions and actively contributing to the propagation of collective knowledge. (Trevarthen, 37-8, abud Riley 2007, 34)

expectations. His examples include what is polite, how we should address our elders, how often children should speak and whether they should be spoken to.

Communicative practices encompass much more than language, which is why Riley refers to them as *culture-specific* forms of language use. Through them we can determine much more than we realize about a person's social identity (e.g. rank in society, occupation, or age). Accent, for example, can help us place someone's class and societal rank. To use a Norwegian example, a person's dialect can help determine where they come from to as precise a degree as a few kilometers.

#### **2.1.4 Phatic Communion and Membership Strategies**

As mentioned in the previous section, communicative practices also communicate identity through proclamations of group membership. Identifying features such as accent or vocabulary give away our role in society and help others place us in context to themselves (ibid.). This takes place as we negotiate our social identity through *roles*, or 'situationally salient aspect of the individual's social identity,' as Riley defines it. The process of attaining group membership will be central in my analysis, as it is the key to defining social identity- in relation to others. To show the relationship between the terms, Riley points out:

Social identity is made up of a configuration of *memberships* and each membership is knowledge-and-language based...If you look at discourse, what you find is that the individual is consciously and constantly trying to affirm his or her sense of identity...Identity claims are techniques for selecting or imposing *roles* on addressees. (ibid., 113-14)

To make this idea more concrete, he gives examples found in everyday discourse, such as: '*Are you ready to order, sir?*' '*Tickets, please.*' '*Pregnant women should not consume alcohol.*' '*There's a good girl.*' or '*Business Class passengers only.*'" In each of the examples, members of specific social groups are "selected and subjected to the discourse of some external institutional or individual voice" (ibid.) These roles can be placed on us semiotically as well, through signs and symbols (see Appendix E).

We can also make identity claims through statements which affirm our membership in specific professions or sub-groups. This is commonly done through expressions like "*As an X, I...*" or "*I'm one of those people who...*" (ibid., 115). We often use specific vocabulary, or *domain-specific discourse* to draw boundaries around our social domains as an insider or outsider of a group (e.g. occupation, specialty, or interest group). For example, linguists have a

set of vocabulary that biologists wouldn't typically use, lawyers can be identified through their legal jargon, sports fans through sport-or-club/team-specific vocabulary or facts.

At the very heart of identity claims is the concept of *phatic communion*. Riley takes this idea from Malinowski, who saw cultures as functioning wholes: "Pull at any loose thread and you will find yourself unraveling the whole of the social fabric" (ibid., 126). The definition of phatic communion is that which is 'interactive but not intended to transfer information' (ibid.), much in the way greetings are carried out in the animal kingdom. Phatic communion divulges unspoken cultural norms and societal structures which in turn operate to negotiate identity. Greetings are one example, such as "*Hello, X speaking,*" or "*Top o' the morning to ya!*" The most infamous American greeting, "*How are you?*" has developed from a request for information to a greeting; a cultural idiosyncrasy which leaves many foreigners befuddled in their response. A Norwegian example would be the statement, "*Takk for sist,*" which literally means "Thanks for last time," and is used to acknowledge a previous meeting, regardless of the length of time that has passed.

Phatic communion also serves a second purpose: to set the stage for discourse, or dyads, by appropriately organizing our responses. As Riley says, "We need to know who we are speaking to...so that we can select and formulate our utterances appropriately...on the basis of who they think they are talking to. We sort them into roles and 'choose our words' accordingly...otherwise, we simply would not know where to start: if every time we wanted to say something, we had to say everything, we would be unable to say anything" (Riley 2007, 131, 201).

### **2.1.5 Ethos**

I have provided a detailed description of Riley's perspectives primarily because of their interconnected nature (indeed quite the three-headed Hydra). Seeing culture as knowledge divulges the myriad ways we communicate and negotiate our identities on a daily basis, and these perspectives are essential to my analysis. Most importantly, they lead up to Riley's definition of identity, which cannot be understood without first grasping the term *ethos*-a term which needs the information I have provided in order to fully grasp its weight. As with other theories, he builds on the work of previous researchers, primarily Ruth Amossy (1999). His definition of 'ethos' is as follows:

Ethos, you may remember, is one of the three pillars of Aritotelian rhetoric, along with *logos* (argument) and *pathos* (emotion). *Ethos* is communicative identity. It is an amalgam of speaker identity (who I am and who I want to be taken for) and perceived identity (who you think I am and who I want to be taken for). (Riley 2007, 213)

Riley's definition is an 'architecture of identity' which is diagramed as a triangle (see Appendix F). On one corner is '*Self*': a private, subjective individual, which has a proper name (I), which is the continuous site of my memories and experiences (ibid., 214), and is the philosophical understanding of identity. On another corner is '*Person*,' to which Riley applies social identity: "a public figure, the 'You' that others address and observe, the sum of all social figurations and the dynamic performer of social roles. Where the Self is diachronic, Person is synchronic" (ibid.) In the third corner is '*Ethos*,' the key to Riley's theories and the completion of the definition of personal identity: a *rhetorical identity*. "*Ethos* is the projected self *plus* the perceived self, the 'Me' I perceive in other's reflected behaviours and judgements' (ibid., 215). He elaborates:

*(Ethos)* is filtered through the hearer's perceptions, expectations and values, especially as constrained by social roles and genres: it is interpreted self-expression, the rhetorical socio-psychological product of mutually influencing communicative behaviors and judgments. (ibid., 213)

It is this term, ethos, which completes the picture of identity in my research and Riley's 'architecture of identity.' It is at once *personal*, *social*, and especially *rhetorical*. Lebow also sums up these ideas in his conclusion:

Our self-identifications are the result of our affiliations and roles, and their relative importance changes in response to social cues and life circumstances... So much of what we think we are is determined by our relations with other people and our position in society. (Lebow 2012, 269-70)

## 2.2 Edward Hall: Culture as Communication

With his 1959 publication of *The Silent Language*, Edward Hall became one of the founding fathers in the field of Intercultural Communication as we know it. This groundbreaking work is often the foundation of other social and anthropological ideas, which can be contained in a deceptively simple statement: *culture is communication, and communication is culture*. Hall devoted his work to illuminating the unspoken ways humans 'talk' to each other, stating and re-stating that 'communication underlies everything.' This does not mean we are speaking when we communicate, for although language is generally considered the main method of communicating,

“Anywhere from eighty to ninety percent of the information we receive is not only communicated nonverbally but occurs outside our awareness” (E. Hall 1998, 53).

Hall’s anthropological perspective comes from a background in psychoanalysis. As a result, he starts from beneath the definitions; from our taken-for-granted subconscious. Thus, his definition of culture is latent; hidden beneath the depths of everything we do. He places it “below the surface of the mind, like a submarine captain steering our actions or invisible jet streams in the skies that determine the course of a storm” (E. Hall 1976, 42). And unless we have grown up in a bicultural home, everyone around us will share the same patterns. Hall sums up his own theories in *Beyond Culture*:

Culture is man’s medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic government systems are put together and function. It is frequently the most obvious and taken-for-granted and therefore the least studied aspects of culture that influence behavior in the deepest and most subtle ways. (E. Hall 1976, 17)

Hall groups culture into two kinds of information: *manifest* and *tacit-acquired*. The first is learned from words and numbers, and the second is nonverbal, highly situational and acquired ‘in the process of growing up or simply being in different environments’ (E. Hall 1998, 55). It goes hand-in-hand with Riley’s theories on rearing and communicative practices. The two aspects of tacit culture he has concentrated on are time and space.

### 2.2.1 Time

The opening lines of *The Silent Language* declare boldly: “Time talks. It speaks more plainly than words. The message it conveys comes through loud and clear” (E. Hall 1959, 1). He divides the globe into two categories based on the way they use and view time: *monochronic*, which pays attention to and does one thing at a time, and *polychronic*, which is involved in many things at once (E. Hall 1998, 60).<sup>12</sup>

Monochronic culture was a result of the industrial revolution, and is primarily a feature of the Western world. It emphasizes “schedules, segmentation, and promptness” (E. Hall 1976, 17). In daily life, schedules dictate everything from work to sex to creativity, becoming almost

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<sup>12</sup> He adds that Einstein claimed that time is what a clock says, and that anything can be a clock. Each culture has its own clocks, from the rotation of the earth to other rhythms. (E. Hall, *The Power of Hidden Differences* 1998)



tangible: “People talk about it as though it were money, as something that can be saved, spent, wasted, lost, made up, accelerated, slowed down, crawling, and running out (E. Hall 1959, 19). Polychronic time is far removed from these concepts, where “time is treated as much less tangible, considered a point rather than a ribbon or a road, and that point is sacred” (ibid.). Examples could be Arabs, Turks, and Japanese, and many African countries where events start when ‘they are meant to’ and not before.

Hall warns that these metaphors must be taken seriously, as they express a basic manner in which time is ‘a frame on which everything is built’ (ibid.). They are so different that he compares them to oil and water, warning that the two systems do not mix (E. Hall 1998, 58). Time is often assumed to be universally significant but is in fact a great cause for dissonance, and a ‘perturbing factor in interpersonal and intercultural relations’ (ibid.).

### 2.2.2 *Space*

The second most common and unstated way of communicating cultural values, according to Hall, is in the way we organize our physical space, or proximity, which he wrote of primarily in *The Hidden Dimension*. He begins just as boldly by stating that ‘space relates to everything,’ and is just as buried in our culture as our attitudes to time: “The language of space is just as different as the spoken language. Most important of all, space is one of *the* basic, underlying organizational systems for all living things—particularly for people” (E. Hall 1966, xii.). In addition, man’s sense of space is ‘a synthesis of many sensory inputs:’ visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and thermal; leading Hall to conclude that “people reared in different cultures live in different sensory worlds” (ibid., 181). He labels his work ‘proxemics research.’

Examples of the way space is used are found in architecture, art, city planning, and different notions of appropriate distances: intimate, personal, social, and public—which are as territorial as those found in the animal kingdom. We see this in the ways space is used in the workplace, where a corner office is a symbol of power, something to be fought over. Examples can be found in everything from urban planning to classroom seating. He points to ‘automobile syndrome’ as one way in which we have allowed our space to be dictated in ways that have altered our way of life and separated us from nature. “The automobile is the greatest consumer of public and personal space yet created by man. It gobbles up spaces in which people might meet. Parks, sidewalks, everything goes to the automobile” (E. Hall 1966, 180).

A crucial aspect of the hidden dimension is personal space, which has become a kind of ‘mobile territory’ for most North Americans (E. Hall 1998, 58). It is common to use the term ‘invisible bubble’ to describe the small protective sphere each of us wears around ourselves. Hall points out that it expands or contracts depending on who is near, our emotional state, and the activity we are performing- and if penetrated we feel uncomfortable or aggressive (ibid.).<sup>13</sup> Personal space is not of a universal size, and infringing on another person’s territorial ‘bubble’ can cause anxiety and conflict.

### ***2.2.3 Aware of Blindness***

The task of becoming aware of tacit culture and the way we use it to communicate nonverbal messages is everyone’s responsibility. The danger, especially for political leaders, is that “culture hides much more than it reveals and strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants” (E. Hall 1998, 57).

Hall describes the state of the world as blindfolded men in an enclosed room, spinning with our arms outstretched and tricked into believing we can see. We accomplish nothing but bumping into each other, becoming frustrated and even angry that the others cannot see what we are (obviously) doing. Each group finds the other just as frustrating, but cannot do anything to change it. He warns that the only way to realize we are blind is to take off the blindfolds. “To do so, two things must be known: first, *that there is a system*; and second, *the nature of that system* (emphasis mine)” (E. Hall 1976, 51). The only way this can be done is through encounters with other systems, or cultures, which ‘highlight otherwise-hidden structure points of one’s own behavior’ (ibid., 83).

Interestingly, Hall reflects that after years of study he has realized the ultimate goal of understanding foreign cultures is ‘the light that study sheds on our own.’ Only when we become aware of the tacit will we realize that, as Hall says, “Our most prized possession are the differences differentiating the people of this earth from each other” (E. Hall 1998, 56).

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<sup>13</sup> Images of rock concerts and Japanese undergrounds come to mind.

## 2.3 Guy Deutscher: Culture as Language

*I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men, and German to my horse.*  
*-Holy Roman Emperor Charles V*

The central question of Deutscher's *Through the Language Glass* is 'Why does the world look different in other languages? It is a linguist's examination of language, culture, and thought. Interspersed with wit and pithy commentary on the field's forefathers, he humorously and succinctly sums up the most debated ideas in the history of linguistics. Divided into two parts, the book looks at language first as a mirror and then a lens. These two perspectives are central to my analysis, as they are a presentation of culture in some quite unexpected places. I will present a summary of his arguments, and then use them to discuss foreign language learning as intercultural communication.

"The way you understand 'culture' depends on which culture you come from" (Deutscher 2010, 8). He turns to German anthropologist Edward Tylor's (1871) original definition as "a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1871, apud Deutscher 8). From this understanding, 'culture' is every human trait which is not the result of instinct: "A synonym for nurture as opposed to nature. Culture thus encompasses all aspects of our behavior that have evolved as social conventions and are transmitted through learning from generation to generation" (Deutscher 2010, 9). The perspectives I have used from Riley and Hall back up his claim that culture is found in the everyday, and "impressed so deeply in our mind that we do not recognize it as culture, because it 'masquerades as human nature'" (ibid.).

Language is perhaps the most deeply engrained of all cultural traits. In a 2005 interview, Deutscher stated, "Language is much more than just a means of communication—it is one of the most important ways we define ourselves, and a prime mark of identity" (An interview with Guy Deutscher 2005). It is also an accident of the place we were born, and for this reason we hardly ever look into it as a mirror to our culture. This is the central focus of the first part of his book.

### 2.3.1 Language as Mirror

He sets out by asking, "If we hold language up as a mirror to the mind, what do we see reflected there: human nature or the cultural conventions of our society?" (Deutscher 2010: 9). What we find when we compare languages around the globe is that they choose different labels for concepts. Even a cursory glance into linguistics will teach you that words are arbitrary (or, as he

puts it, a rose by any other name would smell as *douce*, *zoet*, *sladká*, *sød*, *makea*, *magus*, *dolce*, or even *sweet*) (*ibid.*).

But what happens when we peer further through the language glass, beyond the superficial level of labels and at the concepts behind them, where the lines aren't always so clear? Deutscher answers: "Any language has to categorize the world in a way that brings together things that are similar in reality—or at least in our perception of reality" (Deutscher 2010, 12). We know that children don't need to be taught that a dog is an animal and a rose is a flower, which might lead us to believe that concepts are universally innate (animals are obviously animals and flowers are obviously flowers). That is only until we move into abstract terms that cause us to stumble in translations because they lack a conceptual equivalent (Jandt 2007). For example, the English term for 'mind' has no direct translation in French and German, nor do we have a direct equivalent for the French 'esprit' (Deutscher 2010, 15). Even the word 'pants' takes on another meaning when moving across the Atlantic from one version of English to another.

Things get even more complicated when considering grammatical concepts. Pronouns such as "I" or "we" seem absolutely natural to English speakers, but extremely limited to hundreds of millions of other language speakers in other parts of the world (*ibid.*). The example Deutscher gives is that Tagalog speakers in the Philippines have three distinct pronouns for the English "we."<sup>14</sup> And body parts, the most 'elementary' of all, are often lost in translation and not a natural category at all. In Hebrew (Deutscher's mother tongue), the hand and the arm are one concept and labeled as such, while separate concepts exist for 'neck' and 'back of neck,' which do not exist in English (Deutscher 2010, 18).<sup>15</sup>

The point of all these examples is that the concepts we often consider most natural are in fact categorized and labeled by the language we grow up learning. This means in practice that "culture not only controls the labels, but embarks on incessant raids across the border into what ought to be the birthright of nature" (*ibid.*, 13). Or as Jandt says, "Language bonds a people together and reflects what people see, eat, and think" (Jandt 2007, 123). Nowhere is this more

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<sup>14</sup> Kita (just the two of us, me and you), tayo (me and you and someone else), and kami (me and someone else, but not you).

