COMMUNICATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF SOJOURNER READJUSTMENT:  AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Sojourners, people who live and work overseas and then return home, face challenges. One challenge is finding someone to listen to their stories about living overseas and their readjustment. Readjustment literature explores the difficulties of readjustment, and what facilitates the process. This study focused on the challenges of talking about international and readjustment experiences after returning home. This thematic analysis was focused on semi-structured interviews with 24 returned sojourners who met specific criteria, including living overseas for a minimum of two years, and spending their formative years in the U.S.. Respondents identified potential functions of sharing including preserving memories, building interpersonal connections, managing emotions, and clarifying new understandings. Their responses demonstrate that these functions contribute to a satisfactory repatriation experience.

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CHAPTER I

RATIONALE

For centuries, international commerce, colonization, and exploration have led people to live and work in foreign cultures. Some of those people remained abroad and ended their lives on foreign soil. Others returned home after a period of time. Members of the first group are called expatriates. Members of the second group are called sojourners.

During the last 20 years, the estimated number of U.S. citizens living overseas has increased from three million (Smith, 1991) to between four and seven million (Soriano, 2008). Different types of people live overseas; they are government employees, aid workers, foreign correspondents, and business professionals, among others.

Many companies use overseas assignments to provide managerial and technical support to their international operations (Briody & Baba, 1991). The 13th annual Global Relocation Trends Survey reported that 95 percent of responding multinational corporations planned to either stay at the same level as 2007 or increase the number of employees overseas (Minton-Eversole, 2008). Ewers (2006) reported that up to 400,000 employees relocate overseas each year. Studies of this population are of increasing importance due to the growing spread and influence of international business and businesses. Harris and Moran (1999) reported that "in 1994 there were 37,000 transnational corporations with 207,000 affiliates that controlled one third of all private sector assets, and had worldwide sales of U.S. $5.5 trillion" (pp. 19-20). In 2005, U.S.-based multi-national companies (MNCs) and U.S. parent companies with international subsidiaries increased their value by $3.2 billion and $2.3 billion, respectively (in U.S. dollars) (Mataloni, 2007).

Companies sometimes invest more than one million dollars in each employee they send

overseas (Black, 1992; Frazee, 1997; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun & Lepak, 2005). The totals

represent averages of relocation costs, training, school fees, housing overseas, and other

expenses incurred by the company. Sojourners representing businesses internationally are the

human link in international trade. Thus, their challenges and problems can affect a company's

productivity and profit margin (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). This is a concern, as the

failure rate of these human investments is between 15 and 75 percent, depending on the company

(Borstorff, Harris, Field, & Giles, 1997). That is why successful sojourners are relatively rare.

From 20 to 25 percent of returned, or repatriated, managers end up leaving their company in the

first year (Tyler, 2006). Studies further reported that 50 percent of repatriated managers leave

their home company within the first three years after their return, which is twice the rate of

departure for managers without international experience (Baruch, Steele, & Quantrill, 2002;

Frazee, 1997; Stroh, 1995). In this way, companies lose a large investment and a rich source of

corporate knowledge and experience (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Borstorff et al., 1997). As it has

been a challenge for researchers to identify and gain access to those who have left a company,

there is little direct evidence concerning why managers with international experience frequently

leave a company. Speculation and anecdotal accounts attribute this primarily to dissatisfaction

or frustration with the company in relation to the company's acknowledgment and utilization of

the returnee's international experience. Forster (1994) conducted a survey that verified these

anecdotal accounts.

Returned sojourners can use their experiences for the benefit of the organization while on

home assignment; they can also transfer their knowledge to subsequent assignments overseas

(Aycan, 1997). In one study, only five percent of sojourners who left their home company after

their return were considered poor performers by the companies' human resource departments (Stroh, 1995). Black (1991) noted that when many of the best workers leave the firm after repatriation, other, upwardly mobile employees conclude that a foreign assignment is death to their careers and turn down such assignments. This cascading effect costs companies valuable assets and discourages other employees from developing necessary international or intercultural skills.

Loss of these expatriate resources can lead to several problems for a business: more international human resource management problems, potential issues with carrying out global strategic initiatives, suboptimal productivity in overseas operations, and lost international opportunities, to name a few (Kopp, 1994; Takeuchi et al., 2005). Caligiuri and Stroh (1995) determined that ethnocentric companies, or those without global strategies, were less successful economically than those companies that had some type of strategy for effective international management. Their index of multinational success was based on return on equity, return on capital, sales growth, and profit margin as it related to international human resource management practices. The presence of employees with international work experience is becoming a vital component for business success (Aycan, 1997; Kopp, 1994; Stroh, 1995; Takeuchi et al, 2005).

In 1960, Oberg identified a process of 'culture shock' which occurred when a person settled in a foreign culture. In 1962, Gullahorn and Gullahorn determined that a similar process occurs when people return to their home culture. This additional challenge is called 'reverse culture shock,' or 'reentry shock' (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1962; Martin, 1986). Many studies support the argument that reentry shock is more severe than traditional culture shock (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Cox, 2004; Sussman, 1986).

Human resource professionals in multinational corporations are often unaware of the problems with reverse culture shock (Haslberger & Stroh, 1991). They are ignorant of the nature and extent of issues affecting the returning executive or specialist. As one training expert noted:

Most American companies don't realize what expats go through. When you come back, you're lucky if you have a position. They don't appreciate the depth of knowledge that people gain by living overseas, running their own show. They don't capitalize on those experiences (Stafford, 2005, D15).

Reentry can be defined as "the readapting of the individual to the home environment after an extended stay in another culture" (Martin, 1986, p. 1). While some studies of reentry found that as few as 38 percent of the respondents expressed problems with reentry shock, the preponderance of studies reported up to 100 percent of respondents indicating that they had experienced reentry shock (Black, 1991, 1994; Black & Gregerson, 1991; Sussman, 1991; Wilson, 1993). Sussman (1986) hypothesized that reentry stress and shock is more severe than initial entry shock. Research has shown that sojourners' adjustment to home is more difficult than their initial adjustment to the foreign environment (Adler, 1987; Black, 1991; Cox, 2004; Napier & Peterson, 1991.

Stafford (2005) pointed out that the returnees themselves are often caught off-guard by how difficult it is to readjust to home. They return to jobs that are frequently narrower in focus and to friends who don't understand how they have changed. Adler (1987) discovered that employees can suffer from reentry shock regardless of where they were overseas or what type of assignment they had. Several researchers (i.e., Martin, 1986; Uehara, 1986) posited that since sojourners had to learn new socialization skills to cope with the foreign environment, they would often find themselves out of phase with their home culture. Several key concepts have been seen

to differentiate between adjustment and readjustment. These concepts include: (a) reentry problems are often unexpected; (b) conditions at home have changed; (c) the sojourner has changed; (d) some of the changes are below the level of awareness; and (e) family, friends and colleagues expect an unchanged sojourner (Asuncion-Landé, 1980; Cox, 2004; Martin, 1986; Onwumechili, Nwosu, Jackson, II, & James-Hughes, 2003).

Particularly in the business literature, there is a concern about the difference between the number of studies exploring initial cultural adjustment, or the process of adapting to a foreign culture, and the number of studies exploring reentry adjustment, or the process of readapting to one's native culture (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Lineham & Scullion, 2002; Sussman, 2000, 2001). During the last two decades, writers have bemoaned the greater focus on research into expatriate experiences than into those of repatriates (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Lineham & Scullion, 2002). Lineham and Scullion (2002) reported that there continues to be little empirical research to support the concerns over repatriation issues and that most of the studies of these issues have focused on problems as identified by human resource executives. The research is largely anecdotal or provides descriptive information based on only a few cases (Briody & Baba, 1991). Studies have stayed at the descriptive level because of the complexities of the expatriate/repatriate issues (Aycan & Kanungo, 1997).

Concerns also have been expressed about a lack of theoretical frameworks, explanations for individual variability, and standardized methods of research (Aycan & Kanungo, 1997; Briody & Baba, 1991; Cox, 2004; Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002; Sussman, 2000, 2001). Sussman (2000, 2001) continued the critique by reemphasizing that most studies are descriptive and atheoretical. She pointed out that these studies also neglect the issue of why it is harder to return home than it is to adjust to life in a foreign country. There is a need to start looking beyond what

happens during repatriation to why these challenges occur. To repeat Sussman's (2000) question, "Why is coming home so difficult" (p. 362)?

The studies that have examined reentry have covered a diverse population including teens and high school students, college students, business employees, missionaries, re-migrants, and returned exiles (Sussman, 2001). Similar to other types of academic research, while all these groups have had some attention, student returnees have been studied more extensively (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). There is a need for more research that focuses both on theory building and on other sojourner populations.

To summarize, reentry presents a significant challenge for the returned sojourners. It is frequently filled with surprises. Many companies do little or nothing to help these repatriates readjust to life in the United States (Stafford, 2005). As Tyler (2006) points out, corporations recognize the need to help a sojourner manage the move onto foreign soil but fail to recognize the challenges inherent in the international move back home. These challenges may lead to dissatisfaction, and often disengagement, by the returned sojourner.

Martin (1986) was the first to frame reentry as a communication process. She expressed the need, echoed by several others (see Lineham & Scullion, 2002, and Sussman, 2001, for example), for more empirical research to confirm the speculations drawn from anecdotal reports. When addressing the reentry environment, Martin (1986) wrote:

> When returning home, the sojourner reenters the social environment of friends and family with a potentially changed 'meaning structure' and newly internalized rules of interaction. The way in which the returnee understands and interprets these changes constitutes reentry from a communication viewpoint. The sojourner may encounter new symbols and rules or, more problematic, old symbols and rules with new meanings (i.e.,

sojourners returning from third world locations may interpret symbols of affluence differently).  These changed internalized meanings and rules may result in confusion and difficulty in [the returning] sojourner's interaction with friends and family (p. 4).

Oguri and Gudykunst (2002) posited that communication is a means to facilitate socio-cultural adjustment.  One vital social skill for sojourners is effective communication within the cultural context.  Martin (1986) stressed that the way in which returnees understand and interpret their new internalized rules of interaction constitutes reentry from a communication perspective.  Those who adjusted overseas need to make a further communication adjustment upon return because they adjusted their communication style to match the host culture.  Werkman (1986) pointed out that many communication experiences, including those overseas, are nonverbal.  It is difficult to translate unarticulated experiences into words, and thus sometimes these present an added difficulty in pinpointing the basis of discomfort upon returning home.  Chai (2001) pointed out, "Since the presence of an idea within an individual's identity frame is determined by the communicative actions of others, communication is important for reasons beyond the information it may provide" (p. 92).

Returned sojourners express the difficulties of talking about their experiences as one of the significant challenges upon their return (Kidd, 2006).  Humans are social creatures who create a sense of self and of the world around them through the act of communication (Mead, 1934).  It is in the interaction that meaning occurs, and those meanings can never be completely shared under the best of circumstances.  When sojourners return to their home country, their immediate frame of reference reflects recent, unique interactions from a context that was not shared by the other(s) in the conversation; a context that was truly foreign.  Some returned sojourners have expressed these concerns:

Delia: "Yeah, we did a little bit [face problems relating to people back home]. I mean, you could talk about things and places and people just looked at you like...

David: "…yeah, that was your life. That's all you knew. And you talked with people here, and they don't care. I mean, they can't relate. . . ." (Kidd, 2005, p. 15)

Studies exist that connect communication environment and practices with cultural adjustment overseas (i e., Kim, 2001). Other studies have examined sojourners' communication behaviors prior to return and how they influenced readjustment (Cox, 2004). However, few studies have delved deeply into the influence of the act of communication itself on the readjustment process. Most of those studies are anecdotal, or based on a few questions embedded in a much larger questionnaire. This study was designed to begin to fill in some of those gaps. As an exploratory study, it will help discover topics of communication, the range of communication encounters, and the perceived effect of these encounters on reentry adjustment. This research begins to form the foundation for developing and exploring theories related to communication and sojourner readjustment.

## Summary

Forty-seven years after Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962) first presented the concept of reentry shock and reentry adjustment, the process of reentry continues to be a challenge for returned sojourners, international businesses, and human resource departments. Several atheoretical, descriptive studies of reentry exist, but studies that contribute to theory development are relatively few. This research is designed to help expand that body of literature. Additionally, it will address the need to move away from studies focused predominantly on the concerns of HR professionals, or that use college students as a sample. Instead, it will maintain a focus on the experiences of returned sojourners who are professional business-people and their partners. In

the respondents' answers to open-ended questions, accounts of the sojourners' experiences will be used to identify categories for future studies and theoretical development. Analysis of their responses provides the opportunity to see how communication, specifically, talking about one's experiences, affects the readjustment process.

The following chapters highlight relevant literature, describe methodology, summarize the results of the study, and connect those results to theory and practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE


Ex-pa-tri-ate (vt) 3. To withdraw (oneself) from residence in one's
native country (Barnhart, 1969, p. 422).

In 2000, U.S. census takers reported 576,367 citizens living overseas (USGAO, 2004).
However, this number does not represent the actual number of U.S. Americans living on foreign
soil because the 2000 census included only individuals associated with federally affiliated
groups. In 2008, the number was estimated to be between four million and seven million
(Soriano, 2008), including professional expatriates, non-governmental-organization employees,
etc. The numbers are hard to tie down, but the number of expatriate Americans living abroad is
growing. Many of these expatriates are on temporary or short-term assignments and will
eventually return to the United States.

So-journ (vi) 1. To dwell for a time in a place; make a temporary stay
(Barnhart, 1969, p. 1148).

Those who return from living and working overseas are often called sojourners; at other
times, they are called repatriates. Beyond the varying estimates of the number of U.S. citizens
living overseas, the number who return to the U.S. from foreign assignments each year is
unknown. Types of sojourners vary. Some are governmental employees, such as consular and
military personnel. Some are aid workers, such as those who represent missionary and non-
governmental organizations. Some are familiar faces, primarily reporters on foreign
assignments. Finally, some are businesspeople who represent the interests of international and
multinational businesses. While some companies are shortening their overseas assignments to

less than a year, traditionally the assignments have lasted up to nine years or more (Ewers, 2006).

This chapter explores the challenges sojourners face upon their return to the U.S. In addition, it reviews existing research, with a focus on businesspeople in particular, and highlights gaps. Finally, it reviews literature that supports reasons for studying communication in conjunction with readjustment. The first section will deal with adjustment and readjustment.

Cultural Adjustment

Cultural adjustment can be defined as a "mental-emotional state of comfort, satisfaction, and positive attitude" (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991, p. 164). Cox (2004) wrote, "Cultural adjustment was initially conceptualized as coping with the stress of life changes which people experience when they enter a new culture" (p. 203). In 1960, Oberg described a process known as culture shock, or the psychological adjustment to an unfamiliar culture. His U-Curve hypothesis stated that when people enter another culture, they often experience an emotional shock; this shock prompts them to work through cultural adjustment in stages. These stages begin with an initial 'honeymoon' phase where sojourners are traditionally fascinated with the foreign culture. Then something occurs which is recognizably foreign in a way that 'shocks' the expatriates. The expatriates then struggle to cope with the new experience, trying to make sense of it and fit it into how they understand the world. This is the bottom of the curve, or the low point of adjustment. As the expatriates learn to cope with the strangeness and 'adjust' to it, they climb out of the valley and then regain their equilibrium. While initial research positioned this process as primarily linear, in practice it is often cyclical in nature. Kim (2001) likened the experience to a spiral, with new 'shocks' sparking new adjustment cycles which gradually

become less severe until the resident foreigner reaches a type of balanced, comfortable point of adjustment to the host culture.

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962) extended the U-Curve and formulated the W-Curve hypothesis. They discovered that there is another shock experienced after returning home. They believed that since sojourners had to learn new socialization skills to cope with the foreign environment, they would often find themselves out of phase with their home culture. Thus, culture shock that is experienced while adjusting to a foreign culture is mirrored by re-entry shock experienced by the returning sojourner.

Asuncion-Landé (1980) summarized the changes as "becoming a stranger in one's own culture," (p. 209) and argued that many problems of reentry could be controlled through proper preparation. Increased understanding about the difficulties of adjustment and readjustment has sparked research and training programs across the globe. However, the vast majority of the research has involved adjustment to the foreign culture rather than readjustment back home (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Lineham & Scullion, 2002).

*Reentry*

Reentry occurs when sojourners return to their home cultures. After their return, they have to readjust to what were once their native norms (Martin, 1986). As stated in the last chapter, the majority of returned sojourners studied have reported that readjustment was more challenging than their initial cultural adjustment while overseas (Black, 1991/1994; Black & Gregerson, 1991; Sussman, 2000; Wilson, 1993).

Stafford (2005) pointed out that the returnees themselves are often surprised by the degree of difficulty faced during reentry. They have changed. Their home country has changed, or possibly their view of their home country has changed. Life is not how they pictured it would

be after their return (Asuncion-Landé, 1980; Cox, 2004; Martin, 1986; Onwumechili, Nwosu, Jackson, II, & James-Hughes, 2003).

Research on U.S. and Japanese students and business people suggested that similar changes may lead to repatriates experiencing these difficulties, which are: (a) change in financial status; (b) structural difficulties associated with reentry (logistics of moving, taxation rules, changing children's schools, etc.); (c) objective changes in the home environment; (d) changes in the individual sojourner; and (e) the influence of home culture characteristics such as degree of tolerance for divergent behavior (strength of cultural homogeneity) (Sussman, 1986).

*Reentry Adjustment*

Viewpoints concerning the process of cultural readjustment vary. Sussman (2000) defined three basic conceptualizations concerning the reentry experience and reverse culture shock, or reentry adjustment. The first is what she terms 'reductionist.' This focus positions readjustment to the home culture as simply another type of adjustment to a stressful environment. Researchers in the second group recognize that cultural transitions are different from domestic transitions, but they place reentry concerns on a continuum within the overall cultural adjustment process. That means that any skills acquired that enhance the initial adjustment will also ease reentry adjustment. They assume that changes that occur in the native environment during the overseas assignment are sufficient to trigger a reaction similar to that experienced in the foreign environment.

As noted, authors in the second group place cultural adjustment along a continuum. They see reacculturation as similar to entering a culture for the first time, similar to the process experienced abroad (Asuncion-Landé, 1980; Gama & Pederson, 1977). Some returnees state that they have to use the same mental toughness developed overseas to find solutions within

themselves for the problems encountered back home (Stafford, 2005). Many authors also stress that adjustment is a positive, learning, and growth process, and that adjustment and readjustment are linked stages (Adler, 1987; Kim, 2001; Takeuchi, Imahori, & Matsumoto, 2001).

Within this literature, returnees who were successful with overseas adjustment are expected, theoretically, to have a more difficult readjustment after their return. However, Adler (1987) refuted this concept. In fact, his research indicated that successful sojourners were more effective and satisfied and were in a better mood at reentry than those who adapted poorly overseas. However, this does not explain the statistics concerning those who felt reentry was the more challenging aspect of the process. Other authors have tried to address this concern by separating cultural adjustment from reentry adjustment (Black, 1994; Black & Gregerson, 1991; Gregerson & Black, 1996; Gregerson & Stroh, 1997; Suutari & Välimaa ( 2002).

The third group Sussman (2000) delineated positions reentry as a unique form of initial cultural adjustment. The latter conceptualization of reentry as a unique phenomenon and reentry as part of the cultural adjustment continuum drive the majority of reacculturation literature. Reacculturation is conceptualized as equivalent to reentry, and it is a common term used for reentry research reported in business journals (i.e., Black & Gregerson, 1991).

Black and Gregerson (1991) are members of this group that positions reentry as a process unique from original cultural adjustment. They ground their studies in control theory and uncertainty reduction theory and examine anticipatory and in-country adjustment processes. Black and Gregerson's research focuses on what might be termed pre-return factors, comparing anticipation and expectation to the events after a return. Their work has sparked a series of studies that have greatly influenced the business repatriation literature.

As is typical of these types of studies, Black and Gregerson (1991) administered questionnaires to employees and their spouses who had been overseas under the auspices of four different U.S. multi-national corporations (MNCs). Their study examined time overseas (both on the latest assignment and cumulative time from multiple tours), time back home, role discretion, role clarity, social status and housing, among other things. All of these factors were found to relate to reentry adjustment, but no individual factor was found to be more influential than the others. This is one of several studies that illustrate the complexity of the reentry process. Black and Gregerson agree with those who posit that it is possible that the same factors that facilitate expatriate adjustment may also inhibit repatriate adjustment. They concluded that more attention needs to be paid to these concerns and that effective repatriation training could mitigate reentry difficulties.

This initial research inspired a series of studies based on several interrelated factors that reflect the complexity of the repatriation process. Four basic categories of influencing factors were examined: (a) individual factors, (b) job factors, (c) organizational factors, and (d) non-work factors (Black, 1994; Black & Gregerson, 1991 ; Gregerson & Black, 1996; Gregerson & Stroh, 1997; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). Individual factors included age, time overseas (recent and cumulative), and time since return home. Job factors included role clarity, role discretion (job flexibility), and role conflict. Organizational factors included both the clarity of the repatriation process and repatriation training (which was consistently limited or absent). Finally, the non-work factors included cultural novelty (the difference between host and home cultures), social status, and housing conditions. The influence of these factors was examined using a scale that measured psychological adjustment. The studies indicated that certain aspects of the model and questionnaire they developed are applicable across cultures, but not all are.

Methodologically, most of the studies distributed questionnaires, and they continued to be descriptive in enumerating their applications. For example, Black (1992) reviewed 174 questionnaires, and determined that: (a) managers with accurate job and general expectations adjust better than those who do not have accurate expectations; and (b) firms should choose to offer career and relocation counseling for repatriates.

Black and Gregerson's (1991) research was grounded in control theory and uncertainty reduction theory. They used these theories to see how sojourner adjustment related to the meeting of certain professional expectations. Other studies have addressed perceived gaps in Black and Gregerson's research. Napier and Peterson (1991) based their research on the concept of a three-stage systems model addressing pre-departure training, expatriate experiences, and reentry adjustment. Again, respondents stated that reentry was somewhat more difficult than initial adjustment. The majority of the respondents were male, which is typical of business sojourner studies. In an attempt to address both the dearth of studies on women and on European expatriates, Lineham and Scullion (2002) conducted two phases of interviews with 38 women managers who had experienced repatriation. Instead of questionnaires, they utilized two sets of interviews, one concerning the international career move, followed two years later by another interview focused on the repatriation process. Their study returned to a descriptive focus based on empirical methodology but managed to avoid the traditional dependency on more formal questionnaires. The results reemphasized the challenges of reentry and the importance of a trailing spouse in the process. This study also reemphasized a correlation between expectations and actual experiences as subjects influenced reentry challenges.

Neither those researchers who position reentry adjustment as a continuation of general adjustment nor those who posit reentry adjustment as a unique phenomenon can claim to have

proven their views to the exclusion of all others. One explanation for this could be the difference in the foci of the studies. Researchers positing that cultural readjustment is a continuation of the general adjustment process focus primarily on the characteristics and coping skills of the sojourners themselves. The studies framing reentry as a unique phenomenon center on more systemic issues. While both groups delve into basic reasons for readjustment challenges, there are questions that are not being addressed. The following section explores gaps in the reentry literature in general, and with business repatriation research in particular.

Gaps in the Literature

During the last two decades, several researchers have expressed concerns about the lack of research into reentry when compared with the volume of research into sojourner adjustment overseas (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Lineham & Scullion, 2002). Studies remain anecdotal, and they often focus on only a few cases (Briody & Baba, 1991). This is due in part to the complexities of the expatriate/ repatriate issues (Aycan & Kanungo, 1997). Another concern is the preponderance of studies of student sojourners (Ward, Bochner & Furnam, 2001).