<sup>15</sup> As an English teacher, I used to ask my Czech students how many fingers Americans have. Their immediate answer was almost always '20' before they realized that in English there are separate terms for toes and fingers, while the Czech term *prsty* covers all of the appendages.

successfully camouflaged than in the category of color, a battle Deutscher chooses to fight for ninety-eight pages, stating that, “Since colors are on the ground level of perception, the concepts of color would appear to be the prerogative of nature” (ibid., 17). He uses the concept of color to debate Noam Chomsky’s oft-cited claim that the grammar of all languages is universal and shares the same underlying concepts and degree of complexity. In a walk through anthropological history of the last few centuries, Deutscher’s point comes down to this: concepts exist as they are necessary and developed by a society.<sup>16</sup> While scientists have oft attempted to attribute this development to biology, it is in fact a cultural development: “If one generation exerts its tongue and ‘stretches’ the language to create a new conventional name for a color, then the children will indeed ‘inherit’ this feature when they learn the language of their parents’ (Deutscher 2010, 94). Thus, the development of a culture is a development of its language and with it concepts that seem a natural part of life.

“By now culture has emerged as a considerable force,” he concludes (ibid.). Just how considerable is the focus of the second half of the book, in which he asks, “Does our mother tongue influence the way we think?”

### **2.3.2 *Language as Lens***

The question seems reasonable enough: Do different languages lead their speakers to different perceptions? After all, we have just seen that culture is a considerable force, raising its head in places we expect to see only nature, like categories and colors. What Deutscher says (in a most spirited description) is that our perceptions are extremely subjective and difficult to prove or disprove empirically, affording the perfect platform “to those who enjoy flashing their fantasies without the least danger of being caught out by the fact police” (Deutscher 2010, 21).

He is referencing Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, whose work with the American Indians in the 1930s revealed ‘unimaginably strange ways’ of organizing thoughts and ideas. Their groundbreaking work led to the concept of linguistic relativism, or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which claims that languages determine speaker’s capacity for logical reasoning. The resulting claims were ‘how speakers of such and such language would not be able to understand such and such an idea because their language does not make such and such a distinction’ (ibid, 22).

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Homer did not use words for ‘pink’ and ‘turquoise’ in his poetry because color dyes were not used at that point in history.

It wasn't until a generation had succumbed to this belief that the theory crashed—in the wake of the realization that differences in grammatical organization do not have such far-fetched cognitive impacts on our brains and perceptions (ibid., 24). For example, the fact that English has no future tense does not in fact mean that I have no future, or, at a more basic level, the lack of words for washing machines in remote Papuan tribes does not prevent them from understanding the concept of a washing machine, if given a chance to understand it. “What we must escape from,” says Deutscher, “is the delusion that language is a prison-house for thought—that it constrains its speakers’ ability to reason logically and prevents them from understanding ideas that are used by speakers of other languages” (Deutscher 2010, 149). Words can be created or borrowed; the English language is a living testament.

While he does call Whorf ‘the most notorious of con men,’ Deutscher presents his claims as a segue to current research into the ways language changes the way we perceive the world. He suggests we instead follow Wilhelm von Humbolt’s claim made a hundred years before the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: “The difference between languages is not only in sounds and signs but in worldview...not in what a language is *able* to express but rather in what it encourages and stimulates its speakers to do from its ‘inner force’” (Deutscher 2010, 136). This observation was carried into the work of Franz Boas and Roman Jakobson, who said the difference in languages is not what they *may* convey, but what they *must*; or what information a language obliges its speakers to express (ibid., 151).

Presenting examples from far-off Amazonian tribes as well as the major European languages, Deutscher proves without a doubt that the difference in perception lies within the information a language forces its speakers to be aware of. His prime example is the speakers of Guugu Yimithirr, a language of Australian aborigines. They use the cardinal directions north, south, east and west- as opposed to ‘egocentric’ directions like left, right, and in front of, and thus are forced to develop a constant inner compass, “a whole extra layer of spatial information that we are blithely unaware of” (ibid., 176).

To show examples a bit closer to home, Deutscher lists numerous examples of European languages that force their speakers to memorize an erratic and nonsensical gender system which

assigns a sex to every noun within it,<sup>17</sup> citing recent psychological experiments that suggest “the grammatical gender of an inanimate object affects the associations speakers associate with it” (ibid., 211). Speakers using languages with these features create ‘habits of mind’ that don’t exist in other languages (in memory, attention, perception, and associations) (Deutscher 2010, 235). The second half of the book shows the effects our mother tongue has on our perceptions of the world—as opposed to limiting our thoughts, as once assumed. He points out that frequent use of certain expressions creates ‘habits of speech’ which lead to ‘habits of mind’ by using “concepts we are trained to treat as distinct, the information we are forced to specify, the details it requires us to be attentive to, and the associations it imposes on us” (ibid.). He shows that “what we find ‘natural’ depends largely on the conventions we have been brought up on...and what common sense finds natural is what it is familiar with” (Deutscher 2010, 234).

“Language has two lives,” he concludes. The first is a public method of communication. The second is a ‘private system of knowledge that each speaker has internalized in his or her own mind’ (Deutscher 2010, 233). These conclusions are essential to understanding the process of intercultural communication. My research (and personal experience as an English teacher) has shown me that learning a foreign language, as opposed to being brought up as a native speaker, is not a practice in memorization of vocabulary cards and inundation in grammar. Other languages “highlight the varieties of human experience, revealing as mutable aspects of life that we tend to think of as settled and universal...speaking any language means immersing oneself in its character and concepts...It alters your thinking, your worldview” (Rymer 2012, 71).

When we attempt to define the term ‘language,’ what we uncover is far more than grammar and syntax: we find *meaning*. The human being *is* his language (Svane 2001) and to understand the world is also to understand language (Berger og Luckmann 1966). As Holmen points out in her work with minorities learning Danish, finding a voice in a second language is a part of the ‘complex and dynamic processes of social membership, culture, and identity’ (Holmen 2006, 197).

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<sup>17</sup> “German cutlery famously spans the whole gamut of gender roles: *Das Messer* (knife) may be an it, but on the opposite side of the plate lies the spoon (*der Löffel*) in his resplendent masculinity, and next to him, bursting with sex appeal, the feminine fork (*die Gabel*)” (Deutscher 2010, 202).

## 2.4 The Stranger

*No one knew him, he was evidently only a chance passerby. Whence came he? From the south; from the seashore perhaps? The few inhabitants who were at their windows or on their thresholds at the moment stared at the traveler with a sort of uneasiness.*

*~Les Miserable, Book 2nd, Chapter 3, Jean Valjean's entry*

The concept of 'The Stranger' is often described as ambiguous and powerful, the 'metaphorical figure of precariousness' (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 16). German Sociologist Georg Simmel was the first to examine it as a sociological phenomenon, in a short six-page publication by the same name in 1908. Since its initial publication over a century ago, the intrigue of Simmel's Stranger has caught the attention of numerous notable sociologists. Two of the most commonly discussed are Park (1928), who portrays the Stranger as a 'marginal man,' or a 'citizen of the world,' and Schutz (1944) who discusses the features of a newly arrived migrant. The title has since been used in reference to 'aliens, intruders, foreigners, outsiders, newcomers, immigrants, and any person who is unknown and unfamiliar,' which could extend as far as new grooms or army recruits, or any person coming into a new or familiar group (Gudykunst and Kim 2003, 230).

Simmel initially defined the role as distinct from a wanderer ( someone who is 'here today and gone tomorrow'). The Stranger is 'a potential wanderer,' or one who 'comes today and stays tomorrow' (Simmel 1950, 402). The contrasts found within the role of The Stranger are vexing: as a 'potential wanderer,' he or she is both outside and inside the group. In Simmel's words, "In the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near" (ibid.). Thus in the role of both familiar and foreign, the Stranger is granted greater freedom of movement not restricted by traditional conventions, such as 'habits, piety, and precedent' (McLemore 1970).

Why exactly is this role important to my research? For one, the role of The Stranger is a way to better understand communication both inter- and intra-culturally (Gudykunst and Kim 2003, 22). As their perspective is from within and outside of the group, it embodies the main topics in intercultural communication: language, roles, relationships, membership, dialogue, acceptance, and anxiety. Levine points out: "Group members derive security from relating in familiar ways to fellow group members and the role of the Stranger, by its nature, challenges this familiarity" (Levine 1979, apud Murphy-Lejeune 2002). The mere presence of a foreigner challenges every one of the concepts we have just discussed, from the ways we communicate to the values we take as given- most of them innate. Riley explains:



In our everyday conversations, we spend an immense amount of time reassuring ourselves and one another that things are just as we thought they were and that we are just who we think we are. For this reason, the Stranger represents a challenge not just to local conventions but to nature, to the universe, to life. (Riley 2007, 172)

There are two key aspects of the role of The Stranger: *anomie* and *recognition*. Riley addresses the terms, and I will use them later to examine the processes involved in moving from one to the other.

The term ‘anomie’ was coined in 1885 by Jean-Marie Guyjean to refer to ‘an absence of any fixed law’ (Riley 2007, 174). It is precisely this state in which a foreigner enters a new country. As Riley says, “The absence of any kinds of general rules and structures means there is no epistemic or social matrix within which individuals can find their place” (ibid., 173). Some see this as a state of meaninglessness. For the Stranger, it can be a fresh start, a chance to remake themselves just like Hugo’s Jean Valjean. Taking cues from the dominant culture, the Stranger can reconstruct an entirely new identity which no one can challenge or deny, as they know nothing about their anonymous background and become ‘a man without a history’ (Schutz 1971, apud Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 16).

The second term is what Riley calls ‘recognition,’ which he takes from Kant’s idea of ‘mutual respect.’ He uses it to emphasize the importance of social processes in the construction, (or more precisely, the co-construction) of social identities, since “any kind of identity claims—social, linguistic, religious, or whatever—are claims to be *recognized*...as a human being, or members of society” (ibid., 176). The most important form of recognition is citizenship, but for the purposes of our research it is the notion of ‘community,’ which stems from a ‘sense of belonging.’ Only when one is a member of a group can they truly feel that they belong. Throughout the process of shifting from anonymous to recognized, the Stranger obtains group membership. In this way, changes occur simultaneously in their perception of themselves and in others’ perceptions of them. On all levels, a construction (or co-construction) of identity occurs (ibid., 176).

Recently, claims have been made that the time has come for a redefinition of the role of The Stranger in the context of modernity: “The main difference between the modern stranger and the previous descriptions is that, in the new social conditions which prevail, strangeness has replaced familiarity” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 32), and has become a permanent condition of post-modernity. Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) research on *Student Mobility and Narrative*

*in Europe* identifies what she refers to as the ‘new strangers’: student travelers. Using case studies of their years abroad in Erasmus and EVS programs in the role of ‘The New Strangers,’ she examines the experience of the student’s stay abroad and its effects on their attitudes. Her questions echo those asked in this research: What does it mean to be a stranger today, and what impact does the experience have on individuals (ibid., 31)?

## Chapter 3

### FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

With a theoretical basis in mind, we are better prepared to analyze the experience of the participants of youth exchange. However, before any analysis we must learn more about the experience itself. So we will now go directly to the source: the participants. We will hear their stories while asking: *What is youth exchange and what are the motives of the organization? Who is doing it and for what purpose? How and what have these students experienced? What challenges did they face, and what did they learn? How did they change as a result? Were certain themes common to their experiences?*

We will begin with an overview of the history and motivations of international education and exchange, followed by a closer look at AFS, its history and how it functions. Then, using the orientation schedule and the narratives of Informants A-J (see appendix D for a detailed description), we will look at the process of adaptation involved during the exchange year with AFS.

#### 3.1 An Overview of Intercultural Education and Exchange

When exactly did international education begin? It could be said to go hand in hand with human civilizations, since people have sojourned since ‘time immemorial’ and have always strived to learn more: “Early biblical references provide accounts of travelling scholars, and intercultural education can be traced to the 272-22 BC reign of Asoka the Great of India” (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 142). Notable centers of scholarship have existed in Egypt, Persia, China, Japan, England, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, and Russia. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, interest expanded to include participation by institutions in the United States (ibid., 143). Traveling scholars have been disciples, monks, inventors, alchemists and everything in between.

We know that international education was more than a fad, since underlying its development were ‘social, political, and economic motives of rulers and governments who initiated the programs and provided financial and civic support. International education, from the earliest times, was regarded as a tool of foreign policy and a means of extending political and commercial influence’ (ibid., 143). Another motive was moral, or religious, as in missionaries proselytizing the values of the dominant culture. ‘Cultural imperialism’ was a method of

importing cultural values during colonialism, and the methods were used extensively throughout history by powers from Alexander the Great to the British Empire and USSR. Some argue that Western media continues to carry and import important cultural values (Jandt 2007, 263).

At the end of World War 2, many were searching for ways to build relations between nations and interest in international relations grew. The primary motive was to assist in the reconstruction and economic development of countries affected by the war. Another aim was the promotion of international good will and harmony (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 144). Privately funded nonreligious organizations began sending volunteers overseas during the 1950s, and many organizations were established as a form of aid or technology transfer. Others were founded on the concept of service, such as the Peace Corps,<sup>18</sup> Rotary, or the Lion's Club. Others such as the United World College (UWC) were a way to use education as a uniting force.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that the post-war period should be remembered as coinciding with the Cold War, which meant that students had access to Universities only in the nations with which theirs were allied; i.e. Americans to Western Europe and Russians to China and Cuba. Governments funded these students, as "Cold War rivalries also provided political justification for allocating public funds to support the various programs" (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 125). One of the best known Western schemes was the Fulbright Program.<sup>20</sup> Aims were openly acknowledged to boost economies, create export markets, stem the tide of communism and win the hearts and minds of future leaders (ibid., 126).

Things have changed in the past few decades, with the end of the Cold War and rapid technological advancements which make travel faster and cheaper. Most of the countries that were receiving technical and educational aid now have flourishing economies, Norway amongst them. The demand for international education still exists and has grown, but the status of the students has changed from that of a 'grantee' to that of a customer (ibid.). In many cases, motivations of the sending organizations are financial, as overseas students have become part of the export industry of the very countries that in earlier times footed their bills. Currently there are more than 1.3 million international students world-wide, and in the US alone they contribute \$7.5 billion annually to the national economy. World 'trade' in international education has been

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<sup>18</sup> The initiation of which is generally credited to President Kennedy.

<sup>19</sup> Founded by German educator Kurt Hahn, based on Lester B. Pearson's philosophy: "How can there be peace without people understanding each other; and how can this be if they don't know each other?"

<sup>20</sup> Initiated by US Senator William Fulbright and signed into law by President Truman.

estimated at US \$28 billion, and many universities now derive a substantial portion of their funds from this source (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 145).

For organizations promoting intercultural education and exchange for adolescents, for the most part the primary goal remains intercultural learning and goodwill. While I do not have an exhaustive list, examples in Europe and the US include: the European Voluntary Service (EVS), Erasmus, EF (Education First), Youth in Action and Youth for Understanding, the National Student Exchange (NSE), Andeo International and the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), along with innumerable grassroots and local organizations.<sup>21</sup>

These organizations operate (and often co-operate) as sending organizations for students at the secondary education level, and youth interested in volunteering abroad. Expenses vary from organization to organization, but are not typically as high as University fees. Students do not pay living costs, as they are living with a host family that provides room and board.<sup>22</sup> Some organizations compensate for economic differences of the participants by charging higher program fees in Western countries, and providing scholarships to those who cannot afford the whole cost. In most cases, parents are expected to make up the difference. In some countries such as Norway a scholarship scheme exists to assist with student costs (Statens lånekassen for utdanning). As Informant C explained during our interview, “Norway has a large program fee because it’s a rich country, so what it does is allows other countries to go who don’t have those privileges.”

### **3.2 AFS: A History of Volunteerism**

AFS began in 1914 as the American Field Service, a corps of volunteer medics (young Americans living in Paris) and ambulance drivers who tended to the wounded in France during World War I. According to their archives, it was reactivated in 1939 at the start of World War 2; following which, two hundred and fifty AFS ambulance drivers assembled in New York City to discuss the future of the organization. In 1947, they launched the secondary school student exchange program that is now referred to as AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc. (AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc 2011). The organization pledged to carry on its mission of volunteer service,

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<sup>21</sup> Those I know of through personal contact are Dutch-based Atlantic Bridge, and the similar-named Bridgebuilders, which works to develop friendship between Israeli and Palestinian youth.