As mentioned previously, very different types of individuals spend significant time in a foreign culture: students studying abroad; military and consular personnel living in American enclaves; non-governmental volunteers and missionaries embedded in local cultures; and businesspeople representing their company's interests abroad. Military and consular employees frequently are assigned in three-year stints and may have little opportunity or reason to become acculturated to the host country. Missionaries and NGO personnel have a service focus and are often considered ineffective if they do not adjust to the host culture. Students are sometimes in programs where the location is foreign, but the instructors and curriculum are familiar; they usually take regular courses offered by the university, taught by university faculty.

Businesspeople vary in their degree of cultural adjustment as it depends greatly on their situations and assignments.

As stated in the last chapter, companies are still sending employees to live and work overseas.  Despite current economic difficulties, companies plan to expand their presence in overseas markets and either maintain or increase the numbers of employees overseas (Minton-Eversole, 2008).  Corporations with international ties have increased in value in the last decade, with worldwide sales in the trillions (Harris & Moran, 1999; Mataloni, 2007).  Expatriate employees form a vital link between the home company and their international subsidiaries. They present an important population for research into reentry.

<div align="center">Value of Repatriates</div>

Every time an employee leaves a company, personalized organizational-specific knowledge and experience also departs.  Companies must hire replacements and try to reproduce that knowledge and experience.  Davenport and Prusak (2000) stated:

> Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information.  It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers.  In organizations, it often becomes imbedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices and norms (p. 5).

Davenport and Prusak (2000) pointed out that organizational knowledge is not neat or simple and it resides in people.  They continued by pointing out that such knowledge develops over time, so it resides in people who have been with an organization for several years. Organizational knowledge grounds the rich truths of real situations close up.  Employees who are

grounded in the company's vision and policies are always valuable.  Those who have learned to

translate that knowledge and work effectively in another culture are not only valuable, but rare.

A few studies have addressed the issues related to the retention of returnees.  For

example:  Stahl, Miller and Tung (2002) found that 51 percent of their German respondents

reported a willingness to leave their sending organizations, in spite of the traditionally high

amount of company loyalty in Germany.  International retention strategies can be connected to

domestic strategies.  Forster (1994) surveyed 124 UK returnees and found five predictor

variables for retention: (a) length of time abroad; (b) unrealistic expectations; (c) downward job

mobility; (d) reduced work status; and (e) negative perception of help and support after

repatriation.  Stroh (1995) examined U.S.-based international businesses that had an average of

103 expatriates in international assignments.  Stroh's results showed that attention to career

development issues can affect the retention rates of both global and domestic employees.

Feldman and Thomas (1992) noted that overseas assignments were often ill-planned.  Fifty

percent of respondents in a UK study felt they were not given the chance to spend enough time

discussing their options with the people responsible for managing their return (Forster, 1994).

Some organizations are working to address these concerns.  Hurn (1999) noticed an

upsurge in the willingness of international companies to devote time and resources through

efforts such as debriefing, mentorship programs, repatriation courses, and spousal assistance.

Chubb & Sons is one company that recognized the importance of retaining these valuable

employees (Scelba, 1995/1996).  They conducted a study of their repatriated employees, and

developed a program based upon the findings.  Sprint also provides a program that is designed to

facilitate the whole expatriation/repatriation process (Stafford, 2005).  Stafford quoted one Sprint

spokesperson as saying that there had been no complaints or concerns raised about people being

unhappy after their return.  While this sounds encouraging, more empirical evidence needs to support the connection between such programs and repatriate retention.

These problems with effective readjustment, and re-assimilation, of employees have not disappeared.  Some reasons for these continuing problems include: sharp divisions between domestic and overseas operations, an "out-of-sight/out-of-mind" situation for expatriates, and the removal of expatriates from domestic human resource planning systems (Allen & Alvarez, 1998).  In 1982, Harvey pointed out that few companies had dealt with the problems of reentry.  In 2005, Stafford stated that many employees still wish their companies had some kind of formal repatriation program.   International human resource departments have the challenge of developing practices to address these concerns that are consistent with the overall mission of their corporations (Caligiuri & Stroh, 1995).  The Global Relocation Survey identified retaining returned sojourners as one of the significant challenges facing multinational corporations (Minton-Eversole, 2008).  However, according to a 2004 Cendant Mobility survey, only 49 percent of companies who place employees overseas have repatriation programs (Tyler, 2006).

Sussman (1986) noted that Japanese returnees were more aware of the possible problems and the importance of effective readjustment than their American counterparts.  Almost ten years later, Kopp (1994) also noted that sojourners experience more reentry difficulties when returning to the United States, in comparison to sojourners returning to Japan and Europe.  In Europe and Japan, sojourners expect more difficulties, and companies provide more support during the readjustment period.  According to Kopp, companies in the U.S. tend to focus their resources on getting the employee adjusted overseas, and neglect the return.

To summarize, reentry presents a significant challenge for the returned sojourners.  It is frequently filled with surprises.  Companies do little or nothing to help these repatriates readjust

to life in the United States.  As Tyler (2006) points out, corporations recognize the need to help a sojourner manage the move onto foreign soil but fail to recognize the equivalent challenges inherent in the international move back home.  These issues lead to dissatisfaction, and often disengagement, by the returned sojourner.

Human resources journals present laundry lists of suggestions for effective repatriation management (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Harvey, 1982; Tyler, 2006).   The articles are consistent in suggesting that organizations need to provide reentry training and tangible support in areas such as job reorientation, moving expenses, etc.  This support needs to be grounded in theory and shown to meet the needs of the organization and the returned sojourner.

<div align="center">Filling in the Gaps</div>

While there is a growing body of research into reacculturation, it is not yet extensive enough to offer comprehensive explanations of the challenges faced by returning sojourners. The majority of the studies have been centered around only a few theoretical premises, often focused on the concerns of Human Relations personnel rather than the returned sojourner. Sussman (2000, 2001) strongly criticized the descriptive and atheoretical nature of most repatriation studies.  That is not to say that there is no theoretical foundation for studies.  Black and Gregerson's (1990, 1991) research focused on uncertainty reduction and congruency of expectations.  More recently, Shu-Cheng and Shu-Chen (2007) focused their work on the perceived fulfillment of the psychological contract between employees and their employers. However, while much has been learned from Black and Gregerson's model and other works such as these, they are often focused away from the immediate social and personal context of the sojourners themselves (Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2008).  This is where some other studies have attempted to fill in the gaps.

Sussman (2000) positioned a change in cultural identity as a driving influence in the readjustment challenge. She theorized that these identity changes do not become evident until sojourners return to their native land, and that is what causes the greater difficulties associated with reentry adjustment. Value changes, such as refocusing on social instead of material success, are another area that does not become evident until a sojourner is faced with home cultural norms (Uehara, 1986). These changes do not become salient until people come face-to-face with former assumptions, so sojourners may not become aware of these changes until after their return. Respondents have often stated that they do not feel as if they fit into their home culture upon their return (Wilson, 1993).

Living in a foreign culture creates an awareness of a person's identity as an outsider (Sussman, 2000). Sussman positioned this as a cultural identity change. Another relevant concept is that of identity negotiation, proposing that expatriates are not only influenced by the host culture, but also retain home culture values and then develop new identities different from either home or host cultures (Onwumechili, Nwosu, Jackson, II, & James-Hughes, 2003). Chai (2001) noted that belief change is triggered by surprises, but once the surprise results in a change, a person will attempt to restore consistency in a way that will retain personal coherence. Individuals need to see these changed rules as timeless normative rules, not short-term adaptations. They are incorporated into an integral part of the identity. Faulkner and McGaw (1986) added, "Self-conceptions of the homecomer should be considered as a crucial dependent variable to which we should pay more attention" (p. 116).

The sojourner's sense of self is important. The sojourner's social world is also important. People live in a number of social worlds or cultures (Freedman, 1986). The study of sojourners' social networks, and systems of support, is another area that has not been explored extensively

(Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2008). Relationships are a channel for the flow of resources for information and feedback as well as instrumental and emotional support. According to Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008), these resources are vital for a sojourner's adjustment, and readjustment. Many studies explore the content of social ties, but not the structure of these social ties. In other words, they look at whether or not the sojourner has information from the parent company or the chance to communicate with the local community, but not who they get the information from or how they maintain the relationships with these groups. Structure and content of social networks could influence performance and adjustment. Networks also contribute to identity and adjustment.

Identity changes, of whatever type, may drive a portion of the readjustment challenges. Social networks may help support adjustment and contribute to identity change. However, they are not the only factors that can influence the adjustment/readjustment process. In a pilot study, Kidd (2006) expected interviewees to reflect social identity challenges, but found difficult interpersonal interactions were far more salient to them. Four out of six respondents described talking about their experiences as one of the challenges they faced after their return. Respondents described the lack of interest and understanding when they tried to talk about their experiences, and how they learned not to share unless asked to directly. They also discussed the gaps in their knowledge of both the political and popular cultural events that occurred during their time overseas, which made them feel out of step with others. Despite its limited scope, this study identified key concerns of sojourners about communication during reentry.

Communication provides the connections in a person's social networks. It also is the tool for identity negotiation and development. It is reasonable to posit that it could be an important element in cultural adjustment and readjustment. The following section highlights existing

research into communication and readjustment, with a mention of two important communication theories as they relate to general cultural adjustment.

## Communication and Adjustment

As noted earlier, Black and Gregerson (1991) framed their studies using Uncertainty Reduction Theory. This theory has made some unique contributions to the understanding of communication, intercultural communication and cultural adjustment. An expansion of this theory, Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory (AUM) (Gudykunst, 1983), has been developed that specifically addresses the unique interpersonal challenges posed when communicants cross cultures. Anxiety and Uncertainty Management states that expatriates use communication to manage their levels of anxiety and uncertainty while coping with a foreign culture (Gudykunst, 1988). The goal is not to simply reduce uncertainty, but to find a balance between too much and too little anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1995). If there is too much of either, people may freeze and cease to function effectively. If there is too little, mistakes may occur due to overconfidence. This theory focuses on the interactions between native and non-native communicators, but it positions communication at the center of the process of managing cultural adjustment as well as cross-cultural communication.

Another important intercultural communication theory is Kim's (1995) Integrated Theory of Interethnic Communication. Based on an open-systems approach, this theory posits that humans inherently strive to adapt and grow, and that these adaptations occur through communication (Smith, 1997). Kim's model identifies six dimensions that relate to the different 'systems' in which expatriates may find themselves: the internal, personal system; the overall 'host' culture (the country or area of residence); and the 'ethnic' social realm (Kim, 2001). The 'ethnic' realm is that of the expatriate's subculture. For example, it could be a community of

Vietnamese in the larger city of Dallas, Texas, or it could be a community of expatriates united by their common experience of being 'foreigners.'

Characteristics of the communicator which might influence effective communication and adjustment include their psychological attitudes, cognitive structures, identity strengths, and group biases (Gudykunst, 2005). The situation is defined by the physical setting in which interethnic homogeneity, interethnic salience, and interaction goals are the critical factors. The environment also influences effective communication. These are national and international forces and include institutional equity/inequity, ethnic group strength, and interethnic contact. These ultimately frame three facets of cultural adaptation: communication competence; functional fitness (ability to adapt); and cultural (or ethnic) identity. Expatriates have to negotiate through all these complex systems in order to effectively communicate. Thus, their adaptation is influenced not only by their own capabilities, but also by the willingness of the new 'host' system to accept their experiences and identity. This theory presents a framework for action, with the implication that if certain elements in the environment were to change, then these elements would either facilitate or inhibit effective communication, and, thus, effective adjustment (Gudykunst, 2005; Kim, 1995, 2001).

Communication environments and practices have often been linked to cultural adjustment when sojourners move overseas (Aycan, 1997; Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). Some studies have examined the communication behaviors prior to return and how they influenced readjustment (i.e., Cox, 2004). However, few studies have delved deeply into the influence on readjustment presented by the opportunities, or lack thereof, to talk about what has happened and is happening; the importance of communication as it influences the readjustment process. Martin (1986) highlighted the need for more empirical research to confirm the speculations drawn from

anecdotal reports. Her concerns continue to be echoed by other researchers (see Lineham & Scullion, 2003, and Sussman, 2001, for example),

Some of the germinal articles examining reentry were published in a special edition of the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Martin's (1986) article is often cited in reference to what happens when sojourners return, positioning reentry as one phase of the complete intercultural experience, which is throughout a process a change. This was the first time communication was positioned as a central component of reentry. When addressing the reentry environment, Martin wrote:

> When returning home, the sojourner reenters the social environment of friends and family with a potentially changed 'meaning structure' and newly internalized rules of interaction. The way in which the returnee understands and interprets these changes constitutes reentry from a communication viewpoint. The sojourner may encounter new symbols and rules or, more problematic, old symbols and rules with new meanings (i.e., sojourners returning from third world locations may interpret symbols of affluence differently). These changed internalized meanings and rules may result in confusion and difficulty in [the returning] sojourner's interaction with friends and family (p. 4).

Communication is an inherent part of any adjustment process. Martin (1986) stressed that the way in which returnees understand and interpret their new internalized rules of interaction constitutes reentry from a communication perspective. Those who adjusted overseas need to make a communication adjustment upon return because they adjusted their communication style to match the host culture. Student respondents reported that it was challenging to communicate their foreign experiences and new values (Martin, 1986; Uehara, 1986). Werkman (1986) pointed out that many of our experiences, including those overseas, are

nonverbal. These are hard to translate into words, and thus sometimes present an added difficulty in pinpointing the basis of discomfort upon returning home. Chai (2001) stressed, "Since the presence of an idea within an individual's identity frame is determined by the communicative actions of others, communication is important for reasons beyond the information it may provide" (p. 92).

Other studies have also demonstrated the importance of communication. For example, Rohrlich and Martin (1991) determined that the degree of difference between host communication style and home communication norms influences reentry: the greater the degree of difference, the more difficult the readjustment. Effective communication with the parent company while overseas was similarly important (Aycan, 1997). Additionally, Wilson (1993) reported that returning students said family members listened to their stories about their experiences overseas, but friends were not interested and got tired of listening. Capturing the sense of their reports of communication back home, Adler (1981) quoted a student respondent as stating, "They ask how it was and just want to hear, 'fine'" (p. 38).

More recently, Cox (2004) discovered that the best pattern for both expatriation and repatriation adjustment was to acquire host cultural proficiency while maintaining home contacts. In other words, you need to learn how to cope with where you are living, but stay in close contact with the people you left back home. Those who put effort into maintaining close home-ties reported easier reentry adjustments. Typically, once a person returns from overseas, HR or psychological professionals may conduct debriefing sessions lasting from one hour to several visits. Debriefing can also take the form of reports on the work accomplished while overseas. Cox determined that while debriefing upon return helped participants identify better with their home culture, it did not lessen emotional distress or behavioral differences. This

appears to indicate that other interventions may be needed.  These other interventions may include more extensive communication practices by companies, support personnel, and even family and friends.

Communication is an inherent part of any adjustment process.  Smith (1997) presented more evidence for this statement in her research examining cultural communication competence as it relates to reentry.  After close analysis of interviews with 13 students returned from studying abroad, Smith particularly noted the relationship between identity and face negotiation on the part of the returnees. The students felt a strong need for validation from those who could understand their experiences and perceptions.  They also experienced greater clarity when they had the chance to talk about their experiences with others.

As Mead (1934) argued, communication is the primary tool for creating meaning. Through communication, individuals build connections with others, and seek some type of understanding when they communicate.  Individuals gain an understanding of themselves and their experiences at least in part by the responses of others.  Thus, sojourners may look for others to help them understand the emotions and experiences of their time in another culture.  This reflective understanding is established at least in part for sojourners as they tell their stories and as listeners respond.  The following sections will explore different ways that communication interacts with a person's well-being, understanding, and sense of self.

<div align="center">Communication and Self-Disclosure</div>

Social interactions are strategic (van Boven, Kruger, Savitsky & Gilovich, 2000).  We may attempt to convey not only different information but even different personalities to different people in different situations, depending upon our goal.  However, people sometimes

overestimate how much of what they know is known by others. They have to learn the boundaries of acceptable, or possibly accessible, disclosures.

Recounting experiences and describing life overseas is self-disclosure. Self disclosure involves a decision of when to reveal one's true self (Jourard, 1979). Jourard wrote,

My hypothesis is that we seek to have a true being in the experience of others under two conditions: when we experience it as safe thus to be known; and when we believe that vital values will be gained if we are known in our authentic being, or lost if we are not (p. 181).

Martin and Anderson (1995) state that self-disclosure is a tool for showing others who we are and what needs we have. The purpose of self-disclosure is often to receive confirmation. People are very strategic in what they decide to self-disclose. People are also often very adept at the process (van Boven et al., 2000). The motives of inclusion and affection are particularly important factors in self-disclosure, and those goals determine which strategies are employed. However, even though self-disclosure is strategic, and designed to seek confirmation, more self-disclosure will not necessarily result in greater satisfaction. It is not the degree of being able to talk about an experience, but the quality of the sharing that is important for readjustment. Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimmons (2002) stated, "We have a real need to have others see us as we see ourselves" (p. 36). Self-disclosure is best when a person gains interpersonal validation.

Social support is often engendered by self-disclosure. The presence of social support has been linked to positive health benefits (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Uchino, Caccioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Conversely, its absence has been associated with disease and depression. While many studies of social support have focused on what happens when people share negative experiences, Gable, Reis, Impett and Asher (2004) focused on what happens when people share

positive events. In a series of four studies, they discovered that there are rewards to sharing

positive events above and beyond the benefits derived from simply experiencing the events. If

the response is active and constructive, the results are particularly beneficial, enhancing

relational values between participants, and the ability to remember the event. Negative and

passive-constructive responses, even when given benevolent interpretations, gave poorer

outcomes. Singh-Manoux and Finkenaur (2001) found that the person who shares his or her

emotions feels relief, calm and a sense of closeness with the sharing partner. Thus, the presence

of positive social support provides benefits for the discloser whether sharing positive or negative

experiences.

Jourard (1979) emphasized the dyadic effect of self-disclosure, in that it has a reciprocal

nature. Often one person responds to another's self-disclosure with additional self-disclosure.

There may not be a chance for comparable reciprocity when engaged in discussing international

experiences with those who have not shared such experiences. So the sojourner may have to

determine whether or not the sharing will be to his or her benefit.

Social support and self-disclosure influence a person's well-being in many different

ways. Social support and self-disclosure are the building blocks for people's social networks, as

well as their mental health. However, communication can serve other functions as well. It can

help people understand what they think and who they are.

Communication, Disclosure and Identity

Mead (1934) and Jourard (1979) were not the only theorists who stressed the importance

of communication for creating personal meaning and social positions. Heidegger, Habermas and

Dewey's concepts of world disclosure also address the pivotal position occupied by

communication when people face changes and challenges (Kompridis, 1994). World disclosure

incorporates first order disclosure (descriptions of a world in which we find ourselves), and second-order disclosure. Second-order disclosure exposes "new horizons of meaning as to the disclosure of previously hidden or unthematized dimensions of meaning" (Kompridis, 1994, p. 29). It is second-order disclosure that resonates with the challenges faced by the repatriate. It is the process by which people bring the unconscious aspects of adjustment (Werkman, 1986) into their conscious understanding. Kompridis (1994) expressed it this way:

> *Experience* is Dewey's term of art for second-order process of world disclosure. 'Experience means the new, that which calls us away from adherence to the past, that which reveals novel facts and truths' [Dewey, 1920]. World-disclosing experiences contribute new semantic repertoire, extending the shelf-life of current meanings or replacing those which have become exhausted and inflexible (p. 40) (italics his).

It is through world disclosure that new ideas find their expression, and individuals find their understanding of the experience. It is in this context that they begin to define, or redefine, their sense of self.

The type of self and the way self-expression is negotiated is embedded within our cultural values (Triandis, 1989). The United States is seen as an individualistic culture. Individualistic cultures contain a greater number of potential ingroups than collectivistic cultures. Required behavior toward each ingroup is somewhat distinct. Thus members are more likely to be high self-monitors, constantly surveying the social situation to select appropriate communicative behaviors.

Western cultures such as the U.S. posses a faith in the inherent separatedness of a distinct person (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). This means that people maintain their identity within themselves, and are not necessarily defined by their group memberships; these memberships

influence, but do not define. Of course, the self is a delicate creation of great variation within a culture. Markus and Kitayama (1991) stressed that people seek positive situations that enhance their true view of 'self.' This separate, individual, independent view allows for the verification of personal attributes and appropriate autonomy.

The independent self must, of course, be responsive to the social environment. … Rather, social responsiveness often, if not always, derives from the need to strategically determine the best way to express or assert the internal attributes of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226)

In individualistic cultures, such as the U.S., individuals seek reinforcement of their individual value and sense of self. The individual sojourner must incorporate his or her international experiences into that self-image. Identity is a reflective understanding.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is concerned with the category-based processes of group formation and interaction (Brown, 2000). Tajfel and Turner (1986) proposed that social identity was basically derived from group membership. SIT has three basic tenets: (a) people want to achieve a positive social identity (positive distinctiveness); (b) a positive identity is derived from positive social comparisons; and (c) if one has an 'unsatisfactory' or 'negative' social identity, he or she may either attempt to leave the group or find other ways to achieve a positive social identity. The sudden minority status experienced in a foreign culture, with the concurrent communication challenges mentioned by Martin (1986), often challenge a person's positive social identity. The sojourner has changed, and has to readjust to what were once his or her native norms.

Social self-identity has also been framed as a method to assume some inner consistency in inhabiting a series of roles in various social relationships (DeVos, 1990). DeVos (1990)

proposed that it is not simply an addition of roles, but an integration of these roles that leads to a type of self-perception, or understanding.  When a person encounters a critical experience that challenges his or her self-definitions, that person must make accommodations and adjustments to find a balance.  That is done within the context of society, and society is established through communication.

To behave appropriately and to be effective, communicators must make conscious choices about what to say and do (Vause & Wiemann, 1981).  In their study of older women returning to college, Vause and Wiemann  noted that these women chose communication strategies from their repertoire and applied them as needed in different situations.  These women, like returned sojourners, had to renegotiate their roles.  They had to be adaptive.  People have formal roles which are dictated and informal roles that are related to surrounding social behavior.  Different expectations accompany these roles, growing from the customs, conventions or folkways of the surrounding systems.  Vause and Wiemann stated,

> It should be noted that the motivating factor for role invention is not that the role has never been enacted before, but rather that *the individual has no guidance* in how to enact the role either from inside the new system or from without (p. 243) (italics theirs).

The person who is entering a new role, or re-entering a previous one, has to try on different communication strategies to adapt.  People have to learn what works for this setting.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Everyone experiences events or life changes that can be considered stressful (Johnson & Sarason, 1979).  These stressful events often require significant social adjustment and adaptation.  Hamilton (1979) pointed out that the main mental adaptations involved acquiring new knowledge and finding a solution to decision-making conflicts.  He defined stress in this manner:

"Ecological stressors would seem to be experienced because events present not only opportunities for action, but also because they make demands for adaptation by presenting barriers against subjectively preferred outcomes" (p. 6).  This leads back to the concept of reverse culture shock itself: psychological and emotional difficulties faced by returning expatriates.  They have experienced a series of life changes and must reintegrate themselves into a home that, for some, has become foreign.  So, again, communication should help them negotiate this newly strange territory.

Reentry is not a simple process.  Sojourners have discovered that they cannot simply step back into their former roles and relationships without any effort.  Globalization, and the growth of international and multinational corporations, creates a need for an understanding of the challenges of the repatriation process.  Companies are losing valuable employees due to ineffective management of this process which leads to employee dissatisfaction.  Returned sojourners are experiencing emotional stress and difficulties as they negotiate their readjustment.  In order to effectively manage reentry, both corporations and sojourners need an understanding of the basic causes of the issues and how to deal with them.