<sup>22</sup> Or in the case of EVS, the EU provides pocket money and pays the living costs to the organization they volunteer for. Also of note, some organizations such as EF pay the host families to host a student.

working to promote peace and tolerance in the world through cultural exchange experiences. The present day goal is to be ‘an educational organization dedicated to providing enriched learning experiences that promote intercultural awareness, tolerance and communication’ (AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc 2011).

It is precisely this spirit of volunteerism which continues to drive the organization. I mentioned that the students I interviewed were willing to participate because most of them are currently devoting time to volunteering. Many of them are involved in local ‘chapters,’ as described by my informants:

The chapter is like a board. There are five people. So I’m like the head of the chapter, there’s one who is in charge of the host families. There’s another one who’s in charge of sending people abroad. And it’s all volunteer, nobody gets paid at all so it’s a lot of work... The only people that get paid through AFS work in the national office. It’s in Oslo and I think there are about ten people. Every country is supposed to have one, I’m not sure if all the sixty-five countries do. And the main international office is in New York, the people that are all on top. (Informant C)

Most of my informants got involved as volunteers after returning home from their exchange year. Only one, my first interview, was a paid staff member who offered to do the interview when I contacted the Norwegian national office. He had volunteered the previous year, saying:

After I came home I started working as a volunteer and after a year I got a job here...I don’t know if you’ve heard of the expression “a potato” before but mainly it means you can use a potato for everything and that’s what I do-whatever I’m needed to do. My main job is to answer the phone or an email inquiry. (Informant A)

After the interview, this informant put me in touch with the members of the local Stavanger chapter, all four of whom chose to volunteer after their experience. One informant explained:

A lot of people want to give something back. Obviously a lot of volunteers made it happen for me and I want to pay it back. They think, well if there hadn’t been someone to do this for me I never could have gone. (Informant C)

In fact, the organization is so dependent on their volunteer network that problems arise when there is a lack. This was reflected by this statement from a Slovenian AFS volunteer:

For the last year we were kind of dead, the President didn’t have time left and the Vice-President also. But we’re trying to regenerate now. The problem is there are not enough volunteers. In Italy I always went out with the volunteers, so I feel that I want to do something and the others just don’t. It’s also hard for me to find time because I’m studying medicine and it’s really time-occupying. (Informant B)

Her opinion was shared by the leader of the local office, who put me in touch with the students by email. From a list of twenty students, she was the only one to respond.

I only can hope the returnees will take their time to help you out. My sad experience is that they are not the most reliable people because I can hardly get the hold of them when I need their help. (email dated Oct. 25, 2012)

During the course of my research and contact with AFS students I did not find an approach to overcoming this problem. I noticed that a willingness to volunteer is most likely a result of cultural attitudes to time and efficiency, as reflected in a comparison of national chapters:

In the Czech Republic, we have two for the country, one for Bohemia and one for Moravia. In Germany they have about sixteen of them...Germany is the biggest right after the US. There are like 1,000 students there this year. And sixty-four in the Czech Republic. It depends on the volunteer chapter. (Informant F)

### 3.3 Intercultural Learning and Social Safety Net

AFS states as its aims: 'to promote intercultural awareness, tolerance, and communication by providing immersive learning experiences...and intercultural competence training' (AFS and Intercultural Learning, 2). A great deal of time is spent educating the participants, their families, and the host families the students stay with, and the organization has facilitated research projects which have helped develop their training materials. Parents receive information on how to interact with their sons or daughters through each phase of their year abroad. They are allowed to be in touch as much as they like, but not allowed to visit until the end of the year.

AFS programs work that way that you cannot go home at Christmas, only in very special cases like if someone dies. If you decide to go home or if your parents come to you, that's a kind of major offense and you're excluded from the program. It's supposed to work that way that you are on your own for a year. But I think it's a good thing, I wouldn't want to go home in the middle and see my parents. Most of the guys that were there with me were thinking in the same way...it just confuses you. (Informant B)

You can't go home because it would disrupt your experience... (Informant H)

You're not supposed to have a visit until the end of the year, close to the summer. Like my family visited me in May for graduation and stayed for a week. There's a lot of opinions on if that's good or bad. I think it's good, because going back home and talking about it my family knows when I talk about this person or this place, they can say, "Oh yeah I remember them." (Informant C)

It appears that the rules for these policies can be bent by the local chapters and host families, as one Informant recalled:

My dad applied and wasn't allowed to come. I think it's different from family. I think they could apply for it but they didn't really say it was a good idea. I was already done with the exchange... my boyfriend came to visit in February which wasn't really "legal" but the host family said it was ok and as long as they were ok with it they wouldn't

involve AFS. After he came to visit, he was at my mom's place showing her pictures so she felt like she knew, like she was involved. She didn't miss anything, I talked to her like a hundred times a week. (Informant H)

Rather than relaying conflicts to family and friends back home, each student receives what is referred to as a 'contact person,' whose role and involvement is often vital to the relative success or failure of the experience.

All the students have one contact person who is like an aunt or uncle and is supposed to be in touch with them once a month. That's who they're supposed to contact if there's any conflict, that way the host family doesn't have to deal with everything, that's a neutral person. That way the local chapter doesn't have to handle everything. It's kind of an AFS wheel, and everyone has to use it. (Informant C)

(In the beginning of the year) I had a lot of problems and things didn't work out very well. I figured out the best thing was to change families. I contacted my organization and they arranged a temporary host family for me, which was also my local contact person in my local area, who is supposed to help you if things go wrong. (Informant A)

In this way, if functioning properly, the organization provides training for the participants and their families, as well as a social safety net which begins on a local level. I was told of a few cases of students returning home early, but these experiences are by far the minority. It seems for the most part that the intercultural training provides useful knowledge, and the students and parents felt secure using the social safety net provided for them.

### 3.4 The Exchange Year: Riding the Wave

Many theories have been posited regarding the process of intercultural contact and adaptation. The most well-known term is *culture shock*, a phrase popularized by anthropologist Kalvero Oberg (1960) to describe an initial feeling of anxiety, disorientation or 'buzzing confusion' that many people experience when living in a foreign country (Jandt 2007, 290).<sup>23</sup> Theoretical principles have since been developed which emphasize *phases* of culture shock, rather than seeing it as an on/off phenomenon, or a disease that could be 'prevented, or caught and cured' (Bennett 1998, 25). These theories debate whether the process follows "a systematic developmental sequence, a U-curve, W-curve, a learning curve, or takes some other shape"

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<sup>23</sup> Oberg detailed four phases of emotional reactions: the honeymoon, the crisis, the recovery, and finally the adjustment (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 80).



(Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 145).<sup>24</sup> Peter S. Adler (1950) suggested that culture shock went through five stages,<sup>25</sup> and Milton Bennett has developed the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to track changes from ‘ethnocentric’ to ‘ethnorelative’ stages<sup>26</sup> (Bennett 1998, 24-25). AFS has developed their training materials based on research projects and experiential learning of its participants, which they define as learning by doing: “It involves the body, the senses and the emotions as well as the mind, and it always involves relationships with others” (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). The orientation program(s) aim to help students reflect on their experiences and understand them ‘in a larger context of intercultural education and global awareness’ (ibid.).

The organization understands that each participant has different learning needs at different stages of their experience. This was true of the students I interviewed whose backgrounds as well as experiences were incredibly diverse: some had traveled extensively while others had never lived outside their parents’ home; six were immersed in new languages and the rest had to overcome previously ingrained perceptions of their host culture. AFS sees the cycle as fluid and different for each participant, and charts the year along “The Cultural Adjustment Cycle” which shows highs and lows of the year and themes to expect along the way (see Appendix G). Contrary to many other organizations, the major emphasis of the training is placed on the time ‘During the Sojourn,’ with secondary emphasis on preparation at home. According to their description, “This approach also suits the structure of experiential learning, emphasizing a learning style that depends on action and doing more than one that depends on setting up a theoretical understanding first, as the basis for guiding the actions that follow” (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). For these reasons, I have chosen to use AFS’s orientation schedule as a map of the students’ experience. They are planned at critical points during the year when the students are in a transition period requiring reflection.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The U-curve model was proposed by Lysgaard (1965) to show that the level of adjustment was significantly higher after 6 months abroad. It has been analyzed more recently as being weak and inconclusive, and a new model, W-curve, has incorporated re-entry (see Appendix G) (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 6, 80).

<sup>25</sup> The euphoria of *Contact*, confusion of *Disintegration*, anger of *Reintegration*, self-assuredness of *Autonomy*, and creativity of *Independence*.

<sup>26</sup> The six stages in the ‘experience of difference’ are: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration.

<sup>27</sup> Topics include *AFS and You*, *Required Logistics*, *Personal Safety and Wellbeing*, *Cultural Adjustment and Coping*, *Culture Learning*, *Personal Goals and Expectations*.

The AFS orientation schedule is as follows: *pre-departure* (several weeks prior to departure), *arrival* (upon arrival to host country), *post-arrival* (two to five weeks after arrival), *mid-stay*, *pre-return* (two to six weeks before departure), *end of stay*, and *post-return/re-entry* (four to six weeks after return). Using this schedule along with training literature and descriptions given by the students in my interviews, I aim to paint a picture of the exchange year and the diverse array of experiences it entails. First, we will examine the motivations the students had for choosing to participate in an exchange program.

### ***3.4.1 A Seed is Planted: Decision and Application***

The decision to study abroad as a teenager is one that must begin internally. This decision is sparked by many influences, and often seemed fairly random. Presumably, there were underlying motivations that were not expressed in the interviews, but it was not my place as a researcher to question the psychological motivations of my informants.

With so many organizations sending students abroad, it seemed the deciding factors were the countries available and the volunteerism of the host families. Almost every informant cited this as the number one reason for choosing AFS over other organizations:

I ended up with AFS cause it's a non-profit, the host family doesn't get paid. And I liked the idea that no one was in charge of where I ended up. I don't like the idea of, "here's some extra cash, now you can stay in California." (Informant C)

When asked, "*Why did you initially decide to participate in this exchange?*" many could not remember.

It's hard to tell really, a friend of mine went and said it was fun. He gave me the idea. Then I didn't give a lot of thought to it, I just said, "Hey, let's do it." It was kind of a spontaneous thing. I didn't know very much, I just said, "I want to do this." I didn't really know why. (Informant A)

I saw this pamphlet at our school and the presentation for the program was between lessons and I had time and there was no one to go to a bar with me or something. And after ten minutes I just decided I wanted to do it and, well, "that would be totally awesome." I think that after I applied I started to think about the reasons and what will actually happen. I just wanted to do something different, I don't know. (Informant B)

It was totally by chance. I stumbled across the website for AFS while I was home from school sick one day, and the idea kind of got stuck. (Informant I)

Some had older siblings who had gone on exchanges and they decided to follow in their footsteps.

My sister went to Latvia, she's seven years older than me, so she went in 2002-03, a long time ago. When she came back home, later, she told me, "You're gonna do two things: go on an exchange, and study medicine." I don't study medicine but I went on an exchange. (Informant D)

My sister went to Iceland, and we had two students living with us- one Italian, one Thai. (Informant E)

One responded to a presentation given by AFS volunteers.

AFS had a PowerPoint presentation at school and they had two girls with them talking about their experiences and had a lot of arguments for why you should go, what you would learn. They said you would learn a lot about yourself. Basically they argued that it would be a good experience for your career. They said it could help change your view. (Informant H)

And one student admitted that going on an exchange was an opportunity he only considered when it was handed to him.

My history teacher came to me that they had an offer for a student to go to Germany with a scholarship from AFS. So it was way cheaper than the usual exchange. They have a scholarship every year for one student to go to Germany with the German-Czech foundation for the future, or something like that. [*And you hadn't thought of going before?*] No, not at all. I probably wouldn't have gone at all. Well, maybe a year later if I saw different advertising from AFS, but not on my own. (Informant G)

Once the interest was sparked, they underwent a rigorous decision-making process. Some were intent on a certain country (often changing their mind later), and others didn't have an opinion. A few expressed that after the year was over, they wished they had been brave enough to go somewhere to learn a new language.

It was a process of elimination, like I don't want to go to that country...so I had Spanish because I had taken it in my first year at school. I wanted to learn a new language, and the countries I could choose from were Argentina, Chile, Belgium, France, and French-speaking Canada. And I didn't really want to go to Spanish places and didn't know much about North America. Norwegians, we're very interested in American culture but we don't really know that much about it, so Canada made sense. (Informant D)

When I left I only wanted to go the US. There was no Plan B. But now when I think about it I kind of wish I'd chosen something more exotic, new, a new language. (Informant C)

I just applied for the program and didn't know exactly where I would go. I was hoping to go to US, but it didn't work out. I don't know why, they just said, uh, you can go to Sicily or, you know, not at all. (Informant B)

For many, the choice of destination is one of language. Others are not willing to miss a year of school credits, and had to negotiate with their counselors to accept credits from a foreign institution. At least one had to convince her parents first.

My mom said to choose a country with some ambition, 'cause I wouldn't end up in California anyway. I put the US first cause I thought I could improve my English, but then I thought well why go away to learn it. But I wanted to do something special, like learn French. Everybody goes to the US. My intention was to learn French, but I already did an exchange for a week to France and it was really hard because they're so...well, conservative. So French. And if you go to France you have to do the year over again, it wouldn't be acknowledged because the system is different. I thought about it, it was my 2<sup>nd</sup> choice. (Informant H)

Once the decision was made, students submitted an application along with information about themselves and their interests. It is then up to the organization to choose the location, and local chapters find families willing to host the students for the year. According to personal experience as well as the responses from my informants, finding host families willing to participate can be a great obstacle.

The host family thing is really hard, we have tried so many different things. Something works and something doesn't, but you also have to have a little luck. (Informant C)

For this reason, much of the conflict that happens during the exchange occurs because of relationships within the host families. Half of the students changed families during the year, and others expressed difficulties. This may also be because of the information the students choose to provide in their applications.

A lot of students write the application and write things that aren't exactly true, like they go hiking all the time. That means something completely different if an Asian girl writes that than if a Norwegian one does. What do you mean by hiking? When you only get the application you don't know what more is behind it, what more is in there, what's this person like. (Informant C)

After the host family is found, the student receives a letter informing them of their placement, and they begin the process of preparing for a year abroad. This includes the expectations which begin to grow- both stated and unstated.

#### ***3.4.2 Pre-departure: Expectations, Real and Imagined***

A great deal of preparation for the exchange is required before the student leaves home. As mentioned, in AFS orientation this is more about logistics than 'intercultural training.' In the Pre-departure Orientation Overview, or PDO, they learn about the support system they can use to help handle potential conflicts, explore the concept of culture and stereotypes, and record their expectations and goals so they can be revisited later in the year (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). Attendance is mandatory.

On a practical level, the students must say goodbye to friends and families and travel to a new place on their own, many for the first time. They prepare to meet people from all walks of life; most of whom they would not have come in contact with at home.

One facet of their preparations was learning specific information about their future host culture. As I mentioned, AFS does not concentrate on this aspect in their pre-departure training. For this reason, students possessed varying levels of information which often dictated the outcome of their initial contact with their host culture and family. This was seen in research done on the AFS exchange year by Mitch Hammer, who saw a relationship between the host family's assessment of the student's language upon arrival and their assessment of his or her intercultural competence (Hammer 2005).

After discussing their motivations, my next question for my informants was, "*What were your initial expectations of the country and culture?*" Responses were varied, but the result was the same: no one knew exactly what to expect, even those who possessed previous knowledge from TV and films. Some had a complete lack of geographical knowledge.

I remember thinking, Dominican Republic, where the hell is that? I thought it was in Asia. (Informant F)

My dear mother opened the letter while I was in school and had the good sense to research Costa Rica. No one had heard of Costa Rica in those days; everyone thought I was going to Puerto Rico! (Informant J)

This lack of geographical knowledge sometimes contributed to a misunderstanding about basic necessities, such as the weather and what kind of clothes to pack for the year abroad.

I didn't know anything about Canada at all. [*You knew that they spoke French?*] Yeah, and that's because my Dad told me. The only research I did was when I got my letter. I said, 'Oh, I'm going to Canada!' And my Dad said, 'Well Canada is pretty big...' I knew that it's really cold, just like here. I thought it was more north than Norway and I was really surprised. I thought it was going to be freezing. When we arrived at the airport we just had clothes for autumn so we went shopping on the first day. (Informant H)

Language was another initial barrier many students faced, as many lacked even basic knowledge or greetings. A few were not sure which language was spoken in the country.

I'm embarrassed to say how little I knew about the Czech Republic when I agreed to live there for a year. I had a general idea of where the country was located, but not much more than that. I thought I would be in the city; I was placed in a small town in the countryside. I thought I might learn German, since people spoke German in Prague 100 years ago. (Informant I)

Those who did know something of the geographical location, climate, and language did not necessarily spend time studying pre-departure.

I didn't really have a clue about the culture, and I knew like four words in French. I went to the library and got books but didn't bother to open them until two days before I left. (Informant D)

One might get the impression that students who had to learn new languages had a steeper learning curve, but this was not necessarily true. Those who already spoke the language had many mistaken impressions of the culture from media, especially those going to the US. These ingrained expectations were often difficult to negotiate, or to imagine pre-departure.

The only thing I knew of American was from TV shows and movies. It's easy to think 'everyone knows it's not like that' but it's the only thing Norwegians know cause they haven't been there, which is exactly what I was thinking. I was expecting a lot of good food, which there was, and nice girls too and college parties cause of the movies. I was expecting a lot more freedom than it actually was. (Informant A)

Two of the students travelled to a country which shared a border with their own. They had both been to these countries before, but it seems that geographical proximity did not equate to knowledge of lifestyle. These students faced perhaps the most difficult period of adjustment due to these expectations.

I didn't expect the culture to be so different, because I thought, ok, Italy is so close and it's like a neighbor country. I was in Northern Italy a lot during my childhood, and I thought it would be something like that. But when I arrived, Sicily was something completely different. The south of Italy is totally different from the north, the difference is enormous. It's more like being in north of Africa than in Europe. Really. Or maybe South America, really. (Informant B)

Only one student did not experience a major period of adjustment, and he described his experience as 'ideal.' He was already fluent in the language and had previous knowledge of the culture.

I pretty much knew what I'm going into because my Uncle lives in Bavaria and we tend to visit him a lot. So I knew what the life looks like, their customs. I knew what to expect and wasn't really surprised. It's not that much different. Just the beer is worse. (Informant G)

On the day of departure, each student flew to a 'gateway' city in their host country, where they awaited other participants and were finally presented with specific program/country information. (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012) While this sounds efficient on paper, the reality was often quite different.

All the Central and South America AFSers flew from New York and there was a plane strike while we were in the air. It had never occurred before or after! We had to deplane in El Salvador. Someone from the government picked us all up in a bus, took us touring and for beers and food and entertained us for a day or so. (Informant I)

We had to be at like 5am at the airport. Then we waited for the whole day for all of the students from the whole world to come. Then we went to a hotel and to our families the day after. I could have just taken the overnight train and spare the whole day at the Frankfurt airport. It was the worst experience. (Informant D)

### ***3.4.3. Arrival: The 'Honeymoon Phase?'***

The second orientation occurs upon arrival in the host country. As AFS describes, this is a time when the students are “brimming with emotions, some of them contradictory in nature. It is a time to be gentle and reassuring. Sometimes they are so jet-lagged and overwhelmed that they aren't even sure of their own needs” (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). The experience at arrival largely dictated the first impressions of the host family and school. Seen through the ‘norms’ of their own culture, judgments were often extreme-both positive and negative.

My host family showed up to pick me up from our arrival orientation three hours late. Their car radiator had broke and it was almost a whole day drive from the camp to their home in the countryside. We had to stop every hour or so in order to let the engine cool down and refill the water in the radiator. I thought these people are completely nuts, and drive an awful car. I thought I had no idea what I was getting into. That first night they sat me down and asked me why I was there and what I wanted from my exchange. I told them I wanted to learn as much as I could and experience as much as I could of their authentic life. So they said right then and there that they would not speak English to me, even though they all could with varying levels of competency. I thought, now I'm really stuck. (Informant I)

It was a really bad school. It looked like a ghetto, it was horrible to look at. All the windows were broken, there were graffiti everywhere....people who went there were from the poor areas. And there were only girls in my class and, well, they didn't really like me. (Informant B)

I loved the Costa Ricans and life style which was so different than the states. The US at the time was cynical, angry; it was during the anti war movement. I loved that Costa Ricans were so happy, my friends hung out in big groups, laughed, danced and serenaded each other! I loved that they smiled unless something was wrong. (Informant J)

Arrival thus necessitated large adjustments in expectations, especially for those immersed in a new language. Many experienced a sensation of ‘overwhelming’ information intake.

I was terrified at first. They spoke a little English, but not much. My father didn't at all. But my mom could and didn't want to, she was really really strict on the fact that were were going to speak French. (Informant H)

Sitting in school day after day and not understanding was very boring. (Informant I)  
 One student lived in a small town, and described the size of the population as the biggest surprise. The biggest adjustment was how 'noticed' she felt.

The first night I was walking to clear my head around 9:30 at night, and it was pretty dark. The streets were empty, so I was walking around for about thirty minutes, then I went home, went to bed and everything was fine. The next day I went to school and about five to seven people came up to me and said, "I saw you walking, what were you doing?" And I was like, "I didn't see you, where were you?" And they were like, "Oh I was sitting in that car parked over there..." and I was really freaked out. I felt really watched. (Informant C)

Eventually, the jet lag and 'initial shock' wore off, and students began to find ways of getting involved in their new communities.

#### **3.4.4. Post-arrival: Settling In**

This is the third orientation, and considered mandatory. It takes place approximately six weeks after arrival, and is the first official check-in and often the most critical for evaluating the relationship between the student and host family (AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc 2011).

The first point of conflict shown in the Cultural Adjustment Cycle is fatigue. This is caused by the huge amount of information intake the students are facing on a daily basis. In the first few weeks they process this information with heightened senses. This experience was commonly expressed in my interviews, particularly those learning new languages.

The first week I was tired at 9pm cause I wasn't used to the language. And then school started and all the classes were in French. It was exhausting. (Informant D)

It took about three months before I was fluent. You probably know that at first you spend a lot of time translating in your head. The first three months were awful, you were so exhausted at night. I was happy but it was just...*ugh*. (Informant H)

I was a bit desperate in the beginning...when I arrived I tried to communicate in English but it was practically impossible because they don't know English at all. Even the English teacher didn't know English. So I was forced to learn the language. (Informant B)

While none expressed an explicit feeling of homesickness, some had a difficult time establishing relationships.

I had a hard time meeting people and making friends. I was put in classes just to follow around my host sister, and she and I did not get along well, which caused some problems. Commuting 30 km by train every day to and from school also made it hard to build relationships. (Informant I)



It was harder in the beginning. I didn't really get any close friends until late October. So, in the beginning I just went home and watched TV a lot. (Informant F)

Others found an 'in' through those who shared common interests or knowledge in their country, or had an interest in them as a foreigner.

I was very shy in the beginning. This beautiful girl came up to me and said she was a cheerleader and I was like, "Oh my god, she's a cheerleader! She must be so popular. I must be friends with her and then get other friends." (Informant A)

I found friends really quickly because there was a guy in the school who visited Czech Republic every holiday. So he was really interested in me. (Informant G)

Most conflicts in expectations were resolved quickly, but as mentioned this orientation is a chance for students to evaluate their relationship with their host family and the result was not always positive. Half ended in a change of families at some point during the year, and others expressed complaints.

First I stayed with just a mother and her daughter, but from the first week I saw that it wouldn't go so well, so I asked the organization to change the family. I think the only reason why they took me in was that their daughter wanted to go to Canada. It was very obvious from the beginning. Her mother was hostile, constantly comparing me to her daughter, she didn't let me go out, didn't like the way I dressed...she did mean things. (Informant B)

They were all nice but really didn't go out of their way to show me the country or make me feel wanted. I was a little jealous of the other AFSers who had great families who made sure they saw the country. My host brother Mario was a bit of a problem. He had a crush on me and it made things awkward. When I didn't reciprocate he became very bossy and controlling. (Informant I)

Frustration was often the result of learning to accept new rules. One informant expressed that he felt less independent, although this is not the norm. He attributed a change in host families to an adjustment in expectations.

I was frustrated by a lot of things in the beginning until I got used to them and said, well that's just the way things are. Curfew especially, and these rules in the home, and the drinking age. (Informant A)

Of course, this was not the only time during the year that conflict occurred, as we will see. It did mark a period of 'settling in' as the students developed in-roads to the community and began to be more fluent in the language and the local culture, often while viewing it through the lens of their own.

### 3.4.5 Mid-stay

The Cultural Adjustment Cycle charts the Christmas holidays as the low point in the year. Common experiences identified are ‘deepening of relationships’ followed by ‘culture shock.’ This feeling was expressed in all of my interviews. For most, it was a result of weather (restlessness or ‘winter doldrums’) and being away from family for the first time during Christmas.

*[So you never got homesick?]* No not really, except for Christmas. That was difficult. (Informant B)

The worst part of the whole experience was a few weeks before Christmas vacation. It was grey and slushy and I didn’t speak the language or know the culture. (Informant D)

At Christmas time I didn’t get like the Christmas feelings. We have so many traditions here in Norway, and when I didn’t have them it was like something was missing. Usually we have *pinnekjøtt*, and that’s like the beginning of Christmas for me. (Informant F)

However, less adjustment was required for those who were involved in local activities and had already developed a network of friends.

Some of my closest friends were doing cheerleading so they sort of pushed me into it and I’m so glad they did. The winter would have been so long if I didn’t. There was school and then practice and then games and then it repeated again...it was busy. It was very hard but very rewarding. (Informant C)

As mentioned, only one student did not experience a major cultural adjustment, and felt the holidays were quite similar to those in his home country.

Our Christmas customs are almost the same as the German ones. They came from Germany, many of them. They just don’t eat fish. They get their presents on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Christmas tree decorations are almost the same as ours. (Informant F)

New traditions were also a chance to learn, and a positive experience which for one student was one of the highlights of the year.

We went to Disneyland for Christmas and drove down to Florida. I think the experience with the kids, even if they were crazy, was really great. I remember Christmas day we were sitting on top of the stairs and they were half asleep but still so excited. And the youngest girl got a dollhouse and her excitement...I’ll never forget it. (Informant C)

Mid-year orientation is intended to be both a look back at the student’s exchange so far and to think about how to grab the maximum benefit from the remainder of the exchange. (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). For nearly all the participants, the best was yet to come.

### 3.4.6 Pre-return

After the potential low point of the holidays, a large learning curve takes place. The Cultural Adjustment Cycle makes a sweeping arch and peaks just before the students begin to prepare to return home. This orientation takes place four to six weeks before 'Departure Day' and is intended to prepare students and their families to say goodbye (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). Spring is most often the time of the year when students felt most comfortable expressing themselves in their new languages, and as active members of their community and host family.

In June I suddenly thought, "Oh I have friends" and I was comfortable, I knew the culture and the language, like I was riding on a wave. I told myself, "I succeeded in doing what I was supposed to do." (Informant D)

This time is when most students accept and feel open to new experiences in the host culture, participating in activities they wouldn't have imagined doing at home.

I went with one of my friends to her farm and we went on the four wheeler and they had a llama...I stayed there for dinner and we had steak and my whole plate was covered with this one steak. It was *so* big. I was like, "Am I supposed to eat this?? They said yeah, of course! It's from our cow. I've been eating steak my whole life and I knew it was meat but this used to be in your backyard....to this day I still talk about how much fun it was. I had no expectations so everything was fun. (Informant C)

A feeling of anticipation and often dread begins to develop when considering the prospect of returning home.

The last two months of the exchange, knowing that you're going back- it's a horrible feeling knowing you're coming home. In these diaries I wrote, I think every day began with, "Oh my god, there's only two weeks left. Oh no, there's only two days left..." (Informant B)

Pre-return orientation is often combined with that for End of Stay, which is seen as an evaluation of the overall experience. They once again return to their 'gateway city' and await their flights home with other students. Very often this is when they suddenly realize what they learned and how dramatically they changed throughout the year. Many described a feeling of confidence in themselves.

I was mommy's girl. So when I told everyone I was 'gonna do this, they were like, no you're not. But then when I did it, I was like well I can *do this*. I can be independent. There were a lot of challenges and I handled them good, I think. Just knowing that you can handle things on your own, you can take care of it yourself...having that trust in yourself without your family it can be hard but you have to learn to do it or you're screwed. (Informant C)

Something happened inside of me after that year. I got a lot more outgoing and less shy and more sure of myself... I learned how to handle everything by myself. I wasn't scared of being alone. (Informant A)

Departure day (D-day) is often marked with grief.

It was as hard to leave the Dominican Republic as it was to leave Norway. (Informant E)

They had a nice goodbye dinner for me and I was eating and packing at the same time. Everyone was crying at the bus stop (with the other families) and the other students were crying the whole bus trip to Montreal. I was at the airport when all the other students who left on time were leaving and I was fine the whole time and everyone else was sad and crying. (Informant D)

The sojourn then comes to an end and the students are met by their families at the airport. They return home accompanied by a sense of accomplishment and brimming over with stories. As we will see, the expectations they have of home and relationships with friends and family are often not the reality they are met with.

### ***3.4.7 Re-entry and Transformation***

The scheduling of this orientation is left to the local and regional AFS chapter. Its goals are to help the student re-integrate smoothly by finding ways to integrate the exchange experience and personal growth into daily life (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). Even though students are prepared for the prospect of transition, this phase of the Cultural Adjustment Cycle is commonly the lowest of the year.

The first three or four weeks I was kind of depressed because everything was so different again, it was back to normal. Or...it wasn't really back to normal 'cause what was normal to me at that point was the American way. (Informant A)

When I arrived it was like a punch in the face when no one was there on time, there was no surprise party like I'd expected. (Informant D)

People sort of treated me as though I had a trip or vacation and not this whole incredible immersion experience. I felt isolated and disorientated a little. (Informant J)

The biggest changes are often in old relationships, as the students notice major differences in themselves and none in their friends.

I felt like, I know something more and I'd gone through this big thing and nothing had changed for them like it had for me. (Informant D)

I found them in a way very limited, not thinking very broadly, I don't know how to express this. Closed-minded. The thing I was thinking then was that they weren't actually *thinking* about life, just about school and shopping. (Informant B)

It was not uncommon for a complete change to take place in their social groups, as they found it impossible to return to ‘the way things were.’

I got rid of a lot of my older friends. Well getting rid of is an ugly thing to say but I changed my friends. I think I kept three or four. I was a completely different person. (Informant A)

It was a struggle to readjust to normal patterns and expectations. Senior year was rough, and I ran away on adventures at any chance that I could. My friends had a hard time understanding me, and what I had experienced. I'd missed a year of their life too, and they'd grown and changed right along with me. It was hard, and I definitely grew apart from some folk. (Informant I)

Perhaps the most difficult realization was that they were alone in their experience, and had no outlet through which to share their experiences.

I'm a really social person, so when I got home it was hard, and especially the thing where I would like to talk about my exchange there, but all the people in Norway just asked you, “How was it?” And, I just said, “Good.” (Informant F)

Some felt lucky to have family members who supported them, or other friends who had traveled and could relate.

My mom said that even though I have no interest in it, just go ahead and talk, I'll sit here and listen. It helps. It wasn't that people had to respond, I just needed to tell someone. (Informant H)

Luckily for me I had my other friend that was in Wisconsin so I could talk to him about it. (Informant F)

Others noticed that their friends tired of hearing their stories and it was common to stop talking about their experiences completely.