Sojourners return changed.  They have new values.  They may possess new identities.  They have to make sense of these changes, and find a way to fit back into their home culture.  Humans are social creatures who create a sense of self and of the world around them through the act of communication.  It is in the interaction that meaning occurs, and those meanings can never be completely shared under the best of circumstances.  When a sojourner returns to his or her home country, that person is often in a position where talking about those recent, creative interactions were in a context that was not shared by the other(s) in the conversation.  Communication is not always centered on uncertainty reduction or simply an information

transfer.  Eisenberg (2001) wrote that "…multiple goals in interaction are the rule, not the exception – people often do want to be understood, but this is not all they want, and not at any cost" (p. 539).  He pointed out that part of the problem is the gap between what we think we should do and what we actually do as communicators.  This research will attempt to begin to see what people actually do when trying to communicate their unique experiences as sojourners, how they perceive others' responses, and how that influences their readjustment.  Here are the basic questions that framed this study:

**RQ1:**      What types of information do sojourners attempt to share about their international experiences upon their return to the U.S.?

**RQ1a:**      What types of information are easier or more challenging to communicate?

**RQ2:**      How do sojourners report that listeners respond to these accounts?

**RQ2a:**      What types of communication encounters do business sojourners report when trying to communicate their experiences?

**RQ3:**      How do sojourners describe the effect of these encounters on their readjustment?

**RQ4:**      What suggestions do sojourners offer to other sojourners as communication strategies to ease reentry?

For the purposes of this study, definitions of communication that are contingent upon the success of the communication act will not work.  Littlejohn (1999) describes three positions that can work to define what communication is.  First, "communication should be limited to messages that are intentionally directed at other persons and received by them" (p. 8).  Second, "communication should include any behaviors that are meaningful to receivers in any way, whether intended or not" (p. 8).  Third, "only intentionally sent messages that are received

should count as communication" (p. 8).  Littlejohn concludes that a definition should be evaluated on the basis of "how well it helps a scholar to accomplish the purposes of an investigation" (p. 9).  Kincaid (1987) writes that "communication in its most general sense refers to a process in which information is shared by two or more persons and which has consequences for one or more of the persons involved" (p. 2).  He also points out that the important consequences of communication are often defined as a mutual understanding between the persons involved.  That communication is defined in terms of its success or lack thereof.  However, that definitive sense of communication will not work for this study.  Since there are times that the sojourner's success in unknown, in doubt, or definitely ineffective, communication can not be defined in terms of mutual understanding or its reception.  It will be defined in terms of intentionality and desired consequences. Thus, the working definition of communication for this project becomes:

> Communication is the attempt to relate an event, experience or feeling to another person or persons in order to meet specific relational and strategic goals.  These goals may include increased understanding, but the goals will be influenced by the reactions of the participants during the communication act.

Since there is not an extensive body of literature from which to build hypotheses about the exact nature of sojourner communication, or listeners' responses, this is an exploratory study: an attempt to discover what is there, and build a platform for future studies.  The following chapters present the methods used and results discovered.  The final chapter discusses the theoretical and practical applications of the results.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study examined communication components of the repatriation process from the perspective of the expatriate or sojourner, drawing on his or her accounts of the experience. Individual interviews are appropriate when the researcher wishes to gain first-hand knowledge of the participants' experiences. Interviews allow the participant to reconstruct his or her experiences of re-entry for the investigator, moving back and forth in time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as the interview unfolds. The interview also allows the investigator to probe for clarification, explanation, and understanding of the informant's story, using an interview protocol as a guide to ensure that all pertinent areas of experience are identified for the study.

Most studies of business sojourners summarized in the literature review used questionnaires, with their attendant limitations. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were chosen for this research. Shuy (2002) cited several advantages of open-ended interviews, including: (a) more accurate responses owing to contextual naturalness; (b) greater likelihood of self-generated answers; and (c) greater effectiveness with complex issues. Kerlinger (1986) pointed out that interviews have important qualities not possessed by objective tests or questionnaires He stressed that interviews allow a great deal of information to be gathered in a flexible and adaptable format. The interviewer can check the understanding of a question, and can probe for context or reasons for answers to the question (Atkinson, 2002).

The nature of the information being sought should determine whether or not one uses interviews (Kerlinger, 1986). Qualitative interviews can be used when the researcher wants to discover common themes in accounts of respondents who have had similar experiences, even if those experiences did not occur in the same areas. (Warren, 2002). With the inherent

complexities in the process of readjustment from working overseas and the small amount of research dealing directly with communication's influence on the process, open-ended interviews were clearly the best option for this study (see Appendix A for interview schedule).  The interview schedule was designed to fit both the situation of the returned employee and the situation of the accompanying partner, so no questions directly addressed organizational issues.  However, the respondents were requested to answer questions as they pertained to daily life experiences, which allowed the employees to focus on home and work experiences during their responses.

*Participants*

Snowball sampling was employed to locate participants for this research.  Strict criteria framed who would be considered a viable interviewee:

1. The participant must have spent his/her formative years in the United States.

2. The participant must have worked overseas in a professional capacity that was not associated with consular, military, missionary or non-governmental organizations.

3. The participant must have worked and lived overseas for a minimum of two years.

4. Participants must have been living in the United States for between six months and four years after their time spent overseas.

The researcher networked with colleagues, university alumni, and personal friends in order to identify potential interviewees.  In addition, several letters and emails were sent to human resource departments of international businesses based in the northern Midwest.  Human resource employees from two of these companies responded.  Finally, messages were sent out by a Midwestern expatriate organization to seek members who would qualify and be willing to participate.  The search led to many individuals who had spent time overseas and were willing to

participate but who did not meet all four criteria.  The primary limiting factor was the length of time since the expatriate's return home.  Many potential participants had been back for periods much longer than four years.  The researcher discovered 24 individuals who both fit the criteria and were willing to participate.

In the business realm, it is often the case that his or her family moves overseas with a businessperson (Minton-Eversole, 2008).  Thus, it was decided that both the employee and his or her partner would be interviewed if both met the criteria.  In eight cases, both participated.  In five cases, the spouse or partner had not spent their formative years in the U.S. and did not fit the criteria.  In three cases, the individual went overseas alone.

Twenty-four individuals, ten men and 14 women, participated in this study.  Nine of the women were accompanying partners, though two of them worked while overseas.  The central reason for the move, however, was the primary employee's job.  Fifteen of the participants would have been classed as the primary employee in the partnership.  Ages ranged from 29 to 62 at the time of interview, with a mean age of 50 years.  Table 1, below summarizes their sex, age, overseas status, time spent overseas and country(ies) of residence.  Participants are listed in the order in which they were interviewed and are identified throughout the study by pseudonyms.

Table 1

*Descriptions and Pseudonyms of Participants*

| # | Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Overseas Status* | Total Time Overseas | Country(ies) of Residence |
|---|-----------|-----|--------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Abel | 62 | M | PE | 3.5 years | France |
| 2 | Beth | 61 | F | AP | 3.5 years | France |
| 3 | Caleb | 45 | M | AP | 3 years | Japan,  England |
| 4 | Denise | 57 | F | PE | 2 years | England |
| 5 | Edward | 49 | M | PE | 6 years | United Arab Emirates, The Netherlands |
| 6 | Felicia | 50 | F | AP | 5.5 years | United Arab Emirates, The |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Netherlands |
| 7 | George | 53 | M | PE | 3 years | The Netherlands |
| 8 | Hazel | 52 | F | AP | 3 years | The Netherlands |
| 9 | Isaac | 51 | M | PE | 3 years | Switzerland |
| 10 | Jessie | 43 | F | AP | 5 years | China, Spain |
| 11 | Kevin | 43 | M | PE | 5 years | China, Spain |
| 12 | Lisa | 53 | F | AP | 6 years | Germany, France |
| 13 | Mike | 53 | M | PE | 6 years | Germany, France |
| 14 | Nick | 49 | M | PE | 14 years | Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore |
| 15 | Opal | 29 | F | PE | 3 years | New Zealand |
| 16 | Pearl | 37 | F | PE | 10 years | Japan |
| 17 | Retta | 58 | F | PE | 3 years | Austria, France |
| 18 | Saul | 62 | M | PE | 3 years | England |
| 19 | Sally | 48 | F | PE/AP | 12 years | Panama, Morocco, Costa Rica, Venezuela |
| 20 | Tara | 62 | F | AP | 3 years | England |
| 21 | Travis | 47 | M | PE | 5.3 years | Singapore, The Netherlands |
| 22 | Uma | 42 | F | AP | 5.3 years | Singapore, The Netherlands |
| 23 | Vera | 51 | F | PE | 15 years | Bulgaria, England, Germany, Switzerland |
| 24 | Wanda | 32 | F | PE | 1.5 years | Afghanistan |

*overseas status: PE represents primary employee; AP represents accompanying partner.

Many of the employees were managers, and two were teachers. Other positions included: executive coach, fitness trainer, financial advisor, communication officer, research coordinator, and administrative assistant/sales. The types of businesses encompassed agricultural, computer software, consumer products, educational, engineering/aeronautics, financial services, manufacturing, and petroleum. The majority of the respondents returned after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, so their responses likely were affected by that event.

Sojourns lasted between two and ten years, with one exception. The individual who lived in Afghanistan was there for only 18 months. It was determined that this person could be included in the study for two reasons: stays in conflict areas are often of shorter duration, and

this individual's responses to the interview questions mirrored others' responses indicating that her experiences were comparable. Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) argued that once certain ideas become repetitive, the researcher can logically assume that they have found a pattern in the data. This pattern should be accurate, and, in the sense that another researcher should find the same pattern eventually, replicable. This is similar to the concept of theoretical saturation as it is used to determine effective sample size (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that saturation was reached when no new data was arising that developed new properties of a category. In the practical sense, they wrote, "As [the researcher] sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated" (p. 61).

*Interviews*

Once the participant was identified and had agreed to be interviewed, one of two methods was employed to conduct the interview. Whenever possible, the researcher met with the respondent face-to-face. However, funding did not permit travel to all participants' locations, so for the six interviewees who lived far away, the interviews were conducted via telephone. The remaining 18 interviews were conducted face-to-face in a variety of locations. The choice of location was determined by the interviewees' preferences and included coffee shops, restaurants, private homes, and one city park.

The author was the only researcher and the only interviewer. All interviews were conducted individually with the exception of one couple that was traveling and met the researcher at a public location during their travels. In that case, the man was the first to answer the questions in the interview protocol, followed by the woman. Each spouse limited his or her

input when the other was being interviewed.  Interviews, which were audio-taped, lasted from 23 to 50 minutes, with the average approximately 40 minutes.

The proposed research was submitted to the Human Subjects Committee on the University of Kansas' Lawrence Campus (HSCL).  HSCL determined that this research required an informed consent form.  This form is included as Appendix B.

Some of those who were interviewed long-distance requested an opportunity to review the questions prior to the interview.  The interviewer agreed and provided that information as well as the informed consent forms.  Arrangements were made for the participants to fax or email the signed consent form to the researcher.  At the beginning of the phone conversation, the interviewees were asked whether they were willing to be recorded.  They were also asked to confirm their understanding of the purpose of the research and the promise of confidentiality.

When meeting in person, the interviewer presented the informant with the consent form and a copy of the informed consent document.  A verbal summary was presented, and the informants were asked whether or not they agreed to be tape-recorded.  Each person signed the consent form and agreed to be audiotaped.  After the initial few minutes, both telephone and in-person interviews proceeded in the same manner.

Each interview was conducted using the same interview protocol (see Appendix A).  Initial questions were designed to gather demographic information.  They also allowed an opportunity for the interviewer to begin to build rapport with the interviewee.  Following that, questions allowed the participant to give descriptive, often expansive, information.  Several questions asked for examples of types of situations mentioned in earlier responses.

During the introductory phase, the researcher disclosed that she also had lived and worked overseas.  According to Fontana (2002), researchers who share a common experience

with their informants may be able to gain more detailed responses based on expression of a shared understanding.  On several occasions, reciprocal disclosures were either spontaneously offered by the interviewer or elicited by questions from the interviewee.  Some of the data were thus generated by something approximating a natural conversation as opposed to strictly adhering to an interview protocol.  In addition, questions were sometimes reworded or presented in a slightly different sequence depending on how responses developed.

Hammersley (1998) posited that a researcher should supply enough internal evidence to allow the reader to judge the likelihood of error.  This judgment could be based on three criteria: (a) plausibility, or whether it is likely to be true based on well-established knowledge; (b) credibility, or whether the reported judgments are accurate; and (c) evidence, or the accumulation of support from the study and other sources.  These all have to do with validity and reliability.  Some other measures of 'quality' research include (a) fit; (b) applicability; (c) contextualization of concepts; and (d) variation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).  Corbin and Strauss (2008) measure fit in this way:

> Do the findings resonate/fit with the experience of both the professionals for whom the research was intended and the participants who took part in the study?  Can participants see themselves in the story even if not every detail applies to them?  Does it ring 'true' to them (p. 305)?

A respondent check was used to determine whether the results met the measure of 'fit.'

*Follow-up Study/Validity Check*

In order to confirm interpretation of the findings and support their validity, after data analysis was complete, several respondents were contacted via email and asked to review a results summary and respond to several questions (see Appendix C).  Four respondents agreed to

participate in this check of validity and reliability. A series of email messages were sent to the

14 respondents who had provided email addresses. The email requested the respondent to read an

attached summary of the results of the analysis, and then consider three questions. Then, they

were requested to speak with the author via telephone to discuss their responses and reactions to

the summary. Individuals identified by the pseudonyms Kevin, Isaac, Opal and Retta agreed to

participate.

As before with the major data collection, this study was submitted to the Human Subjects

Committee of the University of Kansas. An informed consent form was included in each email.

As is indicated in the IRB approved informed consent (see Appendix D), participation in the

phone interview was considered consent, so respondents were not required to return a signed

document. The interviews, which took place over a period of two weeks, lasted between 15 to

30 minutes, with an average of 20 minutes. The interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim.

*Methods of Analysis*

The analysis was a thematic analysis, with an emphasis on emerging themes based on the

respondents' comments as opposed to pre-existing codes (for sample codes and statements, see

table 2). Silverman (2003) emphasized the importance of looking to the text by stating that

textual analyses should be data-driven. It is important to take the analysis beyond a simple

listing of statements or ideas and to find the patterns that are present within the data (Boyatzis,

1998; Silverman, 2003). Researchers can build their analyses around individual words or large

blocks of text (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In this project, blocks of text, or sentences and

paragraphs were the primary units of analysis. Full statements, thoughts, concepts, or stories

formed the majority of the analytical units. For example, if a respondent told a story, then that

paragraph would be labeled according to the emergent code based on the type of story (i.e.,

'reentry challenges').  Individual sentences in the paragraph could receive additional labels if they expressed concrete emotions, or described a specific technique for sharing (see Table 2 for examples).

A priori categories were not used for this analysis.  The literature coupling reentry with communication is broad-ranged, but does not fall into concrete patterns.  This study was designed to identify labels and exemplars from the data, as opposed to seeing how they fit existing literature.  Thus, the category labels were derived whenever possible from the words or terms used by the participants, and these concepts were joined into 'clusters.'  One thematic analytical approach used when analyzing such clusters of content is what is called 'constant comparison,' based on concepts from Strauss and Glaser's ideas on grounded theory (as cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Silverman, 2003).  Silverman (2003) presented a simplified model of the process:

1. An initial attempt to develop categories which illuminate the data (such as Bullis & Bach's '[1989] clustering.')

2. An attempt to illuminate these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance

3. Developing categories into more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting

The qualitative researcher must work to find germinal ideas that become part of a growing corpus of information that reveals the essence of events or situations (Christians & Carey, 1989).  This type of analysis occurs in stages and must go through a constant refining process (Christians & Carey, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).  One of the advantages of this method is that the categories were derived from the accounts of the participants in the study,

which helps answer some concerns with the accuracy of the data (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Silverman, 2000).

Suddaby (2006) pointed out that this type of analysis also involves a creative aspect where the researcher must determine which categories to focus upon and what meaning to derive from the data. Thus, in this case the researcher made the decision to stop at 24 interviews once clear patterns were established.

It was an interactive process, beginning with listening for themes during the interview process, and continuing to examine the content while transcribing. The majority (18) of the transcripts were compiled by the researcher. This was followed by reading through the material six times, each time highlighting information that addressed a particular research question. The first level of code development followed. The researcher entered the transcripts into the Atlas-ti program, and examined the data for initial coding. Atlas-ti was used to link codes to stories, phrases or, in a few cases, single words (usually describing emotional reactions or when the interviewee responded with a single word to a question). The initial codes were written on sticky notes, which were then placed on a wall to allow the researcher to note intersections and patterns. The codes were compared and grouped to form the next level of categories. Atlas-ti was used again to compile the initial codes and quotations into the new code families. These codes were once again transferred to sticky notes, and the examination was repeated with specific research questions as the frame for developing the final metacodes. A few of the initial codes did not address any of the five research questions, so they were omitted from the analysis for this project at this stage. Thus, the data were analyzed, coded, re-examined, coded again, compared again, and coded a third or fourth time to develop the final metacodes. The iterative process was complete.

In summary, data were examined to develop illuminating categories, the categories were compared to establish concrete patterns, then the categories (codes) were compared again to establish general analytic frameworks (metacodes). Coding was conducted using Atlas-ti software for ease of organization and access. As mentioned earlier, the interview transcripts were entered into the Atlas-ti framework, and the software was used to track common themes, and then help connect related categories as meta-codes developed. Thus the information was organized and saved in an accessible, concise format.

*Analysis of Respondent Check*

The respondent check transcripts were analyzed a bit differently, using a very simple coding system. They were analyzed according to the overall results summary document and which metacodes were addressed. The metacodes were applied when a respondent mentioned that particular description. Then the remarks were coded according to whether or not the respondent 'agreed' with the findings either in general or as they related to specific metacodes. Four agreement categories were used:

1. Agreement: respondent expressed enthusiastic agreement with the results.

2. Qualified agreement: respondent agreed in general, but did not share all the experiences.

3. Qualified disagreement: respondent disagreed in general, but expressed an understanding that their experience might not represent all respondents.

4. Disagreement: respondent expressed complete disagreement with the results.

While a short summary of the findings will be found in the results chapter, the majority of the relevant comments will be seen in the discussion chapter.

## Summary

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who had spent time working overseas.  Interviews sought to discover the types of information respondents attempted to share on their return to the U.S., identify some types of communication encounters that were salient to them, and identify their perceived effect on readjustment. Finally, respondents' advice for future repatriates for subsequent readjustment experiences were solicited.

The following chapter presents the findings of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study explored the role in sojourners' readjustment to the United States of recounting stories about living and working overseas. The study focused on the content, challenges, and benefits of their attempts to talk about their experiences and the challenges they experienced during the re-entry adjustment period. Results are reported by research question.

Twenty-four semi-structured interviews with sojourners resulted in over 400 single-spaced pages transcribed in a script format. These transcripts were analyzed using the Constant Comparison method (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Silverman, 2000). In this methodology, as stated in the methods section, data are examined to develop illuminating categories.

The basic metacodes were developed as they related to each research question. There was some overlap between research questions; therefore, while the accounts are discrete within the research questions, they are not discrete between questions. For example, information sojourners' desire to share overlaps with their reports of the information that presented greater opportunities or challenges to communicate and the effects of communication overlap with advice they would offer to new returnees. These and other areas of overlap will be noted in each section.

Overall, the respondents reported difficulty after their return in sharing the experiences and discoveries they considered important about their international experience and their readjustment. Topics they wished to discuss included new understandings about U.S. and international cultures, details of their daily life abroad, and their challenges with readjustment. The respondents talked about how the lack of a responsive audience made them feel isolated and

foreign, while they found receptive audiences refreshing.  They noted that being able to talk about their experiences was almost therapeutic.

The participants have been assigned pseudonyms (see Table 2).

Information Exchanges and Issues

The first research question examined topics sojourners reported wanting to communicate, which of these were easy to share, and which were harder for sojourners to communicate or met with a negative reception from the listeners.

**RQ1:** What types of information does the business sojourner attempt to share upon his/her return?

**RQ1a:** What types of information are easier or more challenging to communicate?

*Topics of Conversation*

Sojourners' reported topics of conversation after they returned to the U.S. varied.  They discussed issues that are of concern to most people:  how their kids were coping with life; new responsibilities at work; what happened last Christmas; etc.  The greatest number of instances and codes fed into this category.  A total of 447 codes and 1235 instances reflected the content of their conversations.  After initial grouping of content responses into 110 families and categories, the final analysis resulted in five metacodes:

1. *Emotional Responses*:  Sojourners' accounts of their emotions both during their experiences overseas and as they experienced re-entry.

2. *Readjustmen*t:  Processes and experiences associated with readjustment to life in the United States.

3. *Real Life Overseas*:  Stories about the day-to-day experiences, exciting events and knowledge of foreign cultures and norms.

4. *New Understandings*:  New values and understandings related to how the returned sojourners see themselves and the world around them that they attributed to having lived in another culture.

5. *Job and Family Issues*:  Challenges and experiences faced by the returned employees and their accompanying partners, related to roles and concerns and also contrasting new and old responsibilities.

The categories are listed in rank order according to the number of instances that comprised each.

*Emotional Responses.*  The importance of expressing and sharing emotions after life changes is a central tenet of theories of emotional sharing (Frijda & Mesquite, 1994) and emotional coping (Ellgring & Bänninger-Huber, 1986).  The desire to share feelings was expressed by the respondents, as were their frustrations in trying to share international experiences.

Developed from both direct expressions of emotional words or phrases or discussions of desires and wants, 103 individual codes represented emotional responses  to work and communication challenges and to the change in lifestyle, family issues, etc. (for sample codes and statements, see Table 2).  A wide range of emotions was expressed.  When describing their experiences overseas, Opal and Pearl, for instance, expressed their enjoyment of the opportunities they had there, while Caleb discussed the stress of overseas adjustment.  Some respondents reported mixed emotions.  For example, Mike expressed a feeling of loss of his foreign lifestyle coupled with an enjoyment of the amenities offered in the U.S.

Many emotional responses emerged when sojourners described their return process.  For example, Edward highlighted the emotions he felt at work:

*Edward:* Well, probably the work environment I came back into in that the team I'm

working with, you know, is so risk-averse, ….And, their expectation that, okay, if it fails

and it's in the middle of the night, they're gonna call me and so there's, you know, all

these negatives to taking a risk, and I've always been of the mindset that I'd rather try ten

things and fail at two of them than try six things and be successful. So that's probably

been the most frustrating part, uh, is that I wanna go plow ground, I wanna go try things -

if it blows up, fine, then we'll back off and go from there, where the people here are very

methodical, and absolutely risk-averse.

Several instances focused on feelings that ranged from the sense of excitement and

adventure while overseas to disillusionment with changes in former hometowns. Kevin stressed

the excitement, saying, "I wouldn't give up the five years of expatriate experience that myself

[sic] and my family had for anything. It was a great learning experience and growing

experience." George expressed his excitement,

*George***:** I would say that if you, you're coming from something that was so foreign, and

so new, and so exciting, and so stimulating and just culturally rich, and you're coming

back to the place you just spent, probably 18 years, and you, it's old hat, it's a difficult

adjustment. It's probably taken us two years to recover.

Other respondents focused on emotions other than excitement or adventure. They used

words such as loneliness, disappointment, longing, and anger. For example, Saul was

disappointed that he couldn't live overseas again. Abel's disappointment was focused on his job

after his return. Abel said, "[my coworkers] wouldn't use [a process developed in France].

Because it was not invented by us, here. And that was a disappointment. But it continued

through from the standpoint of people not accepting anything we did in Europe." Other terms

participants used included depression, bittersweetness, and enjoyment. Felicia stressed the depressive aspects, saying, "Oh it's depression… You go through a whole little depression thing… But [the listeners] can't comprehend it."