I was so cocky about being, you know, almost an American. That lasted I guess two months, 'til people got tired of listening to my stories about the US. (Informant A)

I think part of me was sure that even if I talk about my experience to everyone I know for a long time, they're not going to understand. My experience was *so* different to what it's like in Norway, so I knew no matter how hard I tried they would not understand. So part of me was like, oh I'm just not going to bother. (Informant C)

When you come back, many people ask you, ‘How was it?’ They stop asking. That's exactly what we learned about in the camps, that people don't want to hear about it, they don't care. They don't get how big it is. When you notice how much people *don't* care you realize that you actually did something pretty huge and no one will ever know, like if you went to the moon without anyone ever knowing. (Informant H)

To help remedy these conflicts, re-entry orientation states as an aim to ‘process the exchange experience in a supportive environment’ (AFS Intercultural Programs USA 2012). Students are able to share stories and challenges with others who have been through the same process.

We had a thousand different stories to tell... We all had different experiences but the core base of it was the same. We tried to gather everyone's thoughts and pick up the pieces and stuff. (Informant A)

Of course, the process of transformation does not end with the last orientation meeting.

Depending on the level of adaptation, this period can last months or even years. Throughout this transition period, many returnees change their educational or career goals to incorporate a new passion for traveling.

Before, I was pretty sure what I wanted to do. Now, I take everything as it comes. I take one day at a time. I have no clue what I'm going to do next year. I'm less stressed. A lot mentally, like I've grown up mentally, and am a lot more independent. Now I want to travel. Now I really want to see Asia, India, China, and Africa. The world is smaller now than before. I'm more experienced and I understand more about people in general and other cultures. (Informant E)

Those who had spent the year immersed in a new language often find it difficult to return to communication in their mother tongue.

The first two or three months were difficult for me, especially because when you're speaking for the whole year a different language- actually the whole year I didn't speak Czech. I wrote a bit but never spoke. And then to get back into the way of thinking in Czech- I was slipping German words into my Czech sentences: *and, or-* you just don't think about it. It took me almost half a year to speak properly without slipping. (Informant G)

Others noticed a shift in their perspective of their home:

I think I started to appreciate it more. When we were driving from the airport I kind of realized how beautiful Slovenia is. (Informant B)

An interesting point to mention is that at the end of my interviews, every informant thanked me for allowing them to talk about their experience. They were still grateful for a chance to relive their memories and be given the time to reminisce. This tells me that the process of adaptation and transformation is continuous, which was expressed by Informant H as a 'fairy tale never ending.' In the mind of the participants, the sojourn never ends. The memories of their experience keep it alive in their minds after they return home, even if they are never able to fully express the breadth of it to those closest to them.

## Chapter 4

### FROM THE INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

*What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from...  
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And to know the place for the first time.  
-T.S. Eliot*

An attempt to analyze diverse, personal experiences is not an easy task. However, in exploring the narratives of my informants, what I noticed in every case was that they were recounting the modern experience of the Stranger. Each one of them challenged the everyday givens of their host country, as well as their home. Thus, from a diverse set of narratives emerged common themes. Murphy-Lejeune uses the term ‘polyphony,’ or ‘the combination of parts which form an individual melody and harmonize with others, echoes in major and minor’ (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 49). I experienced the same: ten voices traveled to seven countries, half of them learned totally new languages, and all of them returned singing variations of the same tune. How can we hear what they are really saying? By taking them apart and examining the pieces, we can reconstruct a new ‘whole’- a synthesis of the theories *and* the narratives, from the perspective of the intercultural encounter. Piecing together these parts allows us to develop a new mosaic built from unique individual voices, a fusion of narratives the informants themselves might not be aware of: a ‘narrative polyphony’ (ibid.).

The trailhead of this journey was the central question of my research: ‘*What happens to our worldview when we travel?*’ Underlying this was the sub-question, ‘*Can we identify and describe tangible, concrete changes that affect our identity and culture?*’ To answer these questions from the intercultural perspective, I will present my analysis in two halves. The first will examine changes which affected the informants’ perspectives of their *identity*; namely, the process of attaining group membership which I have deemed ‘role playing.’ The second half examines changes which affected their perspective of *culture*; namely, personal and interpersonal attitudes that arise out of adaptation. Finally, we will explore the outcomes of these negotiations and the implications for the participants.

## 4.1 Negotiating Identity

Social identity is a relational concept, dependent on others for its co-construction (refer to the definition of identity in section 1.3.1, and ethos in 2.1.5). It belongs to ‘specific local relations between specific persons’ (Dahl 2008, 5), which is ultimately dependent on our *role*. We already know that the enactment of a role is the dynamic expression of a situationally salient aspect of the individual’s social identity (refer to section 2.1.4), and was a common theme in my informants’ narrative polyphony. They told of the roles they created, played, and adapted during their time abroad; negotiating their identities through the act of *role playing*. The ultimate goal of was attaining *group membership*.

### 4.1.1 Role Playing: Anonymous to Recognized

The Stranger occupies a unique role in society, as one who provokes awareness and tests the permeability of boundaries between near and far (refer to section 2.4). We see in the narratives of the exchange students that Strangers do indeed stand on the threshold between the world outside and the world inside; just as Simmel surmised. Their presence brings up basic questions such as, ‘*What does it mean to be a member of a specific group and how is my sense of identity manifested and maintained in daily life?*’ (Riley 2007, 164). Let us now answer this question in the context of the exchange year, returning to the concepts of anomie and recognition.

When arriving in a foreign country, the stranger is *anonymous*, lacking a past, a person ‘without a history.’ Pollock and Van Reken explain this position as ‘statuslessness,’ when a newcomer carries knowledge from past experiences that has no use in a new place (Pollock and Reken 2001, 68). It might also be experienced as an amputation, as one’s history becomes invisible (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 17). Informant C described her experience of locals wondering which state Norway was, not realizing it was a country. This highlights the experience of the student’s original nationality or ethnicity taking on greater importance, acting as ‘a vehicle of stereotypes and attitudes, positive and negative’ (Riley 2007, 172). They often wondered whether this was liberating or overwhelming.

The other side of anomie is that the Stranger has never participated in local history, it has never been ‘an integral part of his biography’ (Schutz 1971, apud Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 17). Such a basic lack of knowledge can be accompanied by a severe loss of self-esteem, as we



physically look like adults, but emotionally feel like children<sup>28</sup> (Pollock and Reken 2001, 68). The period of 'mutual anomie' is full of faux pas which are often embarrassing and cause anxiousness and shame. Nowhere is this more true than in the learning of culture and language. Informant J gave the example of greeting her host family with the phrase 'I am very happy to meet you,' learning much later the implications of what she said: "I used the word "felicidad" which meant happy according to my book. Once I could speak Spanish, two months later, I understood why they had all just stared at me. I had said, "I am very sexually excited to meet you!"

Additionally, the anonymous role of the Stranger often takes on a certain enigmatic quality, shrouded in a mystery of the unknown. Collective reactions to their presence range from fear to tolerance to attraction, or as Kristeva (1991) points out, from 'God to be adored' to 'enemy to be exterminated' (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 20). The informants recounted being surrounded by gossip, as Informant A reported there being 'like 2000 times more drama' than he had experienced at home, 'especially about the exchange students.' We can attribute this to the role of anomie.

We know that the Stranger does not remain anonymous forever. Day by day, they begin to develop a presence in the host culture, gathering knowledge of its values and norms, acquiring a new history. However, for some time they interpret interactions based on their own cultural filter, often based on stereotypes learned long before arrival (Riley 2007, 172). Thus, first impressions were seen as 'good' or 'bad,' with broad descriptions often including the word 'weird.' This is how Informant B described her school, adding, "From my perspective there was no one really smart in the class. Compared to here, you have to do tests to get in so I'm kind of used to, you know, smart people." Informant D thought it strange that his host family "had three cars and four snowmobiles and they couldn't afford good bread!" What we can gather from these perceptions is that the students, in their role of Strangers, were initially viewed-and viewed themselves-as outsiders.

Treading the waters of anomie is a balancing act. As Murphy-Lejeune explains, "The two sides of student's life, the original and the new, advance simultaneously. It resembles more a mutation" (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 210). Eventually, the conversations shift from cultural

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<sup>28</sup> Author Paulo Coelho shares this sentiment in *The Pilgrimage*: "When you travel, you experience, in a very practical way, the act of rebirth. You confront completely new situations, the day passes more slowly, and on most journeys you don't even understand the language the people speak. So you are like a child out of the womb."

differences to local matters, as their nationality takes less precedence. For this reason, arrival itself is a rite of passage, included with it a period of initiation. And as Riley says, “In all cases, the functions of rites of passage are membership-and, therefore, role- and identity- related” (Riley 2007, 185). We see then that arrival does not dictate acceptance, as “Physical proximity does not mean personal proximity...circles of relationships are already well defined, and most people aren’t looking to fill a vacant spot in such a circle” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 68).

The position of anomie thus allows for a period of role playing, a term I have chosen to emphasize this period as a sort of ‘game’ of identity. As we will see, who the students become in their host culture is up to their own devices, how they play their cards- all involving a negotiation of identity which leads eventually to recognition and acceptance.

#### ***4.1.2 Membership Strategies: Knowledge, Language, and Motivation***

The lack of a personal history means that the Stranger’s chronology begins at arrival. The present takes on new meaning and urgency, becoming ‘inflated:’ “Each moment is an event, everything an adventure” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 16). As they build a common history in their host culture, the students become recognized as group members. How do they accomplish this? We already know that membership strategies are present in every society, and each membership is knowledge-and-language based (refer to section 2.1.4). Let us examine the process of attaining group membership through the acquisition of those two bases: *knowledge* and *language*.

We have defined knowledge as cultural competence as in the forms of know-that, know-of, and know-how (refer to section 2.1). The breadth of information contained within the field of ‘cultural competence’ cannot be learned in a day. It requires time and energy, which goes hand in hand with the fatigue the informants described during their first weeks abroad. However, there is no way around it: in order to move from being an outsider to an insider, Strangers must gain these competencies. Informant A expressed a frustration in ‘not knowing all these things Americans just *know*.’

Notably, the impetus was placed on the students as Strangers-and thus the minority-to acquire these competences and skills. While those in the host country also learn from the foreigner, they are ‘on their home turf’ as a member of the majority, and thus maintain a dominant position. Thus, the responsibility placed on the exchange students to acquire this information can be an intense, frustrating period; especially as we know that the majority of this

knowledge is unspoken and unexamined by the host society. This period often brings about conflict, making it easy to withdraw. Although none of my informants returned home mid-year, a few admitted to entertaining the idea (and recounted stories of others leaving early).

We can see from Hall's definitions of tacit culture that the students went through a period of re-learning the rules of space and time. These crucial elements cannot be left out of a discussion on group membership, as one's role is learned and often displayed in relationship to them (refer to sections 2.2.1-2). The 'language of space' or proxemics can be a crucial determiner of group membership (and also a cause of anxiety in the first weeks). Informant E went through this experience on his first day at lunch, asking himself, "Where should I sit? Should I do like they do in the movies, go to the restroom and sit there on the toilet, crying for myself? Or, should I just pick out somewhere?" Others had similar experiences, noting an extreme divide between groups:

They had long tables in the cafeteria, which is not a habit here. So you had the bitch table who scanned you with a look, and a loser table. It was really clear, just like the movies. So you had the popular table and you can't even try to sit there even if they're not there, and the nerds, and jocks. I ended up at the popular table eventually. Most of the time I sat at the bitch table. (Informant H)

The third or second day of school there was this girl who came to me and said that the class has to divide into two parts: those that have boyfriends and those who don't. And that those who have boyfriends have to sit on the right side and those who don't sit on the left and they don't mix. And when I asked them why they tried to explain me in English at the time because the girls who don't have boyfriends want to steal them from the ones that have boyfriends.... and that was considered normal. (Informant B)

As the students observed these scenes from an anonymous standpoint, they were able to choose which group they wanted to be a part of. Key to their role as a foreigner was their ability to negotiate roles between groups- an ability not possessed by natives. Informant F said, "I could just walk around and say 'hi' to anyone. I was friends with freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors." Murphy-Lejeune refers to this as 'social elasticity' or 'social nudity,' which is granted to the Stranger as they are acquiring cultural competency.

The second, but no less critical proficiency is the acquisition of language and communication skills. We already know that a language has two lives: public and private (refer to sections 2.31-2). Gaining access to this 'private, internalized system of knowledge' that we call language is the key to inhabit the perspective of the natives (Deutscher 2010, 135). Thus, successful 'communication' is not judged solely in terms of the efficiency of information

exchange, but on establishing and maintaining relationships (Byram 1998, 3). In order to truly attain group membership, the Stranger must learn to participate in the context in which the group communicates: their language. “It is the key to intercultural contact and its mastery represents a crucial element... Strangers with insufficient language skills are left outside, marginalized longer than others” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 5). This point was poignantly illustrated a story recounted by a Czech AFS language teacher. Mid-way through the year, her students had erased the title of their class in her schedule as ‘teaching foreigners,’ declaring that they were no longer foreign because they could speak the language. She reflected on this experience:

I noticed that foreign students at our high school remained foreigners if they didn’t start to speak Czech. Brilliant English didn’t help them either. The moment they started to communicate in Czech, in spite of all their mistakes, they stopped being foreign. The language helped penetrate to the people, and with it how they think, how they feel, and how they perceive reality. Using our ‘instrument for thinking,’ they become one of us. (Zabloudilová 2013, my translation)

This story illustrates the dynamic relationship between the knowledge-and-language based learning involved in attaining group membership, or ‘crossing the threshold’ to becoming an active member of the host society. It also incorporates a third, vital aspect in the process: motivation. Essential to acquiring the necessary *knowledge* and *language* proficiency, and perhaps the most important aspect in being accepted, is *motivation*. The Stranger must want to belong, to work at acquiring the knowledge and language necessary to building relationships.

In order to do this, they must rely on their own ‘power of social seduction’ which helps ‘charm their entry into ordinarily closed circles of established groups’ (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 8). They must also demonstrate a willingness to relate, which can be done by using the language (Byram 1998, 3). Thus, group membership (or what Murphy-Lejeune refers to as building social fabric) can be related to a conquest. In Informant D’s words, “I succeeded in doing what I set out to do.”

The complex process of negotiating identity from anonymous to recognized concludes with a feeling of belonging to a community, which Riley defines it as a ‘strong and conscious orientation towards other members and group values and norms’ (Riley 2007, 187). Determining which social group to be a part of is up to each student and is partially determined by available options. Many times, the foreigner chooses other foreigners as ‘equals,’ which ends up representing the majority of their social contact. The reason for this was repeated by my informants in the phrases ‘they’re going through the same process,’ and ‘you understand where

they're coming from.' This is not always the case, as Informant C recounted that life in a small town didn't afford this choice and necessitated relationships with locals, often leading to friendships with those the students would not have normally associated themselves with. Informant J confided that the relationships she made while abroad were with fellow Americans that she 'never, ever would have gotten to know back home.' The result, as Murphy-Lejeune says, is that 'the emerging social fabric is motley,' its success determined by the active role of the foreigner to seek out the interactions (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 10). Once established, these relationships are seen as permanent, becoming 'friends for life.'

They were intense relationships because of the intensity of the experience. They were the people who helped me process the experience and shared all the ins and outs of their experience with me. (Informant F)

Now I have friends all over the world just from that one year, and they are the *best* friends that I've ever had. (Informant A)

There are many in-roads to attaining group membership, but the process always involves a negotiation of identity. "Caught in between groups, one's social identity is unclear and must be defined" (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 10). Defining (or re-defining) this position comes with the awareness that others cannot be limited to social boundaries, or as Informant I said, "You can't classify a population." This awareness can often be an antidote to prejudice. Lebow writes:

Social, religious, professional, regional, athletic, and other identifications that cross national boundaries encourage us to question the value and legitimacy of these boundaries...it rests on the personal ties we create with such people, which makes it easier, if not natural, to see them as friends and ontological equals...they provide the emotional and cognitive foundations for extending our moral sphere. (Lebow 2012, 320)

The 'darker' side of identity negotiation is that the co-existence of places of belonging often creates a feeling of being suspended between two poles, a 'discrepancy between the self and self' (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 12, 18). This often creates a sense that the Stranger is between two looking glasses, or as the students expressed, that they were a part of two worlds.

It was good that he (my boyfriend) left. It was weird mixing the two lives. It's ok to mix them when Skyping but he didn't really understand a word anyone else said and I'm not really the same person as when I'm with him. When I was there I had started over again. With him, he knew a lot of other things...I don't know, the lifestyle...I felt pretty vulnerable. (Informant H)

Attaining group membership is essential to creating a feeling of belonging. It requires the acquisition of knowledge and language skills, which are determined by individual motivation. The result is to "learn the new ways and know our position in the community," Van Reken

explains. “Other members of the group see us as one of them, or at least know where we fit in. We have a feeling that our presence matters. We feel secure” (Pollock and Reken 2001, 71).

## 4.2 Negotiating Culture

What is the ultimate goal of the exchange experience from the perspective of intercultural communication? Attaining group membership is not the whole story. The missing piece is the negotiation of culture, or a re-interpretation of the world (refer to section 1.3.2 for a definition of culture).

The changes experienced during an intercultural encounter are often referred to as a process of *adaptation*. In terms of cultural psychology this process is also known as *acculturation*, which refers to ‘changes that take place as a result of continuous first-hand contact between individuals of different cultural origins’ (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 99).<sup>29</sup> Both terms reflect changes in cultural identity and self-identification of oneself as a member of an ethnocultural group (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 99). It is putting on a ‘social cloak,’ by “learning the gestures, phrases, actions, of the natives, trying on new masks, acting the chameleon- to the point where they feel comfortable enough to want to stay awhile” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 112). The end result is affiliations with the home country are loosened, the foreigner is no longer quite so foreign; the stranger no longer strange. For the informants, reaching this point was the goal of the exchange year.

### 4.2.1 Adaptation

What is involved in the process of cultural adaptation is a matter of debate (refer to Section 3.4 for a summary). What is more important than the form the process takes is the fact that it is an *inevitable* part of the experience. Pollock and Van Reken say, “Life for everyone is a series of transitions, and each transition changes something in our lives. Life after these transitions is drastically different from what it was before” (Pollock and Reken 2001, 61).<sup>30</sup> What is the

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<sup>29</sup> It should be distinguished from *assimilation*, which is a process seeking to replace one’s worldview with that of the host culture. Bennett describes the differences: assimilation is substitutive and adaptation is additive. “The assumed end result of assimilation is becoming a ‘new person’...of adaptation, a bicultural or multicultural person.” (Bennett 1998, 25)

<sup>30</sup> The model they follow in transitions is Involvement (settled and comfortable), Leaving (beginning to prepare, saying goodbye), Transition (chaos), Entering (becoming part of the community), and Reinvolvement (Belonging).

transition for the exchange students? How did they adapt? We will answer that question now as a negotiation of *culture*.

The terms ‘horizon’ and ‘circle of understanding’ have been taken from Gadamer’s hermeneutic concepts and applied to the field of intercultural communication (refer to section 1.4) to illustrate the process of meaning-making. Øyvind Dahl (2008) has summarized these applications (using Marita Svane’s (2004) ‘dynamic model of communication’) to illustrate the relationship between culture, identity, and language when the circle of understanding is moved *inside* the interpreter. As it is an intercultural model of worldview transformation, it incorporates the narratives of my informants and the theories we have discussed. This model is seen as a meeting of two interlocutors divided into three phases: *thesis*, *anti-thesis*, and *synthesis*. We will use it as the intercultural model of or adaptation, throughout the exchange year, to illustrate the process of cultural negotiation.

*Phase 1. Thesis: Pre-understanding or presuppositions.* Each individual possesses innate, tacit, unconscious understanding of how the world works such as space, body, time, and social relations (see section 2.2 for Hall’s descriptions of tacit culture). Dahl refers to these presuppositions as “basic understandings about Self, Others, life, values, norms, and the world” which make up the individual’s frame of reference and which ‘explains, legitimates, integrates, and maintains interpretations of the actual situation’ (Dahl 2008, 8). In Gadamer’s terms, pre-understanding is the individual’s *horizon of understanding*, or ‘range of vision’ (Gadamer 1975). For the exchange students, Pre-departure is Phase 1-viewing the world through their presuppositions. Their horizon, or range of vision, is only what they can see from home.

*Phase 2. Anti-thesis: Communication and meaning production.* The individuals come to a situation that involves communication (on-line, face-to-face, or in a common action). The horizons of understanding, or cultural frames of reference, come into contact with each other. The arrival in the host country marks the beginning of Phase 2. This can end in one of two ways: closed or open communication. In the first course, the individuals stick to their former stereotypes, picking up only on cues which contribute to maintaining them. Dahl calls these frozen stereotypes, or prejudices that create self-fulfilling prophecies (Dahl, 2001: 27). The end result can be distrust, ethnocentrism, or even racism and violence. Closed communication was often the result of conflicts within the host families.

The second course, open communication, occurs when the individuals open up their horizons of understanding, their cultural frames of reference, and put prior stereotypes aside. We saw this happening for the exchange students during identity negotiation, when cultural differences become less and less important and a common history is created. Significantly, they enter into an 'I-You' relation that 'opens for new production of meaning' and pre-understandings are challenged and tested (Dahl 2008, 9). This opens a process of searching for understanding *together* with the Other, which brings to light one's own cultural frame of reference. The result is an 'instantaneous and spontaneous' *fusion of horizons*. The most vital aspect of this fusion is, as Dahl explains, that a *new identity* is created, as well as 'conscious conceptions about Self, the Other, and the world...which defines the borders (between them)...I, you, we, it, and they are identified' (ibid., 10). Informant I expressed this fusion by saying: "You can't really classify a population." It is an awareness of ethos (refer to section 2.1.5), not only in ourselves but in others, the knowledge that others also possess complex, multi-faceted identities. (to use Lebow's words).

*Phase 3: Post-understanding and reflection.* This takes place after the encounter, and as I have mentioned, is the most crucial and often forgotten process of the sojourn. Dahl refers to it as a *change of culture*, a shift in one's frame of reference that creates a new 'freedom to act' (ibid., 11). With it comes a willingness to accept uncertainty, reduce distances, and accept experiments, which sum up Murphy-Lejeune's definitions of openness that we will discuss in the next section. These new attitudes can be shared with others in the social network, which proves, as Dahl says, that 'communication can become the bridge between different human beings' (ibid.), (or as we will see in the concluding section, travel can become a political act).

This new frame of reference, or re-interpretation of the world, creates a new stance for further intercultural encounters. Thus, it is in an infinite process, just as dynamic and ever-changing as the circle of understanding. The outcome of communication is a new perspective. Dahl states, "In communication, both culture and identity are at stake" (ibid.).

### 4.3 Outcomes

Examining the process of adaptation, or cultural negotiation, as a broadening and fusing of horizons leads us to the question: what were the results of this adaptation for the exchange students? What outcomes were common to their experience? "Similar elements are mentioned



again and again from one interview to another, imprinting the narratives with a certain *déjà vu*” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 231). Phrased in different ways, my informants’ narratives revealed three outcomes: autonomy and self confidence, openness (as curiosity, tolerance, and flexibility), and a critical awareness of self and others (which transformed culture into inter-culture, as we will see).

### 4.3.1 *Autonomy and Self-Confidence*

With adaptation comes the acquisition of two strategic skills: *autonomy* and *self-confidence*. According to Murphy-Lejeune, ‘they are the means by which success abroad is attainable’ (ibid., 104). To borrow Informant C’s words: “It can be hard but you have to learn to do it or you’re screwed.”

*Autonomy* is defined as living on one’s own and being self-sufficient, or ‘knowing that you can handle things on your own.’ In the interviews this was often described as a feeling of independence. *Autonomy* is ‘a quality which students gain from having to survive in an unfamiliar environment,’ (ibid.). With no one familiar to guide them, the students paved their own ways into their host societies, and with this came a realization that they could accomplish many other tasks in life “without worrying about what that would bring or what to do or say or what people would say,” as Informant H expressed.

The second skill, *self-confidence*, is intricately connected. Murphy-Lejeune’s informants described the acquisition of this skill as ‘learning to cope.’ This inner sense of confidence results in outward expressions, which was most memorably described to me by Informant H. She described the process as invisible, inner plastic surgery:

It’s not self-esteem but it’s not independent but it’s something in the middle. You know you can do it because you’re not afraid to do it because the year you just completed is something other people would not even consider. But at the same time, I’m - I’m proud of it but it didn’t really give me a self-esteem boost. (Pause) Well, it did give me a self-esteem boost, but...crazy example but if people get a boob job they get better self-esteem. But it’s not the same thing, you know, it’s not something you show people. It’s just something that you know. You *can* do it, you’re *able*. (Informant H)

In attaining the skills of autonomy and self-confidence comes a sense of ‘transformation’ that occurs during the year abroad, being put to the test a whole person.

When I came back I was a lot more outgoing. I had a lot more self-confidence. I learned how to handle everything by myself. I wasn’t scared of being alone. I was a completely different person. (Informant A)

These outcomes of the stay abroad can be summed up in the word ‘maturity,’ which was a word used by many of my informants to describe the transformation they underwent during their stay abroad. In this light, the experience can often be a border event between youth and adulthood (ibid., 17).

#### ***4.3.2. Openness: Curiosity, Tolerance, Flexibility***

Passing the test of adaptation is derived from a deeper sense of who one is and how one can succeed in an unfamiliar social setting. It leads to a development of what Murphy-Lejeune labels personal and interpersonal attitudes: “This double edge may be summed up as twin gains- the discovery of self through the discovery of otherness” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 108). Notably, successful adaptation leads to a development of *openness* which was described repeatedly by my informants and is also used in assessments of intercultural competence (Byram 1997, 6). Openness in its various facets is classified by Murphy-Lejeune as curiosity, tolerance, and flexibility.

*Curiosity* can be defined as ‘the desire to learn new things,’ which is the opposite of indifference or intellectual apathy. “It allows one to question the familiar...A curious mind is ready to ease the supremacy of the ready-made wisdom received through early socialization” (Murphy-Lejeune, *An Experience of Interculturality: Student Travellers Abroad* 2002, 110), or to question the rearing practices of infancy and childhood. Curiosity is an attitude possessed by students before departure, and often a great factor in their initial motivation- the condition and the outcome of travelling. It is directed towards the outside, and ‘frees and energizes’ (ibid.). It is often the quality described as being bit by the ‘travel bug,’ which we will explore later. Informant J confessed to having a ‘love affair with Central and South America’ since returning from her exchange year in Costa Rica, a ‘deep affinity for all things Latin.’

*Tolerance* is a mental attribute, the opposite of narrow-mindedness and ignorance. The act of extending one’s social circle to those one ‘would never, ever have met otherwise’ brings tolerance. “Tolerance occurs when your fear of others is mastered and you are ready to launch into adventure. It is oriented towards others, even if it implies working on self” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 110). The same terms are used in Dahl’s description: a broadening of horizons, to ‘shift’ or ‘break free’ from one’s frame of reference to try to penetrate or ‘fuse’ to the horizons of

others. Informant E said, “I’m more experienced and I understand more about people in general and other cultures.” The same feeling was shared by other informants.

Now I see the news about China and I can understand why they do that. They have different values and rules. I can at least try to imagine why things happen in other places, because their culture is different. (Informant D)

*Flexibility* refers to ‘the way individuals respond under the impact of changing circumstances’ and is oriented towards the self. The opposite reaction is to be rigid, or set in your ways (Murphy-Lejeune, *An Experience of Interculturality: Student Travellers Abroad 2002*, 110), or to close off your horizon. Life abroad is a radical social change that requires adapting to newness and questioning one’s taken-for-granted habits. Lacking flexibility means one is not willing to change or release one’s stereotypes, and thus the ‘mental journey is null and void’ (ibid, 111). The opposite was true for my informants, who found that new experiences taught them about life in ways they wouldn’t have experienced at home.

Actually I learned to like a lot of new stuff. Like smashed potatoes (and I’m a really picky eater). Or for example, I’m a city girl. It’s no secret I like the city, but I was out in nowhere and a lot of my friends had farms. So I thought I should see how it works. I went with one of my friends to her farm and we went on the four wheeler and they had a llama, and ...just lots of things I would never do at home. (Informant C)

Openness is the embodiment of all three characteristics, to be “willing to allow some flow of communication between self and the outside so that bridges are established” (ibid.).

Possessing these qualities prior to the exchange is essential to developing and testing them throughout the experience. This ‘broadening of horizons’ is often not noticed until the final stages of the exchange year, or even until one returns home. Informant I summed up what she learned on her exchange by hitting on all three qualities of openness:

I learned that I am highly adaptable, and capable of figuring things out under pressure. I learned that I can fit in anywhere, and learn from anyone I encounter. I learned that there’s always a multitude of perspectives out there, if I look hard enough.

#### **4.3.3 Critical Awareness of Self and Others: Learning Culture as Inter-culture**

*There are these moments when the enemy all of a sudden becomes just like me: When a soldier becomes a son, when a prostitute becomes a mother, when they become we, when those become us, when he becomes me. Moments when all of the ways that we divide ourselves and rank each other and convince ourselves of how different, better, and unlike we are disappear, and we are faced with the fact that first and foremost, we are humans. In this together. –Rob Bell*

The ultimate goal of this research has been to unearth the processes that occur during the sojourn. We have just answered the sub-question by *identifying and describing concrete changes that occur in our identity and culture*. We have examined the processes involved in those changes as well as their outcomes. Now, we have come full circle and can answer the central question of this research: *what happens to our worldview when we travel?* (refer to section 1.3.3 for a review of worldview as cultural identity). The answer is found in the final outcome: a critical awareness of Self and Others.

Murphy-Lejeune describes this outcome as a personal and interpersonal attitude, while Dahl and Svane describe it as the end result of the fusion of horizons. Both of these outcomes are describing the same worldview change that occurred in my informants during their year abroad, and thus, I see them as the answer to my central question. I will use Murphy-Lejeune's description of a 'new interactive space' to describe this change in worldview. She calls it space redefined: from *culture to inter-culture*:

In this interactive space, partners are aware of the natural gap between strangers, but are also aware that intersubjective communication 'in real time' can bring them closer and reduce distance... Learners come to recognize that the symbolic distance between them and others does not correspond to an objective boundary but rather to a *subjective limit to one's perception*. Categorisation becomes less potent as culture learners uncover the personality behind the national mask. Stereotypes and categories are no longer the basis of communication. From that realization, life abroad is experienced as an untried and refreshing meeting place, and culture can be conceived as interculture. (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 116)

This outcome is perhaps the central goal of intercultural communication.

This redefining of space, the worldview shift from cultural to an intercultural, carves out an objective viewpoint in not one but *two* cultures. This is a special vantage point. After all, the process involves breaking social conventions twice: when leaving *and* when coming home. The students were seen as insiders and outsiders in both places; often suspect in the eyes of 'sedentary natives' (ibid., 110), which can lead to conflicts and readjustments when returning home, where this new perspective is not always shared. For while the foreign has become familiar, the opposite has also occurred: the familiar now appears foreign.<sup>31</sup> Suddenly, they are Strangers in their own home. We can recall Informant A's description that, "Everything was so

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<sup>31</sup> Re-entry for Japanese students and expatriates is a special case in point, where the term *kaigai seicho nihojin* has been coined to describe Japanese who have spent some time abroad. "Friction is caused by being perceived as having adopted 'foreign characteristics' which are incompatible with Japanese cultural manifestations." (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 188)

different again...what was normal to me at that point was the American way.” As we saw in the description of re-entry, this shift in perspective often leads to a shift in social groups and changes in relationships.

Worldview transformation can be ‘an exhilarating trip into a new social territory...or a threat to one’s identity’ (ibid.). Edward Hall describes the consequences of opening the door to this new worldview:

Recognition of the acquired side of culture places a heavy burden on each and every one of us. It means relinquishing the special part of ourselves which gives us permission to put other people down. It means extending ourselves to include others in the same envelope of awareness. It means recognizing others as simply different, but not inferior. And most of all, it means being accepting as well as *nonjudgmental*. (E. Hall 1998, 64)

This new worldview opens up the possibility to “recognize each other as human beings” (Nynas 2001, 324, apud Dahl 2008, 12).