In their stories, participants also described their feelings when trying to share these experiences with others. Denise and Caleb both described what it felt like.

*Denise*: Well, and then the situation with friends, where we were just outside their minds, they had gone on with their lives and in some cases, 'Oh, you've been gone two years? Gee!' and in other cases it was, not, just not really making efforts to contact us because when you come back after two years, you're just not part of the circle, so there was not… there was a very long, lonely period there.

*Caleb*: Well, I know it's like that. Yeah, it was just frustrating and depressing that the story could not be told. And the moments of pleasure were the moments when I could say something to someone who would understand. As far as how that has affected the uh, the re-entry it was, uh, it was just a frustrating kind of a depressive note upon which to begin your new life back in the country.

As stated earlier, the emotions were varied and complex. Edward, Felicia, Mike, and Sally recounted how the U.S. feels foreign to them now. These feelings of disconnection are also some of the influences on the next topic of interest.

*Readjustment.* The second largest metacode focused on readjustment itself. Initial coding drew from 265 instances having to do with readjustment. Given that readjustment was the focus of the interview, a large number of instances concerning this process was to be expected. What is ultimately of interest are the types of things the respondents included in the discussion. Ten code families emerged that covered areas such as how readjustment compared

to adjustment overseas, the actual process of re-entry, and what helped or hindered the readjustment process. Pearl summed up her experiences, saying:

> ***Pearl:*** You know the term reverse-culture shock is often used, and I really think because when you're gone, when you're living overseas, you change as a person, of course, you're growing and you're, you're developing as you would hopefully wherever you were during that period of time, and you can never, you can never go back to the exact same situation. I left right shortly after I graduated from undergrad, and when I returned, you know, I was, I was of course in a different position in life, in a different stage. And, then, geographically I was in a very [different] part of the country. So, then I would describe it as, as almost, as almost you're re-entering a foreign country. Like your home country is a stranger to you…

Felicia focused on the changes at home and the complexities of the readjustment process saying, in part, "it's different, you know, it's, you just learn to assimilate and go on." Kevin described the challenge of getting "back in the swing" of life in the U.S. Retta's comments included missing her overseas "family" and surprise at the difficulties she had after her return. Hazel also missed her overseas community, and wished for similar connections in the U.S. that would help her readjustment. Hazel said,

> ***Hazel:*** I think not having an expat community around that you can really share it with is, it extended it [readjustment]. I think I really grieved losing that part of my life. I think it took me a long time. I really grieved it. And I think it extended it, not having, not having it to talk about sometimes."

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Edward found his challenges in the work environment, saying, "The adjustment of coming back to a U.S. corporation and the change in duties, the narrowing of the responsibilities, is very, very hard." Edward continued, comparing adjustment to readjustment,

*Edward*: the whole process of, uh, uh, building another, new internal circle, and your, and your relationships is no different than when you were in Europe or the Middle-East, but it's actually harder because you don't have the bonding that you did overseas with the expat community to rely on, to build that quicker. Not the support groups type of thing back in the U.S.*"*

Lisa, on the other hand, described working with a group to welcome internationals to the U.S. and finding common ground with them.

*Lisa*: I have another friend who also dealt with tax issues between the different… we have these professional companies that do our taxes. I mean, that's been a lot of my discussion with some of the people I knew, to discuss that and how frustrating it is. Well, we have a group of people that gets together who try to welcome new people. So there is a lot of discussion in there, and they want to talk about, I guess I've done a lot of talking to people from other countries living here, and comparing it to my experience, …. So talking to these people about, just kind of offering understanding. So that's been a lot of what I've talked about.

Thus the degree of support and opportunities to share, the levels of understanding, influenced their readjustment process. On the other hand, there was an appreciation of life in the United States and the opportunity to reconnect with family and friends. These contradictions between missing the international community while appreciating the amenities in the United States were expressed by several respondents.

While it is to be expected that interviews focused on readjustment would draw out statements about the process, the depth and range of the stories are important to consider. The returned sojourners addressed common experiences that occurred in a context that wasn't shared or understood by those around them. As was discovered in previous studies (e.g., Black, 1991, 1994; Sussman, 1986), there was general agreement that readjustment was challenging or "hard." Retta described her surprise at how difficult it was even though she had frequent trips home during her sojourn, saying,

> **Retta:** So I was actually commuting back and forth from Paris to the United States. So, I kind-of saw it as a switch where instead of spending three or four months in Paris and a month in the United States, I'd be spending three or four months in the United States and a month in Paris, and there would be a difference of emphasis, but it would still not be a radical change. But it was a radical change.

Thus, Retta did not expect to experience any readjustment challenges because of the amount of time she spent each year in the U.S. Much to her surprise, however, she did find the readjustment to be challenging. The sense of frustration and lack of an understanding community could contribute to these feelings.

Expressing emotions and describing the readjustment process were often expressed in conjunction with each other and additional issues. When asked to describe the re-entry process, George shows the connection between the general readjustment discussion and the next metacode:

> *George***:** But we were warned of [readjustment difficulties] going into it, so, uh, I knew that going into it. So, uh, that was not surprise. And we just, we just made up our mind we're gonna make it work, so we made it work. Um…Yeah, you know, you're dealing

with, you're dealing with people who've never left the country basically and they don't understand why you went, and they don't necessarily want to hear about, you know, Christmas in Paris.

*Real Life Overseas.* Like the topic of readjustment, the third largest metacode in this category can easily be tied to a specific question. Respondents were asked to describe their sojourn. However, the stories of daily life also emerged when people recalled specific encounters, and when they described topics that were less well received by listeners. This area was a description of what it was like to live in another country: daily life, understanding of new cultural norms, etc. It grew from 266 linked instances and 92 contributing codes.

The day-to-day experiences of buying groceries and adjusting to different life rhythms were described. The challenges of adjusting to different languages, and the things that connected sojourners to or disconnected them from the host culture were all topics of conversation. Denise, Caleb, Retta, Travis, and Lisa spoke about the support and encouragement they received overseas after the 9/11 attacks. Wanda described the difference between the ease of life in European countries and the challenges of life in Afghanistan. While most respondents were interviewed individually, scheduling limitations caused Uma and Travis to be interviewed together. One of them would often interject comments, or ask for clarification, when the interview was ostensibly focused on the other. The following brief dialogue between Travis and Uma is representative of the types of stories people told concerning their life overseas. Their statements focused on communication challenges:

*Travis***:** That is the hugest adjustment (laughing) ever, and so anyway, Singapore and then we were in the Netherlands in this little village for four and a half years.

*Uma***:** It is also interesting that, you know, that your family are from northern Germany, part of my family is from Holland and Belgium, and, yet, in many ways we probably felt, um, closer to a lot of people and easier to adjust to living in Singapore than we did in Holland.

*Travis***:** Right. 'Cuz everything, everything was in English. I could tell walkin' right into the Netherlands airport it was going to be a big adjustment 'cuz suddenly everything was in Dutch, and we didn't know Dutch, and, the other thing that was also different I remember in Asia, um, we looked different so I felt like everybody was always staring at us.

An understanding of foreign culture was often presented through a discussion of contrasts and similarities. This code family emerged when respondents discussed which methods worked well for communicating their experiences. These comparisons provided listeners with a context to help understand foreign norms. For example, Edward shared a story about the difference in the approach to traffic tickets between The Netherlands and the United States. He had received multiple tickets in his first few months in the Netherlands, and learned that he did not need to be concerned about losing his driver's license since their focus was on collecting the fines, not a resultant loss of driving privileges. He pointed out that he could not have been as unconcerned if he possessed a similar number of tickets in the States. Hazel's comparison focused on the difference she noted "between the relaxed European atmosphere and the frenetic American rat race." There were also the stories about everyday life. Kevin and Uma discussed food. Kevin said, "So I would regale stories to my teenage and less, and younger nieces and nephews about all the odd things that one would eat in China. And those were, those

were some of the more fun things." Edward, Felicia and Travis added stories about the adventures of shopping in a foreign country.

Another area focused on foreign norms and cultural mores. While comparison allowed for greater understanding of day-to-day activities, norms and mores were not as easily understood or accepted. The latter family of codes emerged when sojourners discussed the topics that were more challenging to share. The next metacode was also a common theme in response to the question about communication challenges.

*New Understandings.* This fourth metacode reflected a lot of intrapersonal excitement, and interpersonal communication frustration. It covered the personal and philosophical discoveries people made during the process of adjusting overseas and readjusting after their return to the U.S. Topics continued to be drawn from answers to questions about communication challenges. Denise described the patriotism she noticed after her return saying, "We were not gradually exposed to the effects of 9/11, so there was a bit of a shock at the changes that were evident in the country that had become widely nationalistic, um patriotism I suppose one could call it, and this was just evident." Several respondents discussed the growth and change they experienced within themselves. Two areas that emerged were the concept of becoming a citizen of the world or the idea that a sojourner would never be the same again after living in another culture.

> *Nick***:** I think, uh, after being abroad for that length of time, it makes one appreciate the
> many good things that are in the States with access to transportation and media, and, you
> know, sport, which happens to be my area. It's very important and accessible and part of
> the culture. The experience coming back, I think, uh, makes me a bit more in tune with

other people around the world, and makes me want to look up and see what's happening

on the other side….

Wanda discussed her new appreciation of life in the United States, and enjoyment of the

order and "little things like being able to drink tap water." Wanda also described the difficulties

of trying to define some of those new understandings, saying:

*Wanda***:**… that desire to be in that kind of environment, and it's, it's almost something

you can't explain.  I remember I was relaying that conversation to my parents and I was

like, I can't explain to you why it is that I want to go overseas.  I just, it's something that,

it's a desire I have, and to the point where I don't feel comfortable in Kansas City for

long periods of time, because I don't feel like this; it's my home, but I don't feel at home

here.   You know.  But I feel at home in an environment where I'm a total stranger, and

they don't understand that.  …You're gonna be a stranger, because you've had

experiences no one else has experienced, and you have a frame of mind that no one else

understands.

Wanda was not the only person who described this communication challenge.    As Saul

expressed it,

*Saul:*  I just feel, I don't know if the word 'privilege' is the right word, uh, or

'perspective' or, it just, it just feels, you do think a little bit differently.  And what that is,

that's too hard for me to define, but whether it's an appreciation for others; whether it's a

desire to go do things no matter what the circumstances are.

These new understandings were both deeply felt and, as demonstrated above, sometimes

difficult to express.  The respondents highlighted these realizations as both very important to

them personally, and very challenging to communicate to those who lacked the context of international work or travel.

The final metacode covers basic concerns with family and work, a common topic set in a different context.

*Job and Family Issues.* Comments about job and family issues often included emotional terms such as frustration and depression. The interconnection of these codes demonstrates that the various issues discussed were closely related to the emotions experienced before and after the respondents' returns. On the job front, Denise bemoaned her U.S. coworkers' lack of understanding of the work she did overseas. She went on to say that appreciation at work would have helped her readjustment to that aspect of her life. While describing the challenges of readjustment, other respondents also focused on the lack of understanding in the workplace. Felicia described her husband's situation, saying,

> *Felicia*:… but I think it's as hard on the worker and they don't anticipate that because it's been so easy. When workers come back and they're put back into the working environment here… They are pigeonholed. You work this part and that's that, where if you're overseas and a job needs to be done you might start with plugging the stupid machine in to making sure it's got paper and all of the technical stuff in between. ….
> We've known a lot of people that just quit, and have gone back overseas, because of the freedom of them being able to, to do everything, you know, and learn more in that other department or whatever.

Edward shared his own frustrations with the reactions after his return.

> *Edward*: There was just HR, and they didn't understand you in the first place. … [and what stood out was] The lack of, the lack of support. The company didn't have an

organized method for bringing you back like they had sending you. They were very organized. They had, you know, international companies helping you with the logistics and assimilating, uh, finding schools and things like that, and coming back it was, 'okay, you'll figure it out.' You're from here, you should be able to figure this out, but I was in a completely different part of the country. Uh, and so it really was tough.

Not all the comments were negative. Kevin talked about the advantages of returning to an international department. Travis described his situation as, "I have a woman reporting to me who is, uh, Malaysian, a guy reporting to me whose wife is Venezuelan, you know, so I've got... [an] International group." Several of those who stated that they could "talk about it all the time" worked with internationals and continued to have an international job focus after their return. The difference was in the focus of the department and their co-workers.

On the domestic side, Beth, Hazel, and Jessie talked about how their focus as accompanying spouses was their families. Only after their husbands' and children's needs were met did they address their own concerns. They and others discussed the methods they used to help their children become re-established in the local community. George described doing research and sending his kids to a camp for expatriate children to help them readjust to the U.S. Travis and Uma describe how a teacher's acceptance aided their daughter's readjustment:

*Uma*: And her teacher in, uh, Houston, her name was Miss Rosas, and Ella would call 'yofrau bloomsha.' She would convert it to Dutch.

*Travis*: Yofrau is the name for teacher, bloomsha, you know, is flower...

*Uma*: ... flower... (overtalk)

*Travis*: … in Dutch, so she heard, rosas, roses, so she started calling her...

*Uma*: ...anyway, that was interesting, too (overtalk)...

*Travis***:** It probably just for the first few days, then we had to say, 'listen. You're in the US,' it's...

*Uma***:** The teacher was very open to her being, you know, a little bit different, a lot of new things for her.

*Travis***:** It just...

*Uma***:** ... and she was really good about it all, and was interested in her background.

Other family issues centered around how children's stories of life overseas might be received, how to garner support for the adjustment of family members, and how children benefit from having lived overseas. The benefit to the children was something Kevin emphasized in his follow-up interview; in particular his son's fluency in Spanish. Kevin said, "…beyond the cultural skills capabilities and experiences that expat life offers, one of the great opportunities for our children was language skills." The desire to share these and other stories and receive support during the re-entry process was a constant sub-theme that emerged.

The Readjustment and Real Life metacodes were two of the largest categories, but they were the object of direct questions asking respondents to describe their readjustment experience and their time overseas. The factor that highlights their importance is that they are also connected to examples of what people tried to communicate and desired to share. Emotional responses emerged as a part of those questions, but were never directly solicited. Neither were the topics of job and family issues and new understandings. They were similarly expressed in connection with topics people reported trying to share.

Certain aspects of personal change were neither easily expressed by sojourners nor easily understood by listeners. As demonstrated in the next section, sojourners developed creative methods to cope with these challenges.

*Challenges and Successes in Communicating About the International Experience*

The second part of Research Question 1 explored what types of information respondents found easier or more challenging to communicate. Overall, where there was more shared context and interest, there was greater ease of sharing, and when context and interest were missing, it was hard to share, according to respondent accounts. Initial analysis revealed 63 general codes, which, as before, were examined to determine saturation then compared again to develop relevant metacodes. Ultimately, they fit into eight general categories, with the codes being divided evenly between the areas of ease and difficulty.

*Easier to Share.* In response to questions about what was easier to communicate, respondents did not list specific topics. Instead they delineated techniques they used to create connections and understanding. These techniques were:

1. *Use Hooks*: stories tied to commonalities and points of interest.

2. *Decontextualize*: relate the actions but not the full situation or location.

3. *Be Short and Casual*: tell casual snippets and funny little stories.

4. *Share and Teach*: share acquired knowledge of the area, particularly with people who are planning to go overseas themselves.

The sojourners reported these methods as providing greater success when they tried to share; different methods worked with different topics. Specific types of methods included talking about artifacts guests would see when visiting sojourners' homes, comparing common experiences such as shopping or visiting restaurants, and relating short, amusing tales of life overseas. For example, Wanda compared the lack of clean water in Afghanistan to others' experiences in California with water that was not potable. These comparisons often allowed sojourners to describe aspects of their lives overseas as well as aspects of foreign culture.

Therefore, it is possible to share certain information with an unresponsive or less informed audience.

Some people used 'hooks,' tying their stories into some area of interest or commonality. Isaac used a hook in the gym, "[my personal trainer] connected the idea that an exercise machine in Switzerland was the same as the exercise machine in Lawrence, and that was the full extent of the conversation, I mean, about that."

Another technique was to keep stories short and casual, telling a quick story. Uma described having to drive to another town to get a certain type of cereal, without going into details of how the expatriate communities passed the word about where to go. One small but revealing technique was to decontextualize the events. Longer quotes from Vera and Tara present good examples of both this and other methods employed:

*Tara*: Often times in conversation I will say something like, um, well, 'this is an experience that I had,' and I don't necessarily tell people that we were pick-pocketed in Prague. I'll just say, 'there was this experience where [my husband] and I were getting on a bus and this guy tried to pick-pocket us.' So, it, see what I'm saying? I'm taking that other dimension out of it.

*Vera*: We don't talk very much about it, I have to say. I mean outside of my family. My family was able to join me in the experience, so they came to wherever I was living but Bulgaria, but, um, I think it's not something that you wave in front of people. It's not that you, you may discuss the experience, but not the experience because it was abroad; you have to think of common experiences that somebody else has had. You might talk about, you know, having your purse stolen, say, 'I had my purse stolen here.' It's just that the place isn't so important, so it's … in discussions where the place isn't so important,

you can have an experience, but if you start waving places, I don't think it's polite to do that, but, my husband finds it easier because he's British, and people expect him to have those kinds of experiences.

So Tara and Vera took the context out of the equation and just shared events. They reported they found that to work well to continue the conversation without seeming elitist.

The easiest method was presenting information and advice when people were preparing for travel or life overseas. Opal had coworkers preparing to move overseas who were very interested in her advice on how to cope, so she was successful in sharing her knowledge. Like Opal, other people were able to share their knowledge and understanding with people who were going overseas. Opal reemphasized this point during the study's validity check, saying,

> ***Opal*:** One of the ways I'm able to relate is that I get people on the phone and they're so stressed out, and 'I have to do this and all this and I'm moving my family..' They always say to us, 'you have no idea what it's like to move a family around the world.' And I say, well, actually, I do. You can hear, you can hear it in their voices, they're like, 'you do! You understand.**'**

Stories about foreign culture and advice on what to do are examples of what would be shared on these occasions. However, a few respondents expressed their surprise that some friends did not seek out the benefit of their experiences even when traveling to countries where the sojourner had lived.

While these techniques provided some solutions, they did not address all the concerns associated with talking about international experiences. There were certain topics that participants frequently considered harder to share, no matter what technique was employed.

*More Difficult to Share*.  When asked to discuss communication challenges, respondents moved from techniques to content.  There were certain ideas or stories that they wanted to share but that were very difficult to share.  Sometimes the difficulty was lack of interest or context on the part of the listener, but sometimes the problem was that these ideas or changes were a little harder to express.  The personal effect on them from their time overseas was often both.

The discussion of communication challenges elicited clear metacodes that specified challenging types of information.  These metacodes were:

1.  *Complexities and Contradictions*:  the nuances and differences of life overseas, particularly when they contradict preconceptions or the media.

2.  *Extent of Effect*:  the profound effect of the experience, and how the sojourner has changed.

3.  *Details of Daily Life*:  the specific details and the stories of life overseas.

4.  *Reasons for Going*:   reasons for desire to live and work in another culture.

These stories related to new understandings sojourners had about themselves, the U.S., and the world at large.  A category that was easier to express but often not received well by others involved information that conveyed the complexities of life overseas or contradicted existing points-of-view.

> *Wanda***:**  I think when I first came back I really wanted to talk to people about what I did, and just like I was sayin', they just really, they actually did not wanna know.  They didn't wanna know the details.  They wanted to know the things that they could relate to.  They wanted affirmation or, affirmation or, uh, dissention or whatever of what they saw on television.  They didn't really actually wanna know.

Another area that was challenging was sharing details of daily life. For example, Isaac wanted to share about what it was like to live in the country, but felt that his listeners just wanted to hear about his 'vacation in Switzerland and the quaint folk on the mountainside.' Some respondents also felt challenged trying to help people, family in particular, understand why they had wanted to live so far away. So, while it is possible to share certain information, respondents weren't always able to share the stories they most wanted to tell. Wanda, Jessie and Pearl expressed these concerns:

*Jessie*: And, so, he was talking about how every year you go home, and people ask you, "Well, how is it and what is it like?," and he said, and as a person overseas you are so excited, and you've got your big dump truck full of information, and you're backing up and then suddenly you look in the rearview mirror and there are their eyes, and they're just as wide as could be! And, and you have, um you've gotten it. All they wanted was a one-word answer, "Fine. Good." They don't want all that information.

*Pearl*: And there's a type, and there's no, uh, there's no like equal ground, I guess, to meet. And for me, people are initially, 'oh wow, that's great you're doing that.' But it kind-of stops there. I don't (pause) perhaps I'm incapable of going on further, and I also think, you know, people are busy and have their own life, and a lot of them are, 'oh, that's neat, go on to the next thing.' I mean, they're... for whatever reasons, even my family, much as they love me, they're not that, really, they don't want to know, like, what was a typical day like for me in Japan.

Some of these comments demonstrate that many of these sojourners desired to share their life stories with their friends, but could not always share what they considered to be the most valuable or important part of their experiences.

The details and nuances of foreign life and culture are challenging to communicate, but are topics which the respondents highlighted as important to be able to share. The respondents' realization of which topics are easier or harder to share often occurs after observing the various reactions met when talking about their experiences. The second research question focused on these issues. The next section will cover the responses received from listeners and types of encounters returned sojourners described.

<div align="center">Listener Responses and Types of Encounters</div>

Sojourners in this study reported that listeners responded in a variety of ways. These responses created different types of encounters as experienced by the returned sojourner. The research questions covered in this section are:

**RQ2:** How do business sojourners report that listeners respond to these accounts?

**RQ2a:** What types of communication encounters do business sojourners report when trying to communicate their experiences?

Respondents were asked to give a general description of listener responses and then a more focused description of one or more exchanges that stood out in their memory. As with the first question, relevant comments were also made in response to the question about communication challenges. This elicited several types of listener responses that overlapped with the types of encounters that emerged. Listener responses will be detailed first, then the types of encounters.

*Listener Responses*

Answers to the basic question about listener responses, plus related remarks, presented 52 codes drawn from 297 instances that addressed the types of listener responses. As with the other

codes, these were compared to discover additional commonalities and five metacodes emerged. The five metacodes are:

1. *Lack of Interest*: no questions or follow-through, or quick fading of initial interest when subject broached.

2. *Irritated Shut Down*: attempt to share met with active irritation and negative response or abrupt topic changes.

3. *Lack of Context*: listeners lack common ground on which to establish an understanding.

4. *Excited Curiosity*: excitement and curiosity expressed.

5. *Happy I'm Home*: relief at safe return.

*Lack of Interest.* Disinterest and Limited Interest were the two major code families that formed this metacode. Disinterest represents situations when no interest is expressed at all, not even polite questioning. Limited Interest is coded when there is interest in one or two short stories, but nothing more.

Disinterest is something sojourners expect and understand, even though they find it a challenge. Denise explained,

**Denise:** And expect people not to be really interested. And, for all sorts of reasons they're not interested. So I would describe it as… as a let down because you've done something rather interesting and fun and most people are either not particularly interested. Sometimes I think it's because it's too hard. They don't know the questions to ask. The typical reaction is 'oh you've been over there for two years? Oh, I've been in London', and then they tell you all about their week in London. That's typical.

Sometimes, the respondents found disinterest to be painful.  When asked how listeners responded, Abel simply said, "Negative.  Nobody wanted to listen."  Tara said, "Most of the people are just sort-of, you know, polite for about five minutes and then they wanna talk about dinner again."

Kevin provided a good description of limited interest:

**Kevin:** Um, my family, relatives, friends here who have not been ex-pats, have shown some, but fleeting interest in what an ex-pat experience is.  And some of our family members did, in fact, come and visit us [in] China and in Spain, and have some other, more deeper understanding of that.  But, generally, my opinion for most Americans is that they're rather ethnocentric and we, as a culture, aren't as linguistic, and couldn't tell Thailand from Taiwan. ... and not much interest in doing so.

Denise acknowledged a lack of context on the part of the listeners, but focused on their disinterest, saying,

**Denise:** When I talked about it?  I haven't … I don't know that I've had a lot of difficulties, partly because I am sensitive to the fact that people are... don't really have the context, so it's difficult for them to know even how to share the impressions.  So, when I talk about it a bit more, more than inserting it into the conversation, I recognize that I can't think of any particular instance, but I certainly [recognize] that there are times when I'm excited and I wanted to share, and I realized, 'oh!  This is not what they want to see.'

*Irritated Shut Down.*  Disinterest was often mild, but irritation was much more overt.  At times, an irritated response could result in feelings of being shut down, or silenced.  At other times, listeners were described as actively closing down the conversation.  Irritation was also

reported as a reaction to perceived elitism.  When asked to clarify the types of responses

received, Felicia explained:

> *Felicia***:** … it's a double-edged sword.  They wanna hear, but then you either, they
>
> perceive, the perception is two-fold.  One, you're showing off.  (imitates listeners'
>
> perceptions) 'I've lived overseas!  Nah-nah-nah-nah,' but you're not.  Usually, for me it's
>
> just telling a story, like I would tell you a story about what happened to me in Texas or
>
> Arizona or something.  It's just a story; it just happened to be in that particular
>
> geography.  Two, they're just not interested.  Yet they cannot ever identify with it.

Felicia perceives the reaction as irritation, even though there is no overt expression of

that reaction.  Being shut down is more direct.  It is more an active, obvious, almost rude

response from the listener.  As is evident from the next example, it is a feeling of being

dismissed and devalued.

> *Caleb***:** Okay, at the British museum, they have what's called the Elgin marbles.  And it's
>
> the, uh, it's the friezes from the Parthenon that this Lord Elgin from the 19th century just
>
> sort-of gathered up and put into train cars and shipped to Japan, or back to England.  And
>
> he sort of stole the artworks from the Parthenon that were all from the Parthenon.  He
>
> took them back to England.  And you can visit them and go in for free and it's all over
>
> the place.  Well, I've seen the friezes from the Parthenon of Athens, you know, and all
>
> these different wonderful horses and gladiators and all these great things, and I want, I
>
> wanted to tell someone at a dinner party.  We were talking about stuff, and maybe they
>
> were traveling overseas, and I just wanted to tell them I had seen these.  I walked around
>
> the three-dimensional figures, and I, it was fantastic the artwork; it was sublime.  And
>
> they were kind-of pouring wine, they were talking, and, and it seemed like it was almost

dismissed. … That this thing that I wanted to tell them about the Elgin marbles, I wanted to be didactic in a way. You know. …. And, I had this whole thing I wanted to say about it. And I couldn't get anyone to really listen …

As both Felicia and Caleb illustrated, often sojourners truly desire to share their experiences and new understandings. Some sojourners simply stop trying to share after meeting with multiple negative responses. Listener responses influence how sojourners attempt to talk about their experiences.

*Lack of Context, Excited Curiosity, and Happy I'm Home:* These three metacodes are clearly delineated. A lack of context was described more frequently than expressions of curiosity or relief at a safe return. George presented a lack of context as "Yeah, and at work they'd ask a couple of questions and then, you know, pretty much they just can't relate." Jessie clearly stated that curiosity was a rare response. However, Hazel described a situation where interest, or curiosity, was often present in her life, saying,

> ***Hazel:*** or, [people would ask] 'where's this from?' and if at the table with our family if stories came up, you know, stuff that happened, they'd love that. They loved that. That's funny to me because I would think that would bore them silly, but it didn't. So in the context of our family talking and family stories, people coming into our family really loved to hear it.

When discussing people being happy that she had returned home, Vera said, "of course once I came back, you know, I get, okay, 'thank God you made it back.'" Since all three of these metacodes contribute to the uniqueness of the encounters and are not separated by subtle nuances, they will be explored further in the next section.

*Types of Encounters*

Respondents in this study reported that curiosity was a rare response and little interest was expressed as a rule. Many interviewees reported feeling disengaged or disconnected and described abrupt topic changes, initial interest with lack of follow-through, and other responses that caused them to feel shut down. Therefore respondents seldom had encounters where they felt that their stories were well received. They learned they had to adjust to their audiences, often only sharing when interest was expressed. At other times, they would keep their stories to themselves. However, this was not usually a satisfactory experience for the respondents.

An additional 27 codes emerged from 74 instances then merged with the listener responses to form the types of encounters. Nine unique metacodes emerged from all of these, four in addition to the five addressed above. After this further comparison, the following emotional and practical responses emerged and developed into four basic types of encounters:

1. *Disengagement*: lack of response or a negative response leads to disengagement by the sojourner.

2. *Disconnection*: can't share satisfactorily due to lack of context or encouraging response.

3. *Engagement*: greeted with a positive response and enjoy opportunity to share.

4. *Adjustment*: analyze situation to determine when to speak and when to listen.

Three of these types of encounters are primarily framed by the response of the listener, and the fourth is framed by the actions of the sojourner. Disengagement occurs through listener irritation, a feeling of being shut down, and obvious disinterest. Respondents stated that they reached a point where they just wouldn't talk about their experiences anymore. A feeling of disconnection results when limited interest, lack of context and other reactions led to a feeling of

dissatisfaction in the sojourner. Sojourners shared snippets and amusing tales, but not the details or revelations that are sometimes closer to their hearts. The relevant 249 instances and 57 codes associated with these categories provide a picture of encounters that are often unsatisfactory and result in sojourners who are very cautious about sharing their stories.

*Disengagement.* Sojourners felt that listeners thought they were being elitist when talking about their daily life while overseas. Terms like feeling shut out or shut down are also indicative of the disengagement category. George, Abel, Jessie and Caleb talked about these types of reactions:

*George*: Just, don't ask any questions; you start talking about it, and it's like, 'yep,' there's no 'yeah, well tell me what else, where else did you go, what else did you see?'… no follow-up questions…

*Abel*: I wasn't even asked stupid questions. That's how shut out we were.

*Jessie*: Other children might think your children are lying when they (laugh) talk about being on the Great Wall of China, or when they talk about the day at the Eiffel Tower, or when they see the CNN commercial where it goes through and shows the Eiffel Tower, and it shows the coliseum at Rome, and it shows the temple in Beijing, and my kids have been to all those, and other children, they may just say, "You're lying. You are lying. Or , You're bragging a little too much." And it's the same for myself as well. Especially being in a small town.

*Caleb*: … I just said, I'm not going to tell anybody about it anymore. I'm not going to say a thing. Nobody wants to listen to you. I'm not going to say a thing about it. If they ask, I'll tell them. But if they don't ask, I'm not going to; I'm not going to tell them. I'm

going to pretend like we never even left.  See if anyone even asks us anymore.  That's the way I got.  Kind of cynical about it.

Disengagement results in the sojourner cutting off sharing except with limited, specific individuals such as their partner or other sojourners and expatriates.  They disengage from other 'people.'  Edward said,

*Edward*:  Actually, I didn't talk about it much because they didn't, they didn't understand.  They didn't have the background.  They didn't have the experience, and when you talk about it people just think that you're showing off.  So you just don't talk about it.

*Disconnection.*  Disconnection occurs when faced with less overt reactions:  The blank expressions that represent a lack of comprehension; or the limited or vague questions which fade away fairly quickly.  An initial reception of curiosity and excitement is quickly followed by loss of focus and interest.  Edward, Felicia, Kevin, and Retta admitted that they also lacked the desired context and interest prior to their overseas experiences, so they understood the response.  However, they still experienced disconnection.  Hazel and Caleb present two extended examples:

*Hazel*:  You know the biggest challenge is just understanding that they don't, they aren't gonna understand, and so it gets to be kind-of lonely that way because I think as a woman who (clears throat), it, it does get a little bit lonely.  I have a British friend I was really close to who went back to her home at the same time we did.  And, I went home a little earlier, and for the first two years, she would like get on the Internet and it would be, …  I really, (laughs)  And it's just neat, because her friends weren't getting it either, and she couldn't explain it; it isn't like you can, you can explain it so well to people who just haven't done it.

*Caleb*: It was almost like I wanted to show everybody the map of where I'd been. Hey, Hey. And, here's what's happened to me and I see, in the longer perspective, **now** what happens is that we talk to our friends, and they'll bring up England and a story here or there will come up. It's not the monolithic block of experience that we're expressing now; it's something to do with gardening, maybe an anecdote here. Or it's a person we met or a museum we visited there. And it comes out in, what do you say? uh, topic specific doses of just little snippets here and there, and now people seem to be more willing to, oh, they'll listen to it. But when we first got here, we wanted to just unload the cart, and let them know, but that was something we couldn't do.

Disconnection leads to limited sharing. As Caleb illustrated, sojourners tell short stories or anecdotes (snippets), and develop a repertoire of acceptable topics. Hazel summarized this well:

*Hazel*: Oh, I think that people who are, who have traveled are definitely the easiest. They seem to get it. You don't have to go into a lot of detail, or we've had friends who care about us, who we don't necessarily tell about where we were, but the stories, you know, the mishaps that happened… they want to hear those, they like those. Just friends and stuff like to hear the old stories, but we don't get a lot of asking the questions thing. We haven't had that.

These encounters do not present opportunities to share deep feelings about the experience. No description of everyday life or new understandings. In these situations the experience is not ignored, but it is not actively explored either. In the next category there is active exploration, which Hazel just touched on. When asked what she would tell new returnees about communicating their experiences, Retta summarized both *Disconnection* and *Engagement*.

**Retta:**  I would tell them that they really need to try to be attuned to how much the other person really wants to hear.  Because a lot of times people will just ask, but they're just asking to be polite, and what they really want to do is talk about their own experiences when they visited Paris for a weekend, or when they went to Cancun for the summer, or whatever.  So, a lot of times, there are two kinds of people.  There's the kind of person who really **does** want to know about what your experience was like.  And those tend to fall into two categories.  People who really are interested in another part of the world, or what that part of the world's observations or perspectives are on the United States.  Or people who want to know about another part of the world because they're thinking of going there themselves.  But a lot of other people will ask, but they don't want to learn all that much.  They kind-of want to know just a kind-of a polite little segue.

The last two metacodes represent different codes and statements linked to responses and encounters.  Excited curiosity and families' joy at the sojourners' return resulted in an engaging encounter.  These could occur in diverse situations such as a grandchild's classroom or a meeting of internationals.  Stories might even be solicited by the listener.  On the other hand, adjustment occurs when the sojourner tries to gauge the audience and recognize when the conversation can cover international concerns or needs to be focused on more local issues.  They actively seek to discern whether listeners exhibit the uncommon response of curiosity or the more familiar negative reactions.

*Engagement.*  Curiosity was reported as a welcome response, though rare.  As George expressed it, "there are some people who really want to hear about it and some people who, you know, 'why are you talking about that again?'"  When interest is evident the listeners may broach the topic, ask focused follow-up questions, or share their own relevant experiences.  That

is when the sojourner feels engaged.  Saul and Jessie described their experiences with engagement:

> *Saul*:  A good question because, yeah, I think, there's some neighbors across the street from us, and they're younger, but they're retired.  And they travel a lot.  And, so I guess, we have shared a lot of experiences back and forth.  But there again, we're interested in what they have done, and they're interested in what we have done.  The neighbor right next door to them, I don't think they've been out of Bellevue.  They don't even want to hear about anybody going to Seattle, let alone a city half-way around the world.

> *Jessie*:  There was one more weekend.  I came back to the [city].  And somebody organized a luncheon for me.  And there was one particular woman and she was just asking about everywhere we'd been, and it was kind-of, it was just at the point where it was like, 'Why do you want this information, what are you going to do with it?'  But she was just so excited about everything.  She was excited.  It was almost as if she wanted to live vicariously through my experiences.  And that was great.  And, you know, that was more of the exception than the rule.  That was more the exception than the norm.  And it was almost embarrassing because I'd answer one question, and then she'd ask me another, ,… But it was strange because she was the only one asking questions.  I didn't hear the other, 'Wow, really?'  It was her and I, and I don't know if other people were talking, I don't know if that was out of politeness or what.  But she was just so invigorating, she was just so fascinated….

Therefore it is evident that not all experiences are negative.  Sometimes the sojourner has the joy of an opportunity to share.  Respondents talked about gaining pleasure from these encounters.  As Jessie said, they often feel exhilarated.  Certain people receive these stories with

open arms.  Again, however, that was not the norm.  When describing how to effectively share, giving examples of sharing, and giving advice to new returnees, these sojourners often talked about how they had to adjust to their audiences.

*Adjustment.*  The area of adjustment is an important one to consider because, as stated earlier, it shifts the focus from the reactions of the listener to the actions of the sojourner. Denise, Retta, Saul, Tara, Vera and Wanda all emphasized their focus on paying attention to the audience's reaction.  Tara shared about the methods she used to determine that her neighbor's son was interested while the neighbor was not.  As is evident in the section on RQ4, George stressed that returnees have to be discerning about when and with whom to share.  He was not the only one to stress the importance of adjusting to the audience.

> ***Denise*:**  And then socially it was challenging because it's the same sort of thing that you have to think carefully about how you're perceived … one is the change that you have experienced.  You don't come back the same as when you left.  So, when you're actually with friends their perception of you … it's very difficult to gauge that.  To gauge the kind of thing that's appropriate.

> ***Vera*:**  Don't tag an experience overseas onto every conversation just to get it in, I mean, if, there's an urge or something to communicate your experiences no matter what, but I think it doesn't matter, that's true in any case, whether it's an overseas experience or one you had in Wichita.  Makes no difference, you've just got to make sure that that communication is desired and helps you and helps the other person.

After frequent occasions where the sojourners feel disengaged or disconnected from their listeners, they are cautious about sharing.  They are unsure about how it will be received. However, they do enjoy the opportunities they have to share.  Several respondents reported

feeling that these opportunities helped their readjustment.  The next section covers these benefits and other perceived effects of sojourners talking about their international experiences.

## Effects of Communication

During the interview, sojourners were asked what effect the pleasures or challenges of communication made on their readjustment.  Their answers to this question, and to advice for new returnees, provided the majority of the codes and instances that make up this section.  These categories directly address the third question:

**RQ3:**  How do business sojourners describe the effect of these encounters on their readjustment?

Seventy-nine codes developed from answers to the question about communication's influence.  After analysis, five metacodes emerged:

1.  *Communication Not an Issue*:  never felt disconnected; did not feel as if more communication would have influenced the readjustment process, or did not feel pressing desire to share.

2.  *Communication Preserves Memories*:  sharing helps a person recall and retain memories.

3.  *Communication is Therapeutic*:  having a desire to share, and having someone listen and understand really helps.

4.  *Communication Helps Build Connections*:  reconnect to friends and build closer relationships with those who will listen.

5.  *Without Communication, Feel Isolated*:  Feel unconnected in U.S. when no one is there to listen.

Most respondents felt that being able to talk about their experiences was important for their re-adjustment. They said it helped them preserve their memories and build connections. They also felt it could be therapeutic to be able to talk about what had happened while overseas and the challenges of readjusting to the U.S. Some respondents said when they could not share, they felt isolated – like strangers in their own home country. There were a few respondents who did not see communication as much of an issue. However, many of these also mentioned that in the U.S. they were part of an international department or had access to a community where they could talk about their experiences whenever they felt like it. Travis said that it might have been different if he had not had that opportunity.

This section will detail those responses, beginning with the metacode where communication was not considered to be an issue for readjustment, then focusing in on the preservation of memories, and communication's therapeutic aspects. The section will conclude with a brief discussion of building connections contrasted with feeling isolated.

*Communication Not an Issue*

Some respondents felt either that communication was not an integral component or were uncertain about the role of communication during their readjustment. Twenty-three codes formed this metacode. Wanda presented a good example of this feeling of ambiguity when asked to describe a particular occasion when she did talk about her experiences. Wanda explained how she did not always feel a driving need to share, saying,

> **Wanda:** And, so now we were off the topic [Afghanistan], and that's generally how it works; you find a couple of things then try and relate it to something they understand, and then they kind-of take it off somewhere else. So that's fine. I no longer, I no longer feel the need that I have to make people understand what's going on there, or what I was

doing there, or why it was important.  If they wanna know, I'll tell them.  If they don't wanna know, I keep it to myself.  I don't have that desire; I don't need to tell people.

Jessie stated that she did not feel the need for external affirmation after a certain period of time had passed.  George and Kevin both indicated that they didn't feel communication was an issue when asked whether the communication challenges or pleasures affected their readjustment:

*George***:**  I don't think that [communication] was the issue.

*Kevin***:**  I wouldn't say that they have greatly affected it.  Those, those people that I would share that type of information with would be my business colleagues.  And because I've returned to an international environment, I work in an international division, or our family members, many of whom came to visit us, or we kept up to speed during that time, have a deeper interest and understanding of what we did and what we can share with than other folks who we would probably not be as close to.

To put these comments in the larger context, it is important to keep in mind that Kevin worked in an international department.  George also had good friends to talk to.  They never experienced a lack of opportunities for telling their stories.  Kevin acknowledged that it might have made a difference if he had not had his co-workers to talk to.  Kevin said, "Maybe a little more difficult, just on somebody's shoulder to say, 'Gee I just came back and it cost 30% more to buy a house here.'"

Most of the others who were uncertain about communication's influence or did not believe it made much of a difference also had opportunities to share.  The major exceptions were Tara, who is a self-described introvert, and Isaac, who felt he could talk about it any time.  Isaac also stated that with frequent trips home he never felt disconnected from the U.S.  That said, the

largest number of instances and codes related to RQ 3 fed into the last four categories illustrating a belief that communication does have an influence on a person's readjustment.

*Preserve Memories*

Over time, memories fade and details become fuzzy. Mike described both the desire to share and the resultant fading away of details when he lacked the opportunities to talk about his experiences. Lisa, Abel, Saul and Nick all stressed the preservation of memories as a result of sharing. Felicia connected different aspects of communication's influence. She elaborated on the topic when discussing which people were easier to talk to:

> **Felicia:** Other expats. I've really, seriously, wanna create a retirement village for expats so we can all talk about our experiences.. [laughter] … and not feel bad about it. We'll pull our treasures out and go, 'oh, man, I got this in Madrid! Did you see…?' You know. And that kind of thing. And I think it would be a big thing, because there are a lot of people that travel, but for us to come back again, you're told, you pretty well shut up about it, and the unfortunate part about all of that is your experiences are in your head, but you lose them. And people need to be told that this is a big part of life; it's not gonna hurt you to move around.

*Therapeutic*

Research has shown that sharing about important life events, whether positive or negative, help people to process and come to terms with these events (Singh-Manoux & Fineknaur, 2001). In the validity check, Retta said that this metacode resonated strongly with her. Retta stressed that sojourners need people in their lives who have the proper context, who can understand. Others also illustrated the therapeutic effect of talking about their experiences.

Jessie described the complexities of communication's influence when asked to elaborate on her tendency to self-edit.

> *Jessie*: And then all of a sudden it just came to me that, again, it's back to that whole, that whole I've done so much. I've seen so much. And that's, well I think because I don't talk about it … I kind-of buried it. And now suddenly, you know, this is the situation with the [local organization] and I started feeling, I have to be bummed out about this whole, you know, being excluded. All of a sudden it just, it helps me. All of a sudden it was like, I don't need that to confirm who I am and whether I'm successful or not, … But I think, probably, if I had the ability to talk about the things, my overseas experience, my feeling poorly about myself probably would never have happened.
>
> *Saul*: you know, talking about the experiences is also helping you to recall the good times, etc. etc. … but, in reality, it's a form of therapy. But we probably wouldn't have identified it as such.

The opportunity to communicate apparently does influence the returned expatriate's feelings about the repatriation process, although it is not always easy to either recognize or describe its effect. These returned expatriates expressed a variety of opinions concerning the influence of communication, sometimes contained within one story. Communication connects them to others and helps keep their memories alive.

*Build Connections*

Several respondents described how they were able to connect to, and felt closer to, others who would listen. Uma and Opal stated that they were not as close to those who did not understand or were not interested. They gravitated towards people who could relate. Vera

simply said, "I think I am closer with people who showed more interest." Opal explained it saying,

> ***Opal:*** I think it's important to find people you can connect with about it. And, like, I'd have to say my close friend I have here in La Crosse, I've learned a lot about Japan from her since I've been back. … It's an ongoing thing. And I think the time spent abroad, that experience shouldn't be put in a pretty box and put on a shelf and , you know, glanced at occasionally. It should be (pause) it should be shared with others.

This is another category that was stressed as important advice for new returnees – to build connections with people who can understand.

*Isolation*

Not all respondents found the opportunities for communication to build connections. Some respondents said that when they could not share, they felt isolated. For example, Hazel described feelings of loneliness and isolation after her return to the U.S. When asked about whether having people to talk to had an effect, Lisa said that it definitely made adjustment easier. She added that if the people had not been there, she would have sought them out. Denise also looked for opportunities to share. Caleb expressed his feelings of isolation, stating how he felt devalued or dismissed (note the connections to the metacode under RQ2).

> ***Caleb:*** You're not going to go into quarantine, and then you're not going to go in front of the board of scientists who want to pick your brain about everything you say, which is exactly what I wanted people to do. I wanted it too. I have a sense that that's why travel books are written. Because these people are so eager to relate what happened to them that they create a whole book out of it. It's such a human need we have to tell stories. And then to try to shape the process, and assimilate what has happened to us, to keep

telling the story again and that way putting it into some order in our mind. And when I couldn't do that, I felt like I had been devalued or dismissed in some way.

Therefore, while a few of the returned sojourners were indifferent about the influence of communication, the majority of the respondents positioned communication as a valuable component of their readjustment experience. As mentioned before, several of these elements are reflected in the advice respondents said they would offer to other returnees. These suggestions and more are highlighted in the following section.

## Advice for Returnees

The last question requested advice for other sojourners who are preparing to return to the United States, particularly after their first international experience. This category draws upon 63 codes and 160 statements. Constant comparison's methodological emphasis on the importance of accounting for 'outliers' or singular responses (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Silverman, 2003) framed the development of the final eight metacodes, even though there are only small, nuanced differences between some of the metacodes.

As stated earlier, toward the end of the interview, respondents were asked to offer advice to a hypothetical first-time returnee, particularly advice about communication. The specific recommendations that related to talking about the overall experience developed into the following metacodes:

1. *Build Support Group*: find people with whom to share and create a support group.

2. *Don't Withdraw*: stay connected with friends and family, and maintain international friendships.

3. *Find Opportunities to Share*: sharing can aid adjustment and help preserve memories.

4. *Use Technology*:  use the Internet and other technology to stay connected.

5. *Develop the Right Attitude*:  maintain a positive, proactive attitude.

6. *Learn What to Expect*:  be prepared for disinterest, disillusionment, and communication challenges upon your return.

7. *Gauge Audience*:  test the waters and measure the audience's interest.

8. *Focus on the Present*:  be willing to listen to others because they want to talk about their lives just as you do about yours.

Those who had experienced several sojourns or had researched the re-entry process before their return pointed out that many of these warnings and suggestions could be found in anecdotal accounts of the readjustment experience.  They discussed reading books or talking with other returnees that offered similar suggestions.  Tara and Lisa discussed specific situations where they worked with or knew someone who did not heed these warnings:

*Tara*:  Well, the woman that I'm thinking of in particular is quite an extrovert and a real talker, and if there is a pause in any conversation or a quiet moment she immediately has to start talking because it makes her uncomfortable. So I have tried to say to her, don't be surprised if your friends don't wanna hear this or find interest, don't appear interested. You know, I've tried to say those experiences are yours, and they've made you who you are.  And don't be upset or, or disappointed.  She didn't hear me...