#### 4.3.4 *A Word on Grief*

When making the decision to go abroad for an exchange year, the participants agree to a temporary stay. We know this to be the definition of the sojourn. However, knowing from the outset that the year will end does not make ‘D-day’ any easier, and the return home is an inevitable transition-as we know. What is *not* often acknowledged is the sense of loss associated with it. Travel writer Anthony Bordain describes the feelings involved in this transition home on his final morning of a trip to Malaysia:

Things are different now. I can say for sure I’ve had a hell of a time, but what exactly have I gained? How am I changed by what I’ve seen, what I’ve done? I feel strange about leaving...you go away, you learn, you get scarred, marked, changed in the process. And hopefully, when all is said and done, you’re a little bit better for it. I don’t feel I belong here, but I don’t know if I belong back in NY anymore either. Is it possible to feel enriched and hollowed out at the same time? (Travel Channel August 22 2005)

David C. Pollock and Ruth Van Reken’s work with Third Culture Kids has found that a sense of loss is one of the most common conflicts in the life of sojourners, or what they call global nomads. Transition and loss go hand in hand, and it is “essential that we face and deal with the normal grief inherent in leaving a place and people we love” (Pollock and Reken 2001, 199). As the lives and experiences of sojourners are seen by others as exciting and exotic, many of them refuse to admit that it is an issue. Professor of philosophy Jim Gould says that loss

always produces grief, conscious or unconscious, and it will come out one way or another, whether the person intends it to or not (ibid., 207).

What exactly is it they are letting go of? Some losses are more tangible, such as contact with a best friend, community, team, or a favorite food. On the other hand, “much of what they love-and then lose-are intangible parts of their world” (Pollock and Reken 2001, 166). These could be the sights, sounds, and smell of the market or the coast, weather, language, comfort; a new place called home (refer to Hall’s definitions of space in section 2.2.2). We have heard Informant C identified the transition as a time of letting go, and her remarks that: “It was sad to leave everyone, especially because you think, “I’m never going to get this part of my life back.”

Others expressed a feeling of longing, of missing aspects of their host country and family. Informant J said it ‘wasn’t just goodbye... it was a real sadness.’ This does not mean the students weren’t looking forward to going home. “The issue is that transition always involves loss, no matter how good the next phase will be. Loss always engenders grief and the greater you have loved a situation or place or people, the greater the grief” (Sichel 2013). Making sense of this confusion can be a lonely experience. Friends and family need to acknowledge the students are coping with these losses, give them permission to mourn, and provide support along the way.

AFS offers tips for parents welcoming their children home, such as cooking food from their host country, giving them space and time to reflect on their experience, and encouraging them to stay in contact with their friends (something Informant J says is easier for returnees now than it was in 1972). AFS identifies grief as a part of the return, encouraging parents to:

Acknowledge that all AFSers experience some sense of loss. Strange as it may seem to others, returnees often grieve for what they have left behind. They may be missing overseas friends, host family members, a stimulating environment, the feeling of being special, experiencing greater freedom or responsibilities, or special privileges. (Programs 2001)

If returnees are allowed to transition well, the negotiation of identity and culture can be an enriching experience, an exhilarating trip. If the losses are unacknowledged or marginalized, the memories of the experience cannot be fully celebrated and can turn into a source of resentment or anger. Paul Seaman, a former TCK and former president of Global Nomads International, discusses the process of giving dignity to grief:

Like Vietnam veterans, global nomads have been deprived of social validation of their experience. We didn’t get a hero’s welcome. For the most part society—friends, relatives, school officials, parents’ sponsoring agencies—couldn’t appreciate the ‘big deal’ about

what had happened to us. Many aspects were beyond their own experience and, thus, their ability to comprehend” (Pollock and Reken 2001, 318).

Therefore, in the transition home the importance of listening and reminiscing cannot be overstated. It gives the grieving person a chance to be understood, rather than the feeling that they had ‘gone to the moon without anyone ever knowing,’ as Informant H remarked.

This is perhaps another key in the cycle of AFS volunteerism: the outlet for returnees to share their experiences. Going on to volunteer means a chance to give presentations about their year abroad and have a hand in deciding who future participants should be (and once in awhile, they may have a rare encounter with a Master’s student who is interested in hearing their side of the story). Whatever the method, the need is there. Returning sojourners bottling up their experiences do not allow their narratives to be a source of joy and learning, but a lonely memory. Seaman writes, “While we cannot recover what we’ve lost, we can celebrate those aspects of ourselves that we may associate with another time and place. Ultimately, coming to terms with grief means learning to feel at home within ourselves” (Pollock and Reken 2001, 318).

#### **4.4 We Shall Not Cease from Exploration**

The sojourn is filled with ups and downs: the transitions in identity of role playing and group membership, and the adaptations of broadening cultural horizons. The end result in these negotiations of identity and culture are a worldview shift: from cultural to inter-cultural, and the outcomes of autonomy, self-confidence, and openness. These transitions can become a wonderful opportunity for adventure, an opening up of the future, and the globe, as a giant question mark full of potential: “Space no longer conveys an intimidating strangeness, but promises of exciting experiences to come” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 110).

Returned sojourners see that unknown cultures and languages are not intimidating, but challenging. Cultural identity now rests on ‘becoming rather than being,’ a liberation from one’s origins (Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 203). In this way, their identities become “biographical (or historical) experience rather than the fatality of origin, derived from something more like a CV than a birth certificate” (Wollen, 1994:189, apud Murphy-Lejeune 2002a, 204). Informant E said she had shifted her goals to incorporate these new perspectives: “Before, I was pretty sure what I wanted to do. Now, I take everything as it comes. I take one day at a time.” The future is ‘leaky, slippery, elusive’ (ibid., 18), open to the possibility of going away to new horizons.

The happy ending for the sojourner then, is not an ending at all, but a beginning: an expansion of possibilities, a yearning for more. “Everyone says the world is so small, that we’re all alike and there’s no reason to travel anymore,” Informant H confided at the end of our interview. “But at the same time it’s so-excuse me, but it’s so f\*\*\*ing huge.” This realization makes the possibilities for intercultural learning endless. “I want to travel. Now I really want to see Asia, India, China, and Africa...” Informant E told me. Others didn’t have a place in mind, just the goal exploring; of learning. Informant J explained, “It showed me that I am not the person who will stay in one place for a long time.” When I asked him where he would go, he answered, “There’s no ideal place...Just not staying in one place.”

It is then no surprise that all ten of my informants have continued traveling after their experience abroad, saying it has become a ‘huge passion.’ They have been to the UK, Eritrea, Brazil, Switzerland, Russia, Ukraine, Spain, Central and Southern America—they have truly not ceased from exploration. The most valuable lesson they learned is one they share with Hall: the human world is a treasure trove of hidden resources, and the surface of discovery has only been barely scratched (E. Hall 1998, 63). Where they go is not important, but what they learn along the way from the people they encounter- people who can continue to expand their horizons and deepen their circle of understanding. As Informant A told me, “I know that what I want is to be happy and then it doesn’t matter what you do. Being happy is what matters.”

If we return to the example of Bilbo Baggins, we see the lessons are the same. Those that have heard his journey know the process: playing the role of the thief, a shift from that of an outsider to one who belongs as a member of his traveling companions, adapting his cemented, home-body ways and broadening his horizons and frame of reference to incorporate the perspectives of a broader world. And along the way, he acquires the outcomes of autonomy, self-confidence, openness, and the realization that adventure is exhilarating. Author Dorothy Matthews writes:

Bilbo has found the self-knowledge that a willingness to meet challenge is not necessarily incompatible with a love of home. By giving expression to his Tookishness, he has found a new harmony and balance. Thus, at the conclusion of his adventures Bilbo find the greatest prize of all: a knowledge of his own identity. (Matthews 1975, 40)

For Bilbo as well as the sojourner, home is not summed up in a postal address but ‘a certain way of thinking of one’s life space as mobile and changing’ (Murphy-Lejeune 2002,



112). As I so often remind myself, *the journey is my home*. Bordain sums up his experiences in Malaysia with these words:

Travel isn't always pretty. It isn't always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts. It even breaks your heart. But that's ok, the journey changes you. It *should* change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you; hopefully you leave something good behind. (It) is about self-discovery as much as it's about discovering the outside world. (Travel Channel August 22 2005)

### **Conclusion: Travel as a Political Act**

The moment any encounter is deemed difficult, the immediate response is that ‘it is not for everyone.’ This judgment should not be made of international exchange experiences, or of travel abroad-at any age. While transforming one’s worldview, or ‘having our cultural furniture rearranged,’ is not an ‘easy’ task to undertake, its outcomes are essential. We face intercultural encounters in our multicultural societies every day. How we respond to them is a matter of choice.

American author and travel writer Rick Steves has reached a similar conclusion after years of traveling as a guide book author: travel opens eyes and minds to other walks of life-culturally, religiously, and relationally. It shows us that people are real, not ‘paper cutouts that those who do not know them make them out to be’ (E. Hall 1998, 65). It is no surprise that many of the great minds in the field of intercultural communication had similar travel experiences in their youths, which led them to explore them further. “Suddenly, the palette with which we paint the story of our lives has more colors” (Steves 2010, 4).

Following 9/11, Steves began giving a lecture called ‘Travel as a Political Act,’ which he has now developed into a book. In it, he says that intercultural encounters are any trip’s greatest souvenir. “When we return home, we can put what we’ve learned—our newly acquired broader perspective—to work. And when we do that, we make travel a political act” (Steves 2010, iv.) Central to this broader perspective is a critical or objective view of one’s own culture:

I find that you can leave our country and look back at it and see it in a higher contrast and see things that we should address... In this Global Age, the world's problems are our problems. Lessons learned from our travels can better equip us to address and help resolve the challenges facing our world. We travelers are both America's ambassadors to the world...and the world's ambassadors to America. (Steves 2010)

We have seen that these outcomes are international, part of the narrative polyphony of the sojourn experience. What differs is how the outcomes are applied after the sojourn ends. What Steves suggests is that seeing travel as a political act enables us to “challenge our society to do better, and it also shows us how much we have to be grateful for, to take responsibility for, and to protect” (Steves 2010, 196). The challenge is to do something with your broadened perspective when you get home: share lessons, expect more from your friends, be an advocate for those who have no voice, get involved in causes you care about, encourage others to travel or

host an exchange student. Travel in your own country, unearth its diversity and discover how multicultural your own society is (ibid., 196-205).

My informants (and many other returnees from many other organizations) are incorporating these lessons into the fields of their own interest: IT, medicine, science, philosophy, marketing, economics, social work, law, and beyond. Many of those I interviewed chose to enter studies based on the lessons they learned abroad.

I am currently working towards masters degrees in social work and global public health. I hope to work in community mental health abroad and domestically with immigrants and refugees providing culturally relevant mental health support. Abroad I learned how important culturally competency is, and I want to bring those skills to the field of mental health. (Informant I)

Those who have finished their studies are applying the lessons they learned abroad to work and family life, years (and even decades) later- even passing them on to their children:

I have represented many Latinos in my law practice, and I just finished working on a documentary about our horrific deportation policies that leave thousands of undocumented workers who have lived for years in the United States and are dumped in the sewers of Mexico with no ID, money, family or contacts... Two years ago my daughter, who is fourteen, husband and I went to the highlands of rural Nicaragua to build a school. It allowed my daughter to really live and work alongside children her age whose circumstances in life were vastly different than her own ... I really wanted to have this experience in Central America, as I had such a huge love and respect for the Costa Ricans I had known during my AFS experience almost forty years before! (Informant J)

I was asked recently about the conclusions of my research: Did I think exchange was a 'good' experience? The layers of response are as multi-faceted and complex as our identities. How could I respond? After all, the condition of ethnographic research is that it is inconclusive; intrinsically incomplete. "And, worse than that," writes Geertz, "the more deeply it goes the less complete it is" (Geertz 1973, 29). So in the end, I use his words to summarize: "There are no conclusions to be reported; there is merely a discussion to be sustained" (ibid.).

More research is necessary in the field of the sojourn, the role of the stranger and the outcomes of travel and worldview transformation. More attention should be paid to the processes involved in re-entry. These are only a small selection of the voices that are out there to be heard. If we stop and listen, what we will hear is not that the experience of the sojourner is 'good' or 'bad' but that they have seen something different and they have been changed by it. While that is not always comfortable, it is always invigorating.

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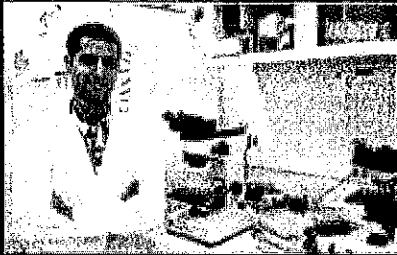
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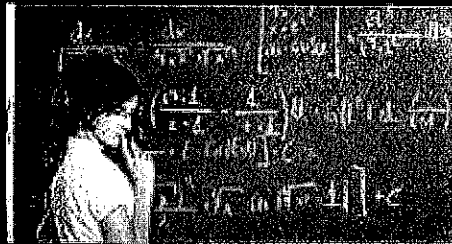
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Appendix A: What People Think I Do/What I Really Do (see page 7)

# SCIENCE STUDENT



How my friends see me



How my family sees me



How I see myself



How society sees me

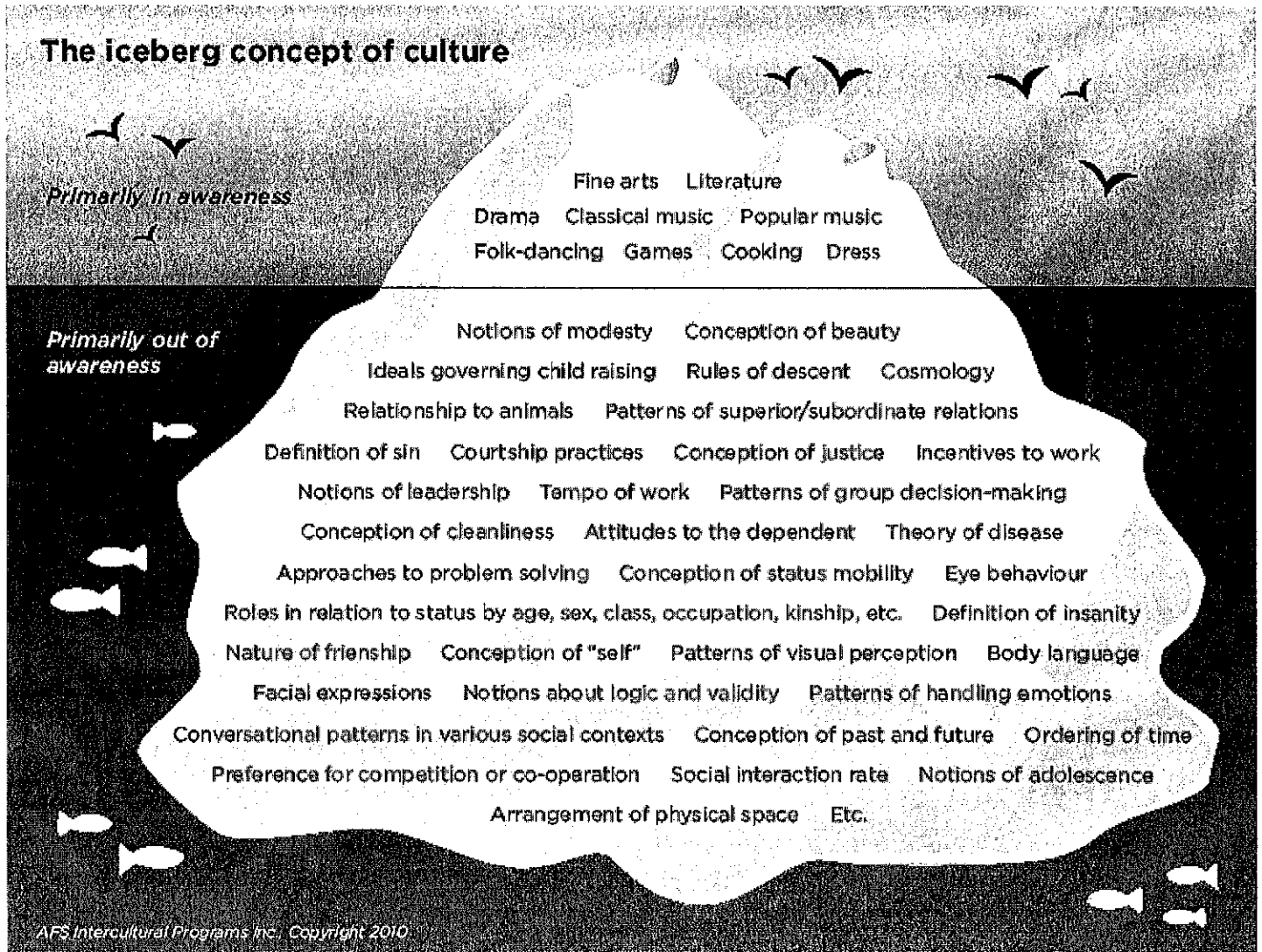


How religious people see me



How it really is

## Appendix B: The Iceberg Concept of Culture (see page 9)





## Appendix C: Interview Guide (see page 15)

### Interview Guide

#### *Pre-departure, motivations*

- Why did you initially decide to participate in this exchange?
- How long did you stay and where did you go? How did you choose the country?
- What were your initial expectations of the country and culture?