*Lisa*:  Well, I'd tell them that the best thing to do is to try not stay home.  And to try to become involved, try to find someone that you can connect with, who's had a similar experience.  And talk to them.  And try not to just, because I have someone here I know who has basically just withdrawn into their, and now they are returning overseas.  I mean, I think staying home and just brooding about the things you might not like here and that

you miss would be the worst thing to do.  I think talking through it all, talking to people who have done a similar thing would probably be the most helpful.  Maybe writing a journal, writing it down in a journal, and trying to get involved with some things in your town.  But then also, I think, not losing, try not to lose contact with the people that you left behind.  That you left behind at the country that you came back from.  Because I think that could, maybe not affect you right [away], but will be, a year later or a year and a half later, could be a real, sad, sad point of your return, when you realize what you've done.

One important subtheme is that is it important and valuable to talk about experiences and find others to support readjustment.  A lot of the onus of an effective readjustment is placed on the returning sojourner.  Beth, Retta, Jessie, Nick, and Saul were among the ten individuals who emphasized the need to share only when interest is expressed.  Sally, Wanda, Isaac and others stressed that returnees need to focus their conversations on the things that interest their listeners instead of the returnees simply trying to get the listeners to focus on their own interests. The following quotes from Saul and George illustrate the majority of the suggestions that formed these eight metacodes:

*Saul*:  Good question.  If I was single when I came back, I probably wouldn't talk to anybody about it other than the readjustment phase would be talking to people who've had similar experiences… and not really knowing what we were doing and trying to, you know, talking about the experiences is also helping you to recall the good times, etc. etc.

*George*:  And I just would say, enjoy it.  Enjoy it.  Enjoy it with your family.  Enjoy it with yourselves.  And don't let other people that's not interested in it bother ya.  Yeah.  Yeah.  Just because there are people who just don't get why would they want to do that?

Oh.  I would say what you have to do is if someone's interested in it, they will ask you questions about it, and they will let you know they're interested.  If someone's not interested in it, they'll let you know by not asking questions and changing the subject or maybe even avoiding you when they see you coming (laughs a little) there, 'I don't wanna talk to this guy about it…' and, You just gotta to be sensitive.  You just have to enjoy if for yourself.   Be sensitive to people, be able to discern when somebody wants to know about it they'll ask you about it.  And as you meet new people, we have people at our house and they see things, and they go, 'oh where'd you get this?' and we say, 'oh we were in the Netherlands for three years,' 'oh, wow!'  'tell me about that' and you get to tell them about it.  But I think it was probably the hardest for the kids, because they, the other kids can't relate at all.

The suggestions offered to new returnees focused on actions and attitudes.  Attitudes encompassed being prepared for the foci of conversations, and having appropriate expectations and emotions.  The actions either focused on finding opportunities to share or suggested methods for sharing. Lisa, Beth, Denise, Caleb, and Opal all talked about how they needed to share their experiences.  As discussed earlier, Saul described sharing as a "form of therapy" that aided adjustment and helped preserve memories.  They would agree with the conclusion that communication is valuable for effective readjustment.

## Summary of Research Results

When people return from living in a foreign country, many of them express a desire to talk about their experiences, according to the respondents in this study.  If they do not have a receptive audience for these stories, readjustment to the U.S. can be more emotionally challenging.  For the returned sojourner, these 'foreign' experiences are the norm.  Sharing helps

them remember their experiences, build or re-build connections with like-minded people, and process their emotions. Returned sojourners report that the primary reasons their stories are not well received are either a lack of context on the part of the audience, lack of interest, or both.

Effective communication is valuable for an effective readjustment, but is not always easy to achieve. Jessie felt that sharing would have prevented her poor self image after her return. The majority of the sojourners described the communication encounters they experienced as being negative, resulting in the metacodes of *disengagement* and *disconnection*. Two of the dominant topics of conversation, *real life overseas* and *new understandings*, were also found in the types of information that was harder to share. Five people expressed frustration and three others voiced feelings of depression related to the readjustment process.

Although not everyone felt that communication was an issue, Travis realized that his experiences working with an international department were quite different from those of his wife, who was a homemaker. The range of topics, listener responses, and types of encounters all contribute to the complexity of the influence of communication on the readjustment process. The advice offered by the respondents underlines the importance of this communication to help preserve memories, process the new challenges, and build community and connections.

Follow-up Study/Validity Check

All four of the participants in the validity check, Kevin, Opal, Isaac, and Retta, affirmed that the results summary (see Appendix C) reflected their experience and that of others they knew. All of Kevin and Opal's responses were coded as agreement. Opal started out by saying, "This is spot on." Kevin said that he was in complete agreement. Isaac expressed qualified agreement. He pointed out that not all of the perspectives reflected his own experience.

However, later Isaac stressed that he could see himself saying the same things others were reported to have said. He summed everything up by saying:

> ***Isaac***: …there is nothing that doesn't resonate with me. It all just makes perfect, it all seems completely reasonable that someone, somewhere would have experienced what you're recording.

Retta expressed qualified disagreement at the beginning. She felt that it was always possible to find someone who could relate, but acknowledged that people living in a smaller community might not find someone as easily. However, she spent most of the interview delineating specific areas with which she was in full agreement, such as the need to adjust to the audience (*adjustment*) and the feeling that sharing was "*therapeutic*."

Different metacodes were stressed by different respondents in the validity check. The only metacodes emphasized by more than one respondent were: *lack of context; lack of interest; build connections; feeling isolated;* and *therapeutic*. None of the respondents felt a need to comment about the types of things that people shared. Instead, they concentrated on the other areas: listeners' responses, types of encounters, communication effects, and advice for other repatriates. More of their quotations will be included in the next chapter as they relate to the discussion about what these results could mean.

The results are complex, and are related to a complex process: re-entry adjustment. The next chapter will summarize and clarify the results and make proposals for future studies.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to explore the role of communication in the readjustment process for individuals returning to the U.S. after being posted overseas for their jobs. The respondents were asked about the stories they told of their life in another country, the situations in which they shared information about that experience on their return, and the outcomes they perceived from those disclosures. Responses from these 24 returned sojourners reflected the complexity evident in readjustment literature. Ultimately, this study confirmed the importance of communication, and specifically opportunities to talk about one's experience, in the readjustment process.

Humans by are innately storytellers. Research demonstrates, and this study confirms, that people use communication to manage change and clarify their personal identities and cultural insights. Literature on self-disclosure emphasizes both the emotional and physical benefits of sharing experiences and emotions. When positive responses, or social support, are not received by people who choose to self-disclose, the results can lead to depression and disease (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Uchino et al., 1996). This tendency to feel depression when lacking positive responses after attempting to share experiences was also recognized by several respondents. They described the experience of talking about their experiences with a receptive audience as therapeutic, and they associated the lack of those opportunities with depression. The respondents described even more, focusing on the benefits of sharing in managing the anxiety and uncertainty associated with their return. This reflects the premises of Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) (Gudykunst, 1983). They also talked about other topics, such as redefining their goals, that go beyond either the self-disclosure or AUM literature.

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Other benefits of sharing were identified, including its role in preserving memories and building interpersonal connections. The benefits associated with preserving memories confirms earlier research on the effects of sharing positive experiences (Gable et al., 2004). Additionally, these responses support and expand research having to do with the effects of the lack of positive, constructive responses to attempts to share (Gable et al., 2004). Connections between self-disclosure and building relationships, as well as the importance of social support, are also reflected in participants' stories.

This study focuses on communication as the attempt to talk about, or share, experiences pertaining to overseas and readjustment experiences. These experiences are often shared in the form of stories. The stories respondents told included the effect of the transitions on family members, personal careers, or partners' careers. The returned sojourners also talked about their lives overseas, international and national norms, challenges experienced during readjustment, and new understandings developed before and during the readjustment process. These topics emerged as the respondents described their attempts to talk about these experiences with others.

Respondents identified the people with whom it was easier to share. However, the characterization or description of those individuals differed from those reported by Martin (1986) and Wilson (1993) from their student respondents. According to the current respondents, the receptivity of the listener was a function more of the listener's levels of knowledge and interest than of the type of relationship they had with the returned sojourner. However, the respondents in this study echoed the findings of Sussman (2000) and Uehara (1986) that changes in values and identities presented communication challenges. They also provided insights into additional topics that were problematic. However, when discussing what was easier to share, the respondents moved away from topics, and focused on techniques that enhanced their ability to

share successfully. Respondents also described variations in levels of receptivity when attempting to share their experiences overseas and during the readjustment process. Some focused on the characteristics of the communities in which they lived and their influence on the presence of receptive listeners. Others described the influence of the characteristics of the local organization where they worked. Participant accounts reflected a differentiation between organizational and social support networks. However, they indicated that both networks were integral for readjustment, particularly of the returned employee.

Stories told by these repatriated businesspeople and their accompanying partners both reinforced and expanded the current understanding of the role of communication, or talking about international and repatriation experiences, during the repatriation process. The following sections explore these findings in more depth.

Receptive Audiences

In contrast to reports from students returning from international exchanges that their families were more receptive to stories about their experiences than were their friends (Martin, 1986; Wilson, 1993), the returned professionals and their partners in this study reported that close ties and relationships did not necessarily determine who would be a receptive listener. For these returned sojourners, family members' ability to listen effectively varied as greatly as friends' and acquaintances' responses. For example, interviewees Beth and Abel recounted that one of their sons did not want them to go to France. He had urged them to stay where they could be close to his children, their grandchildren. He had no interest in hearing their stories after their return. Other family members also refused to listen to their experiences. "My dad was in the war in Germany," Beth said, "and he didn't have any desire to listen to [our stories about Europe]. And to this day he doesn't care." On the other hand, Travis and Uma had several

family members who were not only interested in their stories but had also visited them while they lived overseas. Their family members had been exposed to the places and people surrounding them, so Uma and Travis' families also had some context for the stories they told when they returned. That, they said, was what made the difference. It was the degree of interest and contextual understanding rather than the type of relationship that determined who was or was not perceived to be a supportive listener.

It is probable that family members, particularly parents, of students who study abroad are supportive of their international experience. Martin (1986) and Wilson (1993) found this made the students' families a more interested audience. This is likely the case even if they lacked the relevant context. On the other hand, friends who did not choose to study abroad could lack interest as well as context. Therefore, family members would be better listeners than friends. This is not necessarily the case for professionals who plan to work and live overseas for a period of time, leaving family members behind. Their family members may or may not be supportive of their decisions to go. That would mean that a close family member would not automatically provide a receptive audience for the sojourners' stories.

Respondents identified different levels of context and interest as being the most beneficial. While some stated that the primary characteristics of a receptive listener were international experience and curiosity, others did not feel that all international experiences were the same. Thus, the responses from students and international travelers or vacationers who listened to their stories were not as satisfactory as the responses from someone who had lived and worked overseas. Denise described some of the differences, saying,

> I have some very good friends that visited us there, so they are more into talking about it because they were there! And, saw where we lived and we took them around. That's

still a very limited experience for *them*, … so while they're easier to talk to, there's still a limitation.

Wanda, who had returned from Afghanistan, went even further by differentiating among international experiences. Wanda said, "but they [other returned sojourners] had all been to Europe and so it still wasn't my experience, 'cuz they had been to either developed or developing societies, and if you haven't been to an underdeveloped country, that's a different experience." Thus, there were nuances and different levels of understanding that contributed to the level of satisfaction when some of the returned sojourners shared their experiences. So, while individuals with international experiences and interests were considered satisfactory listeners by some returned sojourners, others felt the need for more informed responses.

Like the student sojourners, the professional sojourners talked about their challenges and concerns with finding responsive listeners. The students expressed a strong desire for validation in the form of an understanding and appreciative audience (Smith, 1997). Having opportunities to share helped them clarify their experiences. The returned professionals mirrored these concerns and desires. The returned students, the businesspeople and the accompanying partners all had to navigate the listeners' responses in order to locate those few individuals who would be effective listeners.

While the characteristics of a satisfactory listener varied from respondent to respondent, research indicates that certain types of responses are more satisfactory than others. The respondents in this study defined the situations where they would share as those occasions when the listener asked questions or expressed interest. They desired more than a simple 'oh that is interesting' type of response. They wanted a more active response. Research into sharing positive experiences indicates that active, constructive responses are particularly beneficial for

the person who chooses to self-disclose (Gable et al., 2004). According to Gable et al., a passive response may not be much better than a negative response as far as the discloser is concerned. Therefore, when the returnee perceived listeners' responses as either negative or passive-constructive, they met with poorer outcomes. As a result of a lack of context, it could be challenging for U.S.-based listeners to provide an active-constructive response even when they are trying to be supportive. The returned sojourners in this study often stated that curiosity was a rare response. They were more frequently met with active disinterest, a decided negative response, or limited interest. Limited interest would likely be perceived as a passive response.

The respondents understood that their listeners often lacked context and interest. They did not see the listeners as bad people, or even poor listeners in general. They often went so far as to provide explanations for this behavior. As Kevin said,

> …and these are not stupid or ignorant people that I speak to, but people who do not have international awareness nor geography appreciation, put it that way. And I would have considered myself 15 years ago not much different than that.

This tendency to explain the lack of an appreciative response does not mitigate the negative feelings associated with such a response (Gable, et al., 2004). Even if returnees understand why they are receiving a negative or passive reaction, an active, constructive response remains the most satisfactory and beneficial response. In addition, the respondents identified sharing with people who have some level of context with which to understand the international experience as particularly satisfying.

These returned sojourners identified the type of listener who provided the most satisfactory response. They also identified the types of information which were harder to share, and what they did to help facilitate the sharing process.

Accessible Experiences

When the respondents discussed what was easier or harder to share, they divided the two categories loosely into techniques (easier to share) and topics (harder to share). The topics were often not only challenging to explain to 'typical' listeners; they were also sometimes a challenge for the sojourners to delineate for themselves. For example, Mike discussed the challenges he faced at work when trying to talk about how things had been done overseas. Mike said,

> …if we're dealing with some sort of business issue here, and it's difficult to get across why you might think you would want to take a different sort of interpretation of something, or a different course of action. It's just always hard to get that across, you know, why you're thinking the way you do.

The complexities and nuances of the situation also present a challenge, as Edward described, "I'm trying to figure out how to summarize this without a four-hour dissertation." Saul also presented an example of the challenges of expressing some of the changes, saying,

> I don't know if the word 'privilege' is the right word, or 'perspective' … you do think a little bit differently. And what that is, that's too hard for me to define, but whether it's an appreciation for others; whether it's a desire to go do things no matter what the circumstances are… I don't know. I don't know. My wife is much better at explaining things, communicating things, than I am in that regard.

Other respondents discussed the challenges of contradicting listeners' beliefs about a country, the extent of the influence of their international experiences (i.e., value change), details of their daily lives and their reasons for going overseas.

Previous studies have identified value changes and identity changes as areas that complicate readjustment and are hard to share (Sussman, 2000; Uehara, 1986). They are also

areas that often do not become evident until after reentry, when the returned sojourner faces daily adaptation to home cultural norms. Chai (2001) argued that the sojourner has a need to see these changed values and identities as something timeless, not some short-term cultural adaptation. Thus, when faced with the shock of now unfamiliar home culture norms, the returnee tries to restore consistency. It is this need to adjust to former, pre-sojourn assumptions that brings the changes up to the level of awareness (Uehara, 1986). It also causes many sojourners to feel like foreigners in their former homes (Wilson, 1993).

Many of the techniques the sojourners used for successful communication reflected their awareness of the listeners' context and level of understanding. Most of the respondents stressed the need they felt to gauge their audience before deciding how or whether to share. If interest was indicated, or the topic flowed with the conversation, then the returnee should share. If interest was not expressed, or no questions were asked, then the respondents reported staying silent about their experiences. The respondents talked about connecting the known with the unknown, using casual snippets of information (anecdotes), and building context. Opal said, "I share it through food, you know, I love to make Japanese food, and that's how I introduce it." Others would share with people who were planning a move or a vacation overseas.

One metacode in this category tied directly into boundary or impression management (Affifi & Guerrero, 1998; Gibbs, Ellison & Heino, 2006). Some respondents reported that they would decontextualize their experiences in order to not sound as if they were 'showing off.' In other words, they would remove the foreign elements that make the story more inaccessible for some listeners. Tara described the process, saying,

Often times in conversation I will say something like 'this is an experience that I had…,'

and I don't necessarily tell people that we were pick-pocketed in Prague. I'll just say,

'there was this experience where my husband and I were getting on a bus and this guy tried to pick-pocket us.' So, it, see what I'm saying? I'm taking that other dimension out of it.

When Vera discussed this technique, she highlighted the impression management portion, saying, "you can have an experience, but if you start waving places, I don't think it's polite to do that." While only a few respondents describe this specific technique, several were concerned with not sounding elitist when sharing their international experiences.

While the respondents highlighted their international experiences as integral to their lives, they did not want those experiences to build a wall between themselves and others who had not spent much, if any, time overseas. Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, and Galois (1998) described this situation when talking about boundary management. Respondents wanted their boundaries to be flexible, and to share information that would create connections. They did not wish to appear to be 'a show-off.' They stressed that communication can be used to find common ground. Other scholars connect the necessities of impression management (attempting to create a positive image with others) as driving communication choices (Affifi & Guerrero, 1998; Gibbs, Ellison & Heino, 2006). That is the case with these respondents, who consciously chose to frame their stories in such a way as to be less intimidating, and more accessible, to their listeners.

The respondents described the most satisfactory type of listener, what information was challenging to share, and how they constructed their messages to make them more accessible, and acceptable, to their listeners. As Vera said, "You've just got to make sure that the communication is desired and helps you and helps the other person." Another important area of concern was what the act of satisfactory sharing did for the respondent, specifically which benefits might be accrued.

Benefits of Communication

[There is an] assumption that individuals decide what, how and to whom they are going

to disclose and that this decision is based on an evaluation of the possible rewards, versus

the possible risks of disclosing in any specific social situation (Omarzu, 2000, p. 177).

As Omarzu (2000) describes, the decision to share information is strategic. Individuals

decide when, what and with whom to share based on the perceived benefits they derive from that

communication. The respondents in this study highlighted several benefits: the preservation of

memories, building connections with others, and feelings that satisfactory sharing was

therapeutic.

*Preserving Memories*

Some respondents noted that sharing their international experiences helped them

remember the experiences better. One respondent bemoaned the fact that as a result of her lack

of opportunities to share, her memories were fading. While describing the importance of talking

about international experiences, Lisa said,

Umm, well, I would tell [new returnees] that I think it's important no matter how they do

it, because if you don't communicate the experience, it can get the whole experience, the

experience of coming back, of returning …. it will recede as if it disappears.

Even when offering advice for newly returned sojourners, the respondents stressed the

importance of sharing for retaining memories. Saul stressed that "…talking about the

experiences is also helping you to recall the good times." Memory is tied into keeping the good

times fresh, learning from challenges and simply not allowing the memories to fade away. It was

important to not lose the memories. It was also important to build and rebuild satisfying

relationships, which was something else the respondents connected to being able to share their experiences.

*Build/Re-build Connections*

In addition to highlighting the preservation of memories as a benefit, respondents reported feeling closer to the people who were responsive listeners. They sought out other returned sojourners and resident internationals, since they would have a certain degree of shared experiences. After her return from Europe, Vera described the type of person to whom she felt closer saying,

> I think that it's, um, that I have a different bond with a friend that I'm renewing, if I'm able to really [tell her] what life is like, or what my life was like, or just pull any of those experiences out to add into a conversation and, and you kind-of lean toward the friends that you can do that with.

Uma described the importance of building connections. While talking about having found some internationals, and forming a playgroup with them, Uma said, "[having] the international playgroups [was important]. Because for me that was, um, it made my repatriation a lot easier."

The returned sojourners did not focus exclusively on building connections with other like-minded individuals. They also stressed the importance of talking about current events, or topics of interest to the listener, as being important for building and rebuilding relationships. Jessie recognized the importance of listening to others. She said, "And so I need to be open-minded and listen as well, and I try to recognize that sometimes, I'm just like (laughs), 'Boundary waters, great!' Or, 'Red Wing, yeah, big deal!'" In order to build connections, it was important to relate to the interests of those around her, to recognize that the other person's stories

are also valuable.  To find good listeners, they said, they needed to remember to be good listeners themselves.

*Therapeutic*

In addition to preserving memories and building, or rebuilding, connections with others, respondents identified a third benefit.  Saul described having opportunities to communicate his experiences as "a form of therapy."  When talking about his desire to share his experiences, Caleb said,

> Yeah, it was just frustrating and depressing that the story could not be told.  And the moments of pleasure were the moments when I could say something to someone who would understand.  As far as how [not having opportunities to share] has affected the reentry it was, uh, it was just a frustrating kind of a depressive note upon which to begin your new life back in the country.

One desire when sharing a positive event is to elicit active engagement and enthusiasm. Felicia, Opal, Jessie, Abel, Mike, Kevin, and Hazel all recounted feeling confirmed when they had opportunities to share their positive experiences, or the feeling of loss when they lacked those opportunities.  Their responses resonate with the positive effects of social support.  When describing her feelings of depression after her return, Jessie said, "But I think, probably, if I had the ability to talk about the things, you know, my overseas experience.  My feeling, uh, poorly about myself probably would never have happened."  Social support provides relief of distress, and helps people define their self-concepts (Omarzu, 2000).  These insights coincide with the respondents' descriptions of talking about their experiences as a form a therapy.

However, managing depression and poor self-image were not the only concerns. Denise's company did not have a specific job or position for her upon her return.  She not only

had to make sense of her international experiences, she had to 'fight' to regain an acceptable position in her sending organization.   Denise said,

> That was very hard, because it was a handicap when the time came to gain a foothold again, at another job, and I suffered for that.  And had that perception that 'oh here is the stuff is on hold; give her this stuff and she'll have to do it.'  I had to fight to get out of that.

In addition to supporting role negotiation, talking about experiences can help the returned sojourner develop plausible explanations for the differences in their work situation, such as the different levels of autonomy that were experienced in the national and international work environments.  For Tara, one of the biggest challenges after her return was finding her new niche.  Tara said, "figuring out what I was going to do with my life when I came back, because when we were in England, I decided that I was going to live a different life when I came back."  Both formal and informal roles may be adjusted to changes in work and social environments, as well as to personal changes (Vause & Wiemann, 1981).

Respondents noted that the need to change quickly and the scope of their changes was a big contrast to what they experienced when they went overseas.  As Edward said,

> They allowed me two and a half months to get ready to go, but when I get back they expect you to have your whole life back in place in thirty days, and, you know, off of their gravy train. There was a complete support staff, moving to Dubai, to help you. There was a complete support staff moving to the Netherlands to help you.  There was no support staff coming back.   There was just HR, and they didn't understand you in the first place.

The lack of understanding and support placed the responsibility for managing the change completely in the hands of the returned sojourner. As a result, the sojourner may feel foreign and uncertain in this formerly familiar environment where they once knew the norms and expectations. Mike said, "I guess I would say that you need to be…ah… you have probably a number of things that end up being different or they're not as you sort of expect." Kevin considered what it might have been like if he had not had the people at work with whom to talk about the different challenges:

> Maybe a little more, maybe a little more difficult; just [having] somebody's shoulder to say, "Gee I just came back and it cost 30% more to buy a house here." And my old boss, who came back a year and half [before] said, "Yeah, it's the same kind of deal." Or we came back, we had to buy a house, two cars, and everything to put in the house, because we have literally sold everything …. Or the challenges of what school is [best] for the kids and can they get registered' and concerns my spouse and I had beforehand…. And to talk to other families who have gone through that, or at least have an appreciation of that challenge, was helpful.