#### *Arrival, adjustment*

- What were your first impressions of your host family?
- Tell me about some new experiences you had with your host family (routine, food, relationships).
- Tell me about some of the people you met at your school.
- What kind of classes did you attend and were they different from your home country (level, difficulty, curriculum)?
- Did you find it easy to meet people and make friends?
- Did you struggle with the language?
- At any point, did you find yourself missing home? Did you ever consider giving up and going back?

#### *Post-return, assessment*

- What was the best experience of the whole exchange?
- What was the worst?
- Do you consider the whole experience positive? Would you repeat it if you had the chance?
- What did you learn about yourself? Your home country? Your family?
- Do you find any relationships changed now that you're home (friends, family)?

#### *Outcomes*

- Would you like to continue traveling?
- What are/were your goals upon completing your education? Why?
- Did they change after your exchange?
- Would you recommend the experience to others?

## Appendix D: Detailed List of Informants (see pages 15 and 38)

### List of Informants

**Informant A:** 20- year-old Norwegian male, interviewed via Skype on 18.10.12. Length of interview: 49:19. Works for AFS Oslo, went on exchange to the US (Pennsylvania) in 2009-10 at the age of 17.

**Informant B:** 22-year-old Slovenian female, interviewed via Skype on 08.11.12. Length of interview: 1:07:42. Volunteers for AFS Ljubljana, went on exchange to Sicily in 2009-10 at the age of 19.

**Informant C:** 20 year old Norwegian female, interviewed in a café in Stavanger on 12.11.12. Length of interview: 1:27:21. Head of Stavanger AFS chapter, went on exchange to the US (Illinois) in 2009-10 at the age of 17.

**Informant D:** 20 year old Norwegian male, interviewed in a café in Stavanger on 19.11.12. Length of interview: approximately 45-60 minutes (memory on the phone filled up and stopped the recording after 11 minutes). Part of Stavanger AFS chapter, went on exchange to Quebec in 2009-10 at the age of 17.

**Informant E:** 19 year old Norwegian female, interviewed in a café in Stavanger on 19.11.12. Length of interview: 45 minutes. Part of Stavanger AFS chapter, went on exchange to the Dominican Republic in 2009-10 at the age of 16-17.

**Informant F:** 19 year old Norwegian male, interviewed in a café in Stavanger on 21.11.12. Length of interview: 55:52. Member of Stavanger AFS chapter, went on exchange to Kansas City, Missouri, USA in 2010-11 at the age of 17.

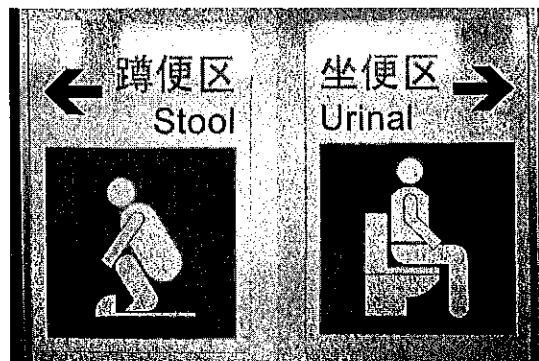
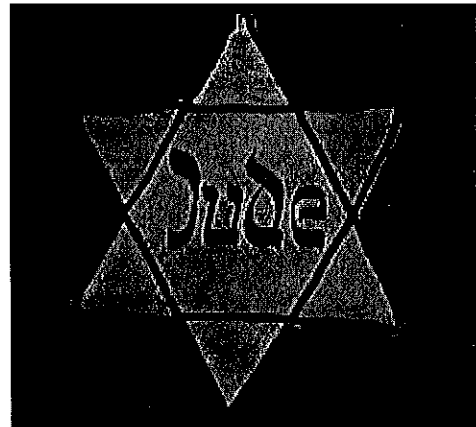
**Informant G:** 22 year old Czech male, interviewed via Skype on 21.02.13. Length of interview: 47:03. Leader of Prague AFS chapter, went on exchange to Germany in 2006-07 at the age of 17.

**Informant H:** 23 year old Norwegian female, interviewed in a café in Stavanger on 28.02.13. Length of interview: 1:26. Went on exchange to Montreal, Quebec in 2009-10 at the age of 17/18.

**Informant I:** 28 year old American female, interviewed via email. Went on exchange to the Czech Republic in 2002-2003 at the age of 17.

**Informant J:** 57 year old American female, interviewed via email. Went on exchange to Costa Rica in 1972-3 at the age of 16.

Appendix E: Semiotics and Social Roles (see page 25)



**Appendix F: Riley's Architecture of Identity (see page 26)**

Other-directed communicative behavior/Other's perception of the person



ETHOS

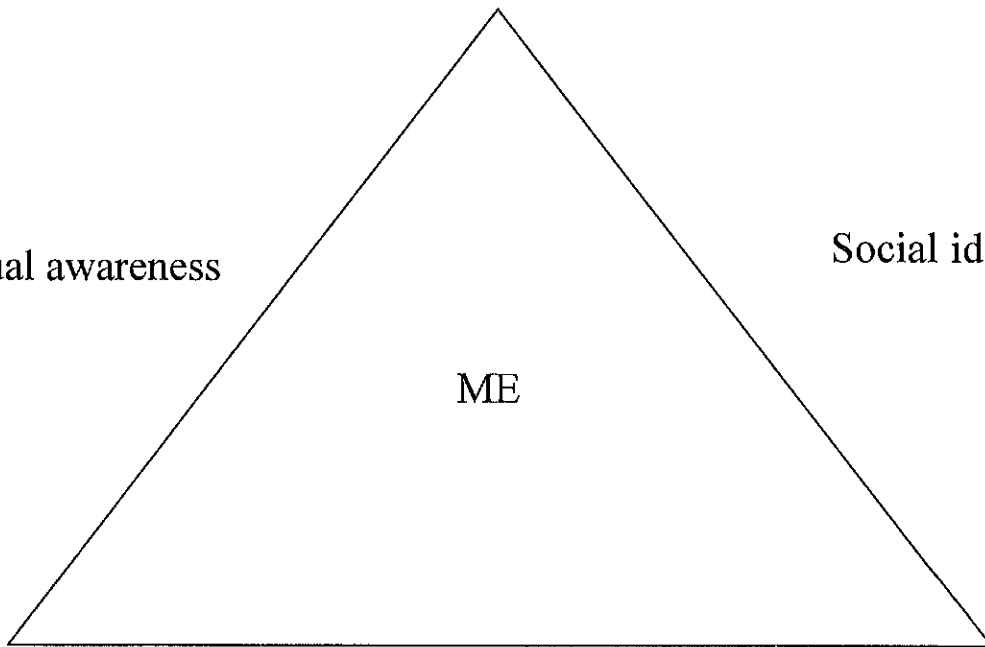
Individual awareness

Social identity

ME

SELF

PERSON



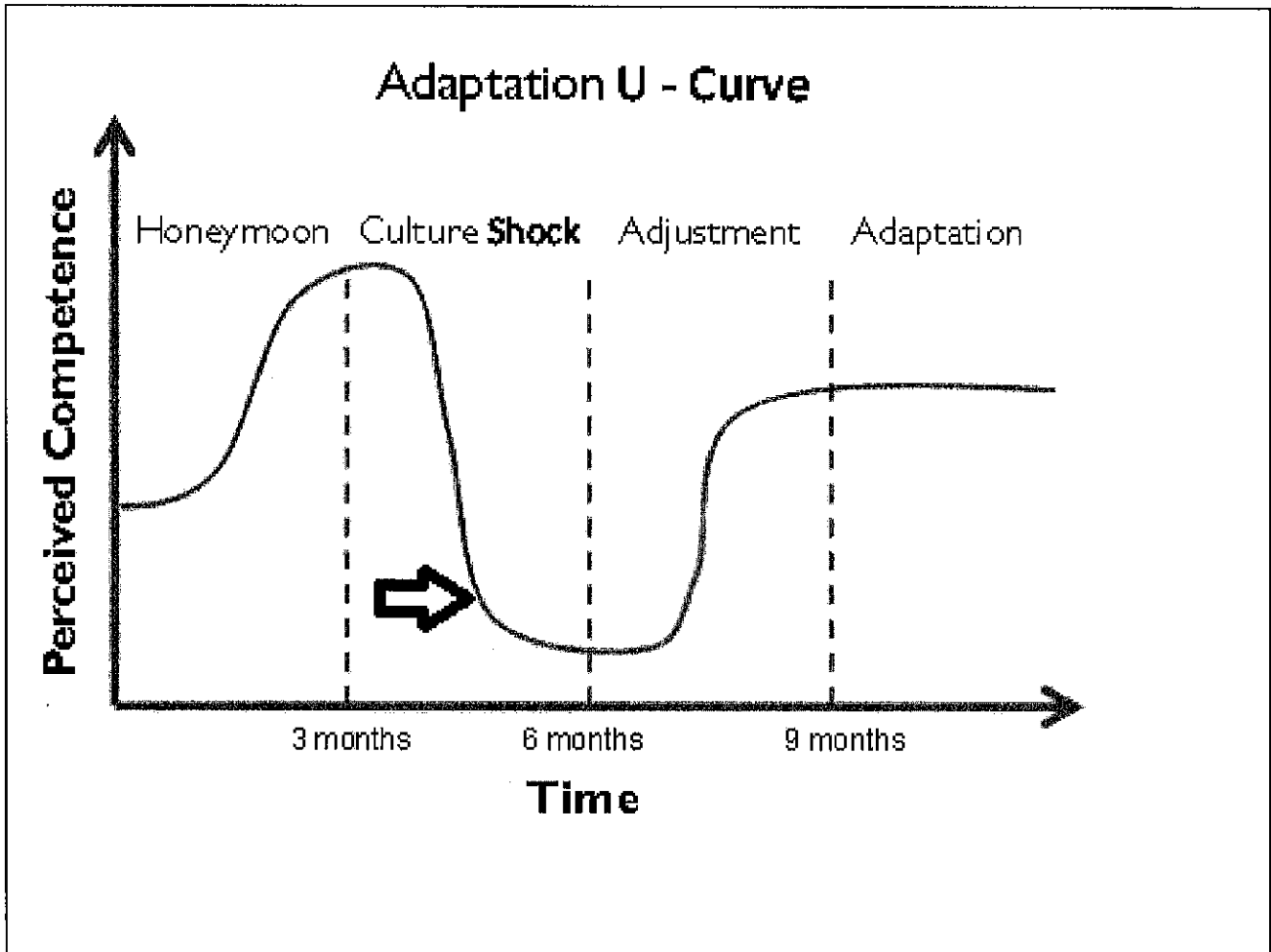
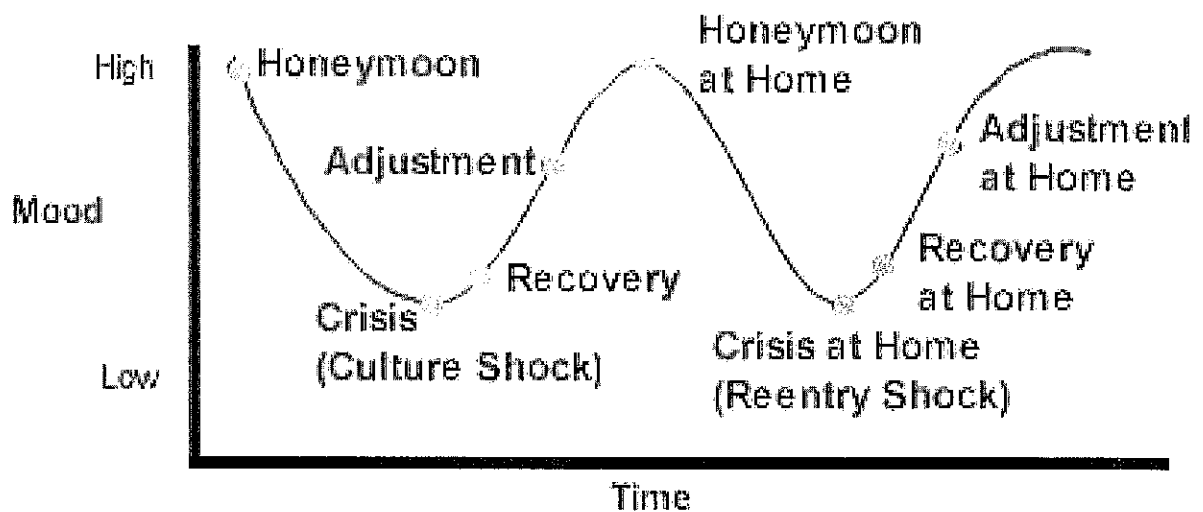
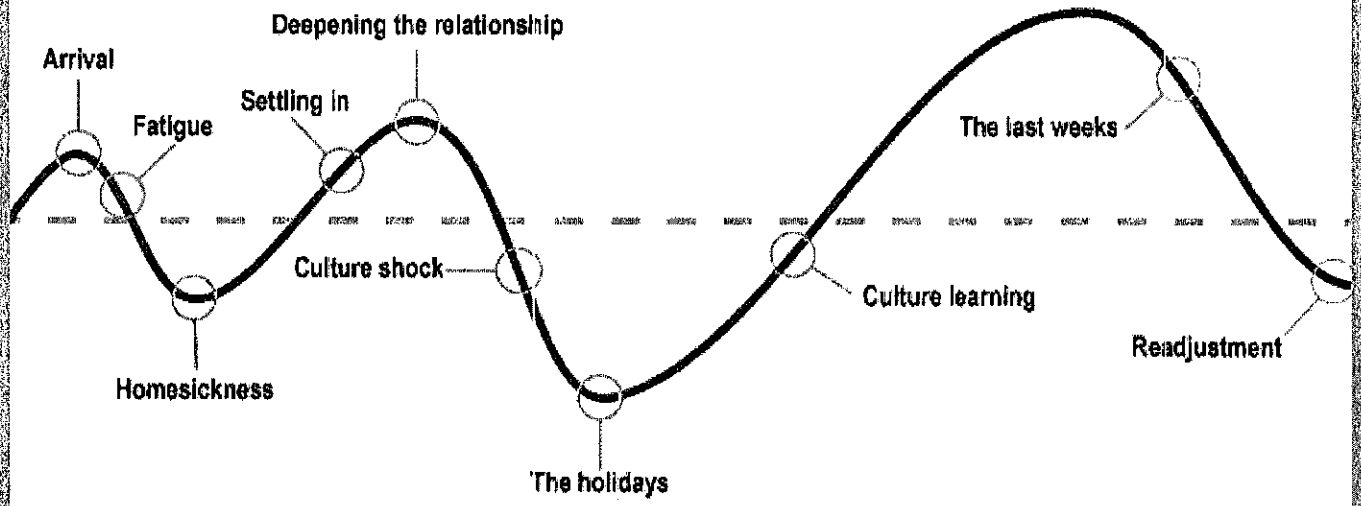


Figure 2. The W-Curve of Intercultural Sojourning



Based on Oberg (1960) and Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963)

# The Cultural Adjustment Cycle



Adjustment curve and stages of the experience as described in The Exchange Student Survival Kit (B. Hansel, Intercultural Press 2007)