> Felicia described the process of returning as

> a lot of it's hard work, but I think it's as hard on the worker and they don't anticipate that because it's been so easy [while overseas]. When workers come back and they're put back into the working environment here… They are pigeonholed. …. We've known a lot of people that just quit, and have gone back overseas, because of the freedom of them being able to, to do everything, you know, and learn more in that other department or whatever.

So some people left the sending organization after being unable to manage the change satisfactorily.

Finally, respondents discussed the differences they discovered in themselves after their return. Mike not only described the differences, but also the way he only came to realize them after his return. Mike said,

> …especially with just your interactions with other people, and you have this whole totally different perspective now. You've made sort of a frame shift in the way you view the world. And that hangs on for a while, and so you really see things with a different eye. And you're not even aware of it, I don't think, yourself. Though that gives you sort of a different perspective on things; you interpret things a little differently, and I think you're sort of surprised a lot by that difference, that you sort of experience them and so I think you have to have some patience for that and be expecting that. I know that's kind of vague, but you just don't realize, I mean I can see it now better looking back.

Mike came to a retrospective understanding of how he had changed while interacting with others, through talking about his experiences.

Communication, or being able to talk about international and readjustment experiences, provides several benefits for returned sojourners. It helps them preserve their memories of their lives overseas. It helps them build connections with others. It is therapeutic, helping the returnee manage emotions such as depression, negotiate their roles and identities, manage uncertainty about what to do after their return, and clarify new perspectives (understandings). These categories that were highlighted by the respondents in this study connect to several theoretical perspectives that identify the benefits of communication: theories such as self-

disclosure, anxiety and uncertainty management (AUM), and sensemaking.  The following

sections explore the relationships between the respondents' revelations and these theories.

## Self-Disclosure

Jourard (1979) described self-disclosure as an attempt to 'uncover' one's self to another

at a pace which is controlled by both parties.  Self-disclosure is sharing information with others

that they would not normally know or discover.  Thus, self-disclosure can be defined as a

strategic decision concerning when and how to reveal, or communicate, one's 'true self' to

another person.  Jourard (1979) stressed that people vary in the rate at which they self-disclose

based on the risk, the perceived consequences of influencing the behavior of others toward

oneself for better or worse.  The boundaries of acceptable disclosures are discovered through

strategic self-disclosure and social interactions (van Boven et al., 2000).  In turn, individuals are

careful and thoughtful when deciding when to reveal their 'true selves' (Jourard, 1979), because

they want to receive confirmation or interpersonal validation after they choose to self-disclose.

Self-disclosure is a means to show other people who they are and what they need (Martin &

Anderson, 1995), but, further, individuals learn about themselves through others' responses to

their words and actions (Mead, 1934).

Research demonstrates that it is the quality, not the quantity, of sharing that determines

satisfaction (Bargh et al., 2002).  Responses from the returned sojourners in this study

highlighted the benefits of self-disclosure for the readjustment process, including the

preservation of memories, building connections, managing emotions such as depression, and

clarifying understandings.

*Preserving Memories*

The preservation of memories has been associated with the sharing of positive events or experiences, which is known as capitalization (Gable et al., 2004). All the respondents in this study described their overseas experiences as beneficial, or positive and valuable experiences. Even when telling stories about the challenges of finding good steaks in The Netherlands or losing power frequently in Venezuela, the respondents stressed the benefits of their time living in another country. Saul said,

…because our experience with the folks and the country, etc. was so gratifying and satisfying, it was as if a kid on Christmas morning comes to the last present and still hasn't gotten what he wanted. You know (snickers), you're still lookin' for it and even though the other presents were nice you still wanted more. And then it's over. So, I guess that's the best way I could describe it.

In their study of capitalization, Gable, et al. (2004) discovered that effective capitalization, that is, sharing positive events, resulted in a stronger memory of the event. While the importance or stressfulness of an event, whether positive or negative, also contributed to enhancing memory, for positive events, the more people who were told, the greater the degree of recall. The respondents in this study echoed these findings by highlighting the preservation of memories as one potential benefit of talking about their experiences. When they lacked the opportunities, they were concerned that their memories would fade. In addition, some respondents stressed the preservation of memories as one of the reasons for new returnees to be sure to find opportunities to talk about their international experiences. This function was considered important enough to be stressed both when discussing the benefits and when giving

advice to new returnees.  Respondents felt the need to preserve their memories through effective self-disclosure.

The connections between the benefits of self-disclosure and the communication benefits described by the respondents did not end with the preservation of memories.  Self-disclosure has also been recognized as being influential in the establishment of close relationships.

*Build/Re-build Connections*

Communication is a central element for satisfaction and a sense of belonging (Kim, 1995).  People use self-disclosure to build intimacy (Omarzu, 2000).  Supportive responses influence not only self-perception but also relational depth (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987).  Langston (1994) put it this way when discussing the sharing of positive events (capitalization), "Positive events can tell us where our skills and talents lie, who among our acquaintances may become our friends, and how we should evaluate ourselves" (p. 112).  In other words, through this type of sharing people can discover who is supportive and receptive.  They can find 'connections.'  Social support provides social capital that builds self-esteem, as well as interpersonal connections (Singh-Manoux & Finkenaur, 2001).  The respondents desired this type of social capital.  As Abel said, "I'd love to have a group of people here that had been there, done that, that we could sit down and talk about it."  Productive self-disclosure can build connections.

As Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008) demonstrated, relationships are the channels for emotional and instrumental support, and positive relationships are vital for effective adjustment and readjustment.  The respondents echoed these findings both in their descriptions of the benefit of building, or rebuilding, relationships, and in the advice given to new returnees to ensure that they did not isolate themselves, but built connections with other people.  As Edward said, "…you

need family or friends that support, that you can talk to. You can't talk to strangers. You can't talk to people that you've only known for three months, unless they have been in the same boat, the same situation."

*Managing Emotions and Change*

In the context of discussing feelings of isolation and depression, respondents described another benefit of communication. They said talking about their experiences could be a form of therapy. Effective self-disclosure has been shown to promote good physical and mental health (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Uchino et al., 1996). If they do not disclose, then people experience stress, both mentally and physically, stress that can lead to depression (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Talking about an important event helps people process that event and its implications (Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001). Social support received via positive responses to disclosure helps individuals adapt to change (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987), helping them cope with negative events, and capitalize on positive events.

*Clarifying New Perspectives*

It is through interactions with others that individuals discover new meanings by moving unconscious understanding up to the level where they can consciously understand and express them (Kompridis, 1994). This act is part of the experience that clarifies 'novel facts and truths' (Dewey, 1920 as cited in Kompridis, 1994). Self-disclosure then can serve not only to reinforce a sense of self, but also to help individuals recognize changed perspectives about themselves and the world in which they live. Other theoretical frames illuminate the influence of communication on the repatriation process.

Anxiety and Uncertainty Management

Uncertainty reduction theory has been used to frame several readjustment studies (Black & Gregerson, 1990, 1991). Further, an expansion of this theory, anxiety and uncertainty management (AUM), specifically addresses cultural adjustment and communication issues (Gudykunst, 1983). AUM positions communication accounts as the tool used to manage anxiety and uncertainty while adjusting to a foreign culture, trying to find a balance between too much and too little of either (Gudykunst, 1988, 1995). While AUM is focused on interactions between native and non-native participants, the centering of sharing experiences for the adjustment process is equally applicable to readjustment. The availability of someone to talk with who understands the situation not only helps manage the changes but also helps control the associated anxiety and uncertainty.

In addition to managing uncertainty and anxiety, sharing experiences provides the returned sojourners with a mean to clarify their understandings and the current interpersonal exchanges. They attempt to 'make sense' of the current experience as it relates to their past experiences. Sensemaking is another theory that reinforces communication's role in managing change.

Sensemaking

Culture shock is an "emotional manifestation of sensemaking in operation" (Glanz, Williams, & Hoeksema, 2001, p. 106). Returned sojourners have left situations where complexity is the norm. They return to situations with different expectations and demands on their time and expertise. Zikic and Richardson (2007) wrote that sensemaking "… may be understood as a coping mechanism involving the collection of information about the self (self-exploration) and the environment (environmental exploration) relevant to the progress of one's

career" (p. 60). Events trigger a need for explanation, and sensemaking allows for a consistent, positive self-concept.

If sensemaking can be viewed as a method whereby active agents "structure the unknown" (Weick, 1995, p. 104), then it is a process that the sojourner employed constantly while overseas, and continues to use after his or her return. Thus, some of the processes and benefits of sensemaking join with those of self-disclosure and AUM during the repatriation process. Sensemaking also aids people in managing change, negotiating identity, and clarifying new understandings.

Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obtsfeld (2005) said that researchers should "treat sensemaking as reciprocal exchanges between actors (Enactment) and their environments (Ecological Change) that are made meaningful (Selection) and preserved (Retention)" (p. 414). Caleb described the retrospective aspects of discovery. Caleb said,

> I think T. S. Eliot's got this poem, I can't remember the last two lines, but it's something like, that you know it for the first time. You come back, and you see, you see what you've always been looking at it before but you see it like the way an outsider would see it.

 In other words, people learn what they think by looking back. So, in addition to managing change, they also gain greater understanding or their new understandings. Weick (1995) also positioned sensemaking as a method whereby people learn what they think by hearing what they say – and it can only happen retrospectively.

The respondents discussed the need to manage the changes that had occurred in themselves, their family and friends, and the United States while they were gone. They had to learn to cope with formerly familiar surroundings that have become strange. Sensemaking

organizes flux (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obtsfeld, 2005).  It begins when people notice differences and bracket them or set them apart mentally.  When expectations are violated, the world becomes less familiar, and sensemaking occurs to deal with unfulfilled expectations and ambiguities.

The outcomes of sensemaking, the understandings gained from the process, are frozen moments in a continuous, ongoing process (Glanz et al., 2001).  It is a process that a person experiences as process but can only understand retrospectively.

Within the theory of sensemaking, sojourners' identities, or how they see themselves, lie in the hands of others (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obtsfeld, 2005).

Who we think we are (Identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (Image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity  (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obtsfeld, 2005, p. 416).

Denise fought to stabilize her identity after her return.  During her fight for her organizational role after returning from overseas, she was engaged in sensemaking, redefining her place within the organization, and managing her sense of self, which did not fit the position into which management initially pigeonholed her.  Felicia described returned sojourners that she knew who had left their sending organization because of being 'pigeonholed' after their return to the states.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) states that as people differentiate themselves from others, they discover the groups with which they identify.  Individuals seek a positive social identity derived from positive social comparisons of their ingroups with others' outgroups.  Lacking positive comparisons, they will either change groups or attempt to establish a different positive identity for their existing group membership.  When individuals succeed in making sense of changes and their new place in the organization, it contributes to successful

readjustment, and possibly to retention of the employee.  When sensemaking fails then the employee may leave the organization.

A common theme in the 'new understandings' metacode was respondents' view of the U.S. culture in a new way, through 'new eyes.'  Several respondents stated that amidst appreciation of the conveniences found in the U.S., they noticed ethnocentric and commercialistic characteristics that they did not like.  Distinct changes occurred during most of their sojourns, all of which began before 9/11 and ended after that tragedy.  There was a greater degree of patriotism.  They found that news reports were focused primarily on domestic matters, with few reports involving more widespread international issues.  Commercialism and consumerism were evident, as was a return to a feeling of the 'rat race.'  Opal noted that "Overseas, people work to live, in the U.S., people live to work."

The returned sojourners used aspects of sensemaking, self-disclosure, and AUM to help them manage the various stresses and changes they encountered after their return.  They wanted opportunities to share, to talk about their experiences.  When those opportunities were available, it helped them manage uncertainty and identity, manage emotional outcomes, and clarify their new understandings.  When those opportunities were not present, the respondents described feelings of isolation and disengagement.

Feelings of Isolation

When describing how it felt to not have opportunities to share, respondents used terms like depression, isolation, and loneliness.  Hazel said, "The biggest challenge is just understanding that they don't, they aren't gonna understand, and so it gets to be kind-of lonely that way because I think as a woman who (clears throat), um, it does get a little bit lonely."  Denise also said, when talking about her lack of connections, "there was a very long, lonely

period there." Many respondents said that they felt foreign after their return. Wanda said, "It's my home, but I don't feel at home here. You know. But I feel at home in an environment where I'm a total stranger, and they don't understand that." Describing what it was like to not have any opportunities to communicate, Abel said, "I wasn't even asked stupid questions. That was how shut out we were." These feelings of loneliness, dismissal, and isolation were the result of the lack of opportunities to share. Although many respondents reported these feelings, some felt that having opportunities to talk about their experiences was not an issue. They did not feel the lack of those opportunities.

## Unexamined Effects

Six respondents reported no need to share, or they 'could talk about it any time' they wished. Most of these individuals had returned to a more diverse U.S. community or were working in a department with an international focus. Tara, who was not in either situation, described herself as an introvert. Tara said, "Well. I am pretty careful about who I choose to be around, to spend my time with. I mean, I've always been that way. I don't have tons of friends. I'm much more of an introvert than an extrovert." She did not feel a need to share very often. The only other exception, Isaac, stated that his conversations after his return tended to be focused on his retirement more than his time overseas. While discussing his frequent visits home, Isaac went on to say, "I've not felt a great overarching need to talk about it 'cause I don't ever feel like I was completely disconnected." He added, "I guess some people process the change by talking about it. I hadn't."

Isaac and Tara were in the minority. The majority of those who did not feel the lack of opportunities to share were in situations where they had frequent opportunities to share with others who had common interests and experiences. Travis was one of those who said he could
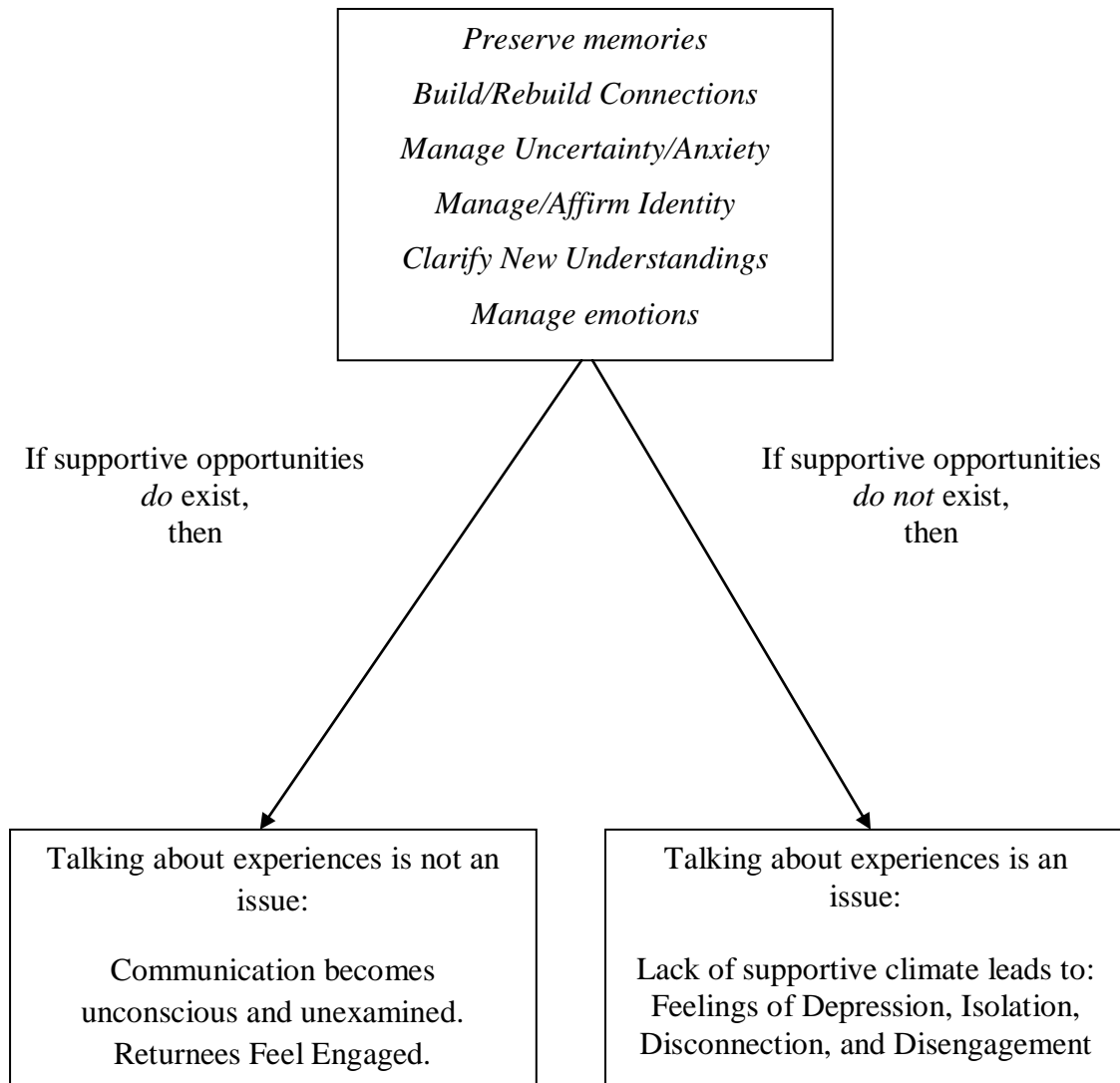
talk about his experiences any time he wished.  However, while listening to his wife describe her readjustment experiences, Travis realized that her experiences were not the same as his.  Travis said, "I think it was more of an adjustment for you [Uma]."  Later in the interview, Uma spoke about some of her communication challenges, and Travis realized, "That's an item I didn't notice one iota, but clearly you did."   Since communication was providing the benefits he needed, he was not consciously aware of its influence.  That is likely true for others who were working in international departments or living in diverse situations.  In the validity check, Retta noted that the experiences of those living in smaller communities may have differed from her experience in the big city.  While she felt as if she frequently had opportunities to share, and it was not much of a challenge, she saw how others may not have had the same opportunities.

Having opportunities for satisfying self-disclosure, engaging in sensemaking, and enacting anxiety and uncertainty management are integral parts of a satisfactory readjustment, according to these sojourners.  When opportunities are absent, the sojourner becomes aware of the lack while when opportunities are present, the sojourner may be unaware of their functions.

The theories of self-disclosure, AUM, and sensemaking frame distinct functions that can result from successful attempts to share.  When sharing is not successful, the functions are not serving their purposes.  That is when the returned sojourners become aware of the need to communicate, or talk about their experiences.  When sharing is successful, the functions are serving their purpose.  In this case, the sojourners may not be aware of the influence effective communication has had on their readjustment.  The following model illustrates the relationship between the potential functions and their presence or absence:

Functional Model: Sharing Experiences during Readjustment

Sharing experiences can function to:

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│         Preserve memories            │
│      Build/Rebuild Connections       │
│     Manage Uncertainty/Anxiety       │
│       Manage/Affirm Identity         │
│     Clarify New Understandings       │
│         Manage emotions              │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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If supportive opportunities
*do* exist,
then

If supportive opportunities
*do not* exist,
then

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Talking about experiences   │    │  Talking about experiences  │
│ is not an issue:            │    │  is an issue:               │
│                             │    │                             │
│ Communication becomes       │    │ Lack of supportive climate  │
│ unconscious and unexamined. │    │ leads to: Feelings of       │
│ Returnees Feel Engaged.     │    │ Depression, Isolation,      │
│                             │    │ Disconnection, and          │
│                             │    │ Disengagement               │
└─────────────────────────────┘    └─────────────────────────────┘
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These functions may not be equally important to every returned sojourner. Some returnees may need certain functions more than others, just as introverts and extroverts practice different levels of self-disclosure. This study indicates that these functions are important for returnees in varying degrees, and if these functions were not being enacted then the respondents felt their absence.

Theoretical Implications

Satisfactory readjustment is influenced by the presence or absence of the functions of sharing experiences during the re-entry process. For many returned sojourners, a central contribution to adjustment at home is being able to talk about their international experiences. This aspect of the readjustment process has been largely absent in research and literature. While uncertainty reduction has been recognized as influential during the readjustment process, the importance of effective self-disclosure, anxiety and uncertainty management, impression management, and sensemaking for satisfactory readjustment has not been highlighted previously.

The implications of this study focus on the importance of communication, specifically the opportunities to share one's experiences, for the readjustment process. While there is no evidence that sharing experiences, both those from overseas and those related to readjustment, would shorten the process of readjustment, respondents in this study described how an active, supportive climate for sharing enhanced their emotional satisfaction and how its absence was associated with depression, feelings of isolation, and lack of appreciation.

Practical Implications

Practically, organizations should provide opportunities for returned sojourners to share their experiences and make sure that the expertise developed while overseas is acknowledged, appreciated and applied effectively after their return. Companies continue to invest more in the preparation of employees for the overseas assignment while neglecting efforts toward a successful reentry (Stafford, 2005; Tyler, 2006). According to one survey, only 49 percent of multi-national companies have repatriation programs (Tyler, 2006). Research has continually re-emphasized the challenges of reentry, the importance of the trailing spouse or partner, and the correlation between expectations and actual experiences (Lineham & Scullion, 2002). The

respondents in this study were asked to relate their experiences at work as well as at home. Several of the employees expressed challenges inherent when returning to a domestic-minded organization. Many of the employees and accompanying partners highlighted the lack of appreciation or understanding apparent in their sending organization, whether or not the organization expressed an international focus. If an organization says they value international experience, but the returned employees do not see evidence that their experience is valued, then they are likely to feel frustration and possibly leave the company.

In earlier studies such as Forster (1994), several factors were discovered that helped predict retention of employees: length of time abroad, unrealistic expectations, and negative perception of help and support after the return. Felicia described her husband's experiences after his return, saying, "… if you do try to talk about what you've accomplished, it's not good. They will cut you." Able also expressed his frustration when he said, "They didn't want to accept some of the new things that personally my group [overseas] developed which were better than anything we had here." It is possible that the perceived absence of support and acceptance for the returnee's international identity and skills could lead to their departure. In other words, if they can't make sense of their personal identity within the organizational identity, it could lead them to find a place where they do fit in another organization. However, that can only be hypothesized since most of the respondents were trying to work within their sending organizations and not disclosing any plans to leave. The majority of references to people leaving the sending organization after their return were about other people the respondents had known who did this.

International businesses have increased their efforts to help returnees readjust, using techniques such as debriefing, mentorship programs, repatriation courses, and spousal assistance

(Hurn, 1999). However, many employees still bemoaned the absence of such programs in their companies (Stafford, 2005). While corporations recognize the need to help sojourners with international adjustment, they continue to be less aware of the challenges of domestic readjustment (Tyler, 2006). Edward described how he had a complete support staff when he moved to Dubai and The Netherlands, but no support staff to help with his return to the states. He expressed the contrast, saying, "they allowed me two and a half months to get ready to go, but when I get back they expect you to have your whole life back in place in thirty days."

Even when there is some type of support for the return, it is not always sufficient. Cox (2004) stressed that while organizational debriefing has a positive influence on the readjustment process, it did not decrease emotional distress. Debriefing by itself will not provide opportunities for communication to fulfill its functions. There need to be opportunities in both the organization and the community for the returned sojourner to receive active, constructive responses when trying to share. Organizations need to think about the characteristics of the local community and the relevant branch of the organization that contribute to or hinder these opportunities. If there are no local resources, perhaps organizations could provide access to regional or national resources for returned sojourners to be able to connect with, and gain support from, others who have had similar experiences. With this in mind, it could be beneficial to utilize the experience of past returnees to help present and future repatriates with their adjustment. Lisa discussed the satisfaction she experienced being a part of a group that would welcome new people, particularly internationals transferring to the U.S. If organizations incorporated past returnees into their orientation and reorientation programs, it could serve a dual purpose: helping new returnees and also recognizing the value and contribution of those who have gone before. That would be a wonderful contrast to Edward's feeling that HR simply

expected the returned expatriates to figure out the practicalities of readjustment on their own. Various studies have stressed the value of having a mentor in the home company to aide in the re-assimilation of an employee back into the organization (i.e., Lineham & Scullion, 2001). This same method could also work to help the employees and their families in the broader readjustment to the community at large. It could also help if the organization were to incorporate the expectations of readjustment challenges into the initial training before employees move overseas. The organizational re-acculturation is important, but readjustment to the broader social context is equally as important.

Any family members or friends who are interested in actively aiding the returnee's readjustment should also make an effort to become active, supportive listeners. They need to remember that this study's participants classed passive listening as equivalent to a negative response in relation to levels of satisfaction when a person chooses to capitalize on positive events. Simply nodding and asking a question or two before going on to a different topic does not provide a satisfactory climate for sharing. Family and friends who wish to help with a person's readjustment need to explore how to be active, constructive listeners who can provide a satisfactory response to the returnees' attempts to talk about their experiences.

The returned sojourners need to be actively involved in managing their readjustment experience, and work on effective actions and attitudes. They need to develop a supportive community and be aware that they may not easily find a receptive audience. Additionally, depending on their personality, they need to make sure they create the necessary level of support for a satisfactory adjustment. During the validity check, Kevin offered additional advice for the new returnee. Kevin said,

the empathy issues of finding and connecting with some other expats who may not have been to the same city that you may have, but have traveled along and experienced similar highs, lows and challenges along the way for themselves and their family still is a good way to commiserate and share the good, bad and the ugly…and even if they're not in the hometown, … or expats who are still there [overseas], or subsequently are prior returnees.

The returned sojourners in this study were asked what advice they would give to a novice returnee. Their responses reinforced the importance of a person's attitudes and actions for a successful readjustment. Pearl stressed the importance of returned sojourners reaching out to others. Pearl said,

… [readjustment] might feel easy at first, but be prepared because it will hit you at some point that the country you've come back to has changed a lot since you've left. And, you'll have to adapt to that. …. And I think the time spent abroad, shouldn't be, … that experience shouldn't be put in a pretty box and put on a shelf and just glanced at occasionally. It should be shared with others…

The level of preparedness, and the willingness to find opportunities to share, were both described as important to develop on a personal level.

The returnees need to remain positive and be prepared for what they will find. While offering her advice for the new returnee, Hazel said,

I guess, really, to be as patient with the coming as you were with the going out. We gave ourselves a lot of time to allow ourselves to make mistakes when we [went overseas]. You're almost relearning it when you come back, and if you're coming back to the place you left, … give yourself that patience, and, you just have to experience it. You just have

to let yourself have the sad days and enjoy, you know, really try and enjoy it, try and enjoy being back.

The returned sojourners need to be aware of the needs of their audience as well and not focus exclusively on trying to share their personal experiences. They also need to listen to those around them. Just as a person would not wish to be the ugly American abroad, they should strive not to be the ugly returnee at home. Ultimately, as Omarzu (2000) pointed out, it is an individual decision whether or not to share one's experiences. The receptiveness of the social system determines the satisfaction received from sharing. The individual's characteristics influence the satisfactory amount and depth of sharing. No matter what the organization or family and friends do, a lot of the responsibility for an effective readjustment is going to fall on the shoulders of the individual returnee.

## Future Directions

Since this study focused on only 24 interviews, with four interviews for validity checking, the theoretical proposals need to be tested using larger samples, and a different population. The majority of the respondents lived and worked in Europe. Future studies need to include equivalent numbers of individuals who lived and worked on the other continents, and in different situations. Eventually, these findings would need to be examined in relation to populations such as students and aid workers in addition to businesspeople to see whether the same functions influence readjustment for all the relevant populations of returnees.

It would also be beneficial to test the results with different nationalities to see if they are generalizable beyond the borders of the United States. Similarities between the readjustment challenges faced by U.S. and Japanese returnees have already been identified (Sussman, 1986). Japanese and European companies appear to be more aware of the readjustment challenges, and

do more to aid in the readjustment, thus helping to ease their employees' transitions to a greater degree than U.S. companies do (Kopp, 1994; Sussman, 1986). Another population that could be studied would be immigrants who return to their native countries, or possibly re-migrants who return home then go back to the host country after a few years.

This study focused on a single point in time, and did not gather insights the represented various phases of the readjustment process. A series of interviews over a period of time would need to be conducted to determine whether or not the proposed functions model remains applicable during the different stages of the readjustment process. It would be helpful to develop a quantitative measurement to compliment the qualitative interviews in order to determine the degree to which the different functions were consistently present, and their degree of influence on the re-entry process. The quantitative measure could also be paired with a series of diaries recording different communication encounters, and the functions they served. That would allow for a clearer understanding of the nuances of communication's influence on the process.

Additionally, the degree of adjustment needs to be determined to see whether communication's influence is only in the areas of satisfaction or emotional adjustment or whether it extends to the time it takes to readjust. That would require the use of instruments to measure readjustment and satisfaction. Ideally, this would also be part of a longitudinal study, as opposed to the method of catching a single moment in time which was employed in this case. The longitudinal study could begin before the sojourner's return, and include measures of their style and degree of communication with friends and family in the U.S. This could examine how communication channels such as Skype®, email, and Facebook® were employed, and how those methods influenced their effective readjustment (similar to Cox's [2004] study).

A closer examination of the characteristics or responses of the receiving organizations and communities would be valuable as a comparison to the perceptions of receptive audiences and reported number of opportunities the respondents had to share. Those, as well as personal and national cultural characteristics, could then be compared to opportunities to share, satisfaction, degree of adjustment, etc. to determine the influential characteristics that provide satisfactory opportunities to share.

This study only examined the points-of-view of the business sojourner and his or her accompanying partner in relation to their attempts to share their experiences. The interview questions employed in this study elicited both positive and negative experiences about trying to share, but they did not attempt to elicit or measure the number of those experiences or which was of them were dominant. None of the extended family members, friends or co-workers who were recipients of these attempts to share were interviewed. To complete the picture of sojourners' reentry communication process, it would be helpful to check with the actual characteristics, levels of interest and context that are present in the potential listeners. Their perceptions of the attempts to share would be beneficial, particularly if coupled with some measure defining the quality and characteristics of the returned sojourners' communication. Thus, further research should explore the actual impressions of the listener including areas such as perceptions of elitism and degrees of interest or understanding. This could provide information that could verify the sojourners' perceptions as well as discover which of the communication techniques they employed were the most effective.

Finally, future research needs to focus on two areas which have not received much, or any, previous study. One area is the function of sharing experiences for the preservation of memories. The study by Gable et al. (2004) was the only research discovered that addressed this

benefit, and the authors also proposed future research into this result of satisfactory capitalization, or disclosure of positive experiences. The use of a mixture of quantitative instruments to measure the numbers of disclosure and the levels of satisfaction and degree of memory retention could parallel those incorporated by Gable et al. The second area of interest is the tendency of some returnees to decontextualize stories to make them more accessible, and avoid the appearance of elitism or 'showing off.' It would be valuable to discover if this technique is used in similar situations where the context of an experience might lead to some type of negative impression on the part of the listener. Since this requires a more in-depth understanding of the communication encounter, interviews or diaries might be useful for this investigation. Whatever techniques are employed, these two areas rate further exploration.

## Conclusion

Cultural adjustment occurs when a person has to cope with life changes after entering a new culture (Cox, 2004). It is achieved when the person becomes comfortable, satisfied, and develops a positive attitude (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). It is theorized that sojourners, while overseas, learn new skills and norms as they adjust to the foreign environment. (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1962). Reentry into one's home country after living and working overseas requires another cultural adjustment to former native norms (Martin, 1986). Finding opportunities for effective sharing, or finding supportive audiences for attempts to share experiences, is vital for effective readjustment.

People have many goals for their interactions, and have a desire to be understood (Eisenberg, 2001). They will measure the relative risk to determine when it is safe to share their experiences. People want to disclose both positive and negative experiences, though not always for the same reasons. From the beginning, the respondents reinforced the value of having

opportunities to share international and readjustment experiences for the readjustment process. The benefits of these opportunities included preserving memories, building interpersonal connections, and managing uncertainty, anxiety and other issues associated with the challenges of readjustment. Talking about experiences could be therapeutic. The absence of these opportunities to share, and the resultant benefits, can lead to feelings of isolation and depression. Conversely, their presence can lead to the benefits of and need for talking about their experiences to go unnoticed by the returnee. Organizations need to keep this in mind when developing programs to facilitate effective readjustment.

In relationship to previous explorations of communication and readjustment, the characteristics of supportive listeners are more complex than previously discovered. There is more involved in being a satisfactory audience than simply having a close relationship with or passively listening to the returned sojourner. Degrees of context and levels of active support were more relevant than type of relationship. The nuances of experiences that present challenges to share are also more diverse than previously identified. The areas that presented challenges for communication expand beyond value and identity changes into areas such as contradictions of commonly held beliefs about a culture and the personal changes experienced by the returnee. Effective techniques for sharing do exist and could be positioned as valuable knowledge for returning sojourners. The interaction of the different systems, national, local and personal, that frame satisfactory opportunities to share are also important areas for future study.

This study continues the recognition that readjustment is a multi-level, complex process that is influenced by not only the characteristics of the individual returnee, but also characteristics of the local organization and community. Communication, specifically, being

able to talk about one's experiences, is an important aspect of the mix.  That centrality needs to be recognized and serve as the subject of further examination.

Table 2

*Emotions:  Codes and Satements*

| Emotion | Number of Codes | Number of Quotes | Sample Statement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adventure | 3 | 18 | "It, it was hard.  It was hard to come back.  If you like *adventure*, if you like seeing new things and the scenes are all right there, and all that history …" (Hazel) |
| Anger | 1 | 2 | "Uh, and, you know, probably for the first six months when I got back, *I was just mad*.  …  and, you know, mentally that's very hard." (Edward) |
| Anticipation | 1 | 1 | "The going, you're excited.  *You're looking forward to it*.  Da dah da dah da dah."  (Saul) |
| Bittersweet | 1 | 2 | "And that's why I'm referring to it as being *bittersweet*.  We left a lot of good things.  Came back to a lot of good things." (Abel) |
| Depression | 3 | 9 | "But I, I think the biggest thing about reentry is not to just be, 'cause I think you do go through, I definitely went through *kind of a low point*, I'd say, a *depression* after about five or six months." (Lisa) |
| Devalued | 1 | 2 | "It's such a human need we have to tell stories.  And then to try to shape the process, and assimilate what has happened to us, to keep telling the story again and that way putting it into some order in our mind.  And when I couldn't do that, I felt like I had been *devalued or dismissed* in some way. " (Caleb) |
| Disappointment | 1 | 4 | "…so there were some things about it that worked out very well, and, and a lot of things that were *really disappointing*.  ….I was just completely strung out. " (Retta) |
| Enjoy | 6 | 14 | "And we just got to go over[seas] and *enjoy it*." (Jessie) |
| Excitement | 2 | 3 | "Just when I went over there, um, first upon going over there I was *very, very excited* to be going …" (Pearl) |
| Exotic to Mundane | 3 | 18 | "I would say that if you're coming from something that was so foreign, and so new, *and so exciting, and so stimulating* and just culturally rich, and you're coming back to the place you just spent, probably 18 years, and you, *it's old hat,* it's a difficult adjustment. ." (George) |

| Emotion | Number of Codes | Number of Quotes | Sample Statement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fear | 2 | 2 | "And one time after I hadn't been back very long; I was so used to walking around in Paris that I thought when I got back to the United States that the only reason I hadn't been walking around the United States was that I just hadn't had any impetus to. ….But I remember after I moved back, I walked over to the shopping center, and I found that I was *afraid of the cars*." (Retta) |
| Feel Isolated | 3 | 5 | "So, under those circumstances, it was not always able to be socially active. …. And, so it was *a very lonely time for us*. Friends had gone on. So, all the effort had to come from us." (Denise) |
| Feel Like Outsider | 4 | 5 | " I just, I *feel like an outsider* here, so I don't really feel like I've met any groups of people that have made it, you know, my transition here easier." (Sally) |
| Feel Limited in US | 1 | 1 | "… we've really not pushed ourselves to travel since we came back 'cuz it just seems like, you know, it does take forever to do anything, or it's phenomenally expensive to take… I think that's, I think it's been really hard to know that, uh, *just, how limited we [are] right here*." (Hazel) |
| Frustration | 2 | 20 | "…but just learning how to cope with other cultures and, of course, dealing with language barriers and communication. … That had its times when it became quite, you could become quite *frustrated* …" (Mike) |
| Home | 1 | 1 | Interviewer: "What was kind of your first thought when you came back to the US?" Abel: "Major thought? *Home*." (Abel) |
| Humility | 1 | 1 | "In Europe, you're treated with more respect, more honesty, more *humility*. That's a pretty strong feeling. " (Abel) |
| Hurt | 1 | 1 | "And I think initially that was kind-of *hurtful*, that those peop., that, you know, someone that close to you really didn't wanna know, but even, you know, there's definitely, you know, strangers who've been more inquisitive about my time in Afghanistan than my brothers or my, or my mother have been. " (Wanda) |

| Emotion | Number of Codes | Number of Quotes | Sample Statement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Maddening | 1 | 1 | "Oh getting, it still is the most challenging....hmmm...just being...the bombardment of our selling culture is the most challenging part to get used to, its the most *maddening*. " (Lisa) |
| Mixed Emotions | 3 | 3 | "Yeah! *I miss it* [living overseas], but we *really enjoy living here*, and I, I don't hate living here, and, um, you know, there are *things that I definitely do not miss* about New Zealand. " (Opal) |
| Pain in the Neck | 2 | 2 | "[frustration about sharing] It's made it a real *pain in the neck*." (Mike) |
| Really Upset | 1 | 1 | "Oh yeah, now that's, yeah, that, you're right there. I mean, uh, you know, uh, literally sessions where, you know, um, you were, uh, uh, it was emotional, I mean, you know, uh, [my wife] would *really be upset* by the fact that we had no relationship in terms of our friends like the way we had over there." (Saul) |
| Return Disorienting | 1 | 1 | "*Returning to the US*? At first it's extremely *disorienting*. Um, I mean, it's just so totally different. That, uh, um, you're not, I mean, it's fun at first, but then it's just like, it's just not real to you. (pause) That's how I felt. " (Sally) |
| Risk | 1 | 3 | "I think the difference is the degree of adventure, you know, that the person has. You know, the willingness to experiment, and, you're basically, um, it's *high risk*, because you aren't guaranteed a job when you come back; you sell everything you have and you start over again when you come back." (George) |
| Sense of Loss | 7 | 33 | "I think, um, adjusting to *a sense that you've had a loss of some kind*. Um, and maybe that *loss* of uniqueness that I mentioned to you before. " (Saul) "And often times, we *missed* our new friends terribly in England, and we *missed* the opportunity, you know, you, you get on a plane and you go over to Frankfurt for the weekend." (Tara) |
| Shut Down | 1 | 3 | "And they were kind-of pouring wine, they were talking, and, and it seemed like it was almost *dismissed*. *Dis.. dismissed*. ….And, I had this whole thing I wanted to say about it. And I couldn't get anyone to really listen to my…" (Caleb) |

| Emotion | Number of Codes | Number of Quotes | Sample Statement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shut Out | 1 | 2 | "And they're looked upon, uh, they want to be in a corner, they don't wanna know about it, they want you to do that one job, and if you do try to talk about what you've accomplished, it's not good.  They, *they will cut you*." (Felicia) |
| Stress | 2 | 8 | "So it became easier living in the community, but *never not stressful*, always a *level of stress* for me.  And from any of the people I knew there too, always this level of *stress* is there…. " (Lisa) |
| Surprise | 1 | 5 | "You'll find a lot of people are not nearly as interested in these stories as you, or other expatriates are in these stories.  ….  A lot of people just don't find that particularly interesting.  Which I found *surprising*." (Travis) |
| Sympathetic | 1 | 1 | "But talking to these other people [internationals working in the US] as an expat having lived somewhere else and coming back has been really interesting for me to hear of these people, and coming to the United States and what it feels like for them.  And being *sympathetic*." (Lisa) |
| Unfulfilling | 1 | 1 | "… when we would talk at home, you know, we had long, long conversations of, uh, how, uh, *unfulfilling*, if you will, or un-stimulating I guess is a better word, the neighborhood was with the exception of the neighbors I talked to you about who do travel." (Saul) |
| US Feels Foreign | 4 | 14 | Well, coming to La Crosse, Wisconsin was kind-of like another foreign assignment. (laughter)  …  I probably didn't do as good of a job coming back to the US, because I figured that the US was the US…" (Edward) |

*Communication and the challenges of sojourner reentry: An exploratory study.*

Dissertation Study for completion of Ph.D.

Mary Anna Kidd, Ph. D. Candidate, University of Kansas

*Interview Schedule*:

1. Please describe briefly your sojourn and then your return to the United States. What stood out to you when you came back to the U.S.?

2. If you were going to try to describe the experience of a returning expatriate to someone, how would you describe it?

3. How did other people respond when you talked about your experiences overseas?

4. Tell me about a time that stood out to you when you recounted your experiences abroad? Can you think of other times?

5. Was there a person or group of people who were easier to talk with about your sojourn? What was different about them?

6. Did context make a difference in how your accounts were received? (i.e., was it better at work, home, church….)

7. What was the most challenging part of your readjustment to the US?

8. What was your biggest challenge when it came to trying to tell others about your experiences?

9. How did these communication challenges, or pleasures, affect your readjustment?

10. Imagine that you are talking to someone who is about to have his or her first experience of readjusting to home. What would you tell him or her about the readjustment process?

11. What would you tell him or her about trying to communicate their experiences?

*Demographic Data*

Age:                          Gender:

Marital Status:

Accompanying partner or spouse – yes or no?

Overseas Position:

Type of Company:

Location(s):

Length(s) of stay(s):

Time since return:

APPENDIX B

*Communication and the Challenge of Sojourner Re-entry: An exploratory study*

**Informed Consent Form**

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the impact of communication on the repatriation process of the business sojourner. This research will attempt to begin to see what we actually do when trying to communicate our unique experiences as sojourners, and how that influences our readjustment to our home culture. This study should expand our knowledge of the repatriation process. In turn, the knowledge gained should aid repatriation training and counseling. Participation is voluntary. As stated above, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. However, your willingness to help with this study is greatly appreciated.

You will be asked a series of open-ended questions about your experiences as a repatriated businessperson or spouse. This should take between 45 minutes and 1 ½ hours. The session will be audiotaped, and the tapes will later be transcribed. Your tape will be labeled with a pseudonym for anonymity. We do not anticipate any risks with this study. However, if you do feel uncomfortable with any question, or the interview itself, you are free to withdraw from it at any time.

The information collected about you will be used by Mary Anna Kidd to complete her research into repatriation. The researchers will not share information about you with anyone not specified above unless required by law or unless you give written permission. Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future. You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Mary Anna Kidd; 403 Gillette Street #214; La Crosse, WI 54603. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above. Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me for the study.  I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas   66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant.  I further agree to the uses and disclosures of my information as described above.

_____        _____
Type/Print Participant's Name                          Date


  _____
Participant's Signature

Researcher Contact Information

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APPENDIX C

Validity Study


Body of email to be sent to respondents for validation study:

Dear  :

As you may recall, a couple of years ago you participated in a dissertation research project exploring how communication impacts a person's readjustment to the U.S. after living and working overseas.   One method for validation of research results in this type of study is to check with the interviewees to see whether or not they agree that the findings accurately reflect their lived experience.

I am in the final stages of this project, and I am asking you and a few other respondents whether or not they would be willing to read a short summary of the study results and give their reactions to what I have learned so far.

All you would have to do would be to read the summary, answer three questions, and discuss them with me at some time during the week of March 14-22.  I have attached a copy of the questions and the summary so you can see more specifically what would be involved.

Would you be willing to help me out with this final aspect of my research?  If so, please respond to this email and we can set up an appointment to discuss the summary over the phone.

Sincerely,
Mary Anna Kidd

# DIRECTIONS FOR RESPONDENTS

1.  Read the following document through once, and simply make notes on anything that jumps out at you in the space below:

2.  Now, please read the document a second time, while thinking about the following questions:
    a.  Are your concerns represented here?

    b.  Do comments and ideas from other respondents make sense (or resonate) with you?

    c.  What new thoughts, if any, do these ideas and comments evoke?

# RESULTS SUMMARY

## "Communication and the challenges of sojourner re-entry"

When people return from living in a foreign country, many of them express a desire to talk about their experiences, according to the respondents in this study. If they do not have a receptive audience for these stories, readjustment to the U.S. can be more emotionally challenging. For the returned sojourner, these 'foreign' experiences are the norm. Sharing helps them remember their experiences, build or re-build connections with like-minded people, and process their emotions. Returned sojourners report that the primary reasons their stories are not well received are either a lack of context, lack of interest or both.

It is possible to share certain information with an unresponsive audience. Respondents in this study reported various techniques that were successful. Some people used 'hooks,' tying their stories into some area of interest or commonality. For example, they would compare the lack of clean water in the country where they had lived to others' experiences in California with water that wasn't potable, or they would talk about parenting methods in (the Mideast) to a class of young married couples at a church. Another technique was to keep the stories short and casual, telling a quick story about having to drive to another town to get a certain type of cereal, but not going into the details of how the expatriate communities passed the word about where to go. A third technique was to decontextualize the story. Some respondents removed the locale from the event, such as sharing that they had been mugged, but not mentioning that it was in Prague. Finally, it was easier to share accounts of their experience when helping someone prepare to go overseas, whether for a vacation or a sojourn. These were the primary methods reported by the interviewees.

When asked to discuss communication challenges, respondents moved from techniques to content. There were certain ideas or stories that they wanted to share but that were very difficult to share. Sometimes the difficulty was lack of interest or context on the part of the listener, but sometimes the problem was that these ideas or changes were a little harder to express. The personal impact of their time overseas was often both. These stories related to new realizations sojourners had about themselves, the US and the world at large. Some respondents also felt challenged trying to help people, family in particular, to understand why they had wanted to live so far away. A category that was easier to express but often not received well by others was involved information that conveyed the complexities of or contradicted existing points-of-view. For instance, one respondent became frustrated because people didn't want to hear her stories about Afghanistan that contradicted what they heard on the news. The final area that was challenging was sharing details of daily life. For example, one respondent wanted to share about what it was like to live in the country, but felt that his listeners just wanted to hear about his 'vacation in Switzerland and the quaint folk on the mountainside.' So, while it is possible to share certain information, respondents weren't always able to share the stories they most wanted to tell.

Listeners responded in a variety of ways, but respondents in this study reported that curiosity was a rare response and little interest was expressed as a rule. Many interviewees reported feeling disengaged or disconnected and described abrupt topic changes, initial interest with lack of follow-through, and other responses that caused them to feel shut down. Therefore respondents seldom had encounters where they felt that their stories were well received. They learned they had to adjust to their audiences, often only sharing when interest was expressed. At

other times, they would keep their stories to themselves.  However, this was not usually a satisfactory experience for the respondents.

Most respondents felt that being able to talk about their experiences was important for their re-adjustment.  They said it helped them preserve their memories and build connections.  They also felt it could be therapeutic to be able to talk about what had happened while overseas and the challenges of readjusting to the US.  Some respondents said when they couldn't share, they felt isolated – like strangers in their own home country.  There were a few respondents who didn't see communication as much of an issue.  However, many of these also mentioned that in the U.S. they were part of an international department or had access to a community where they could talk about their experiences whenever they felt like it.  One respondent said that it might have been different if he hadn't had that opportunity.

Finally, the respondents offered advice about communication to hypothetical first-time returned sojourners.  Their advice reflected maintaining positive attitudes and being proactive.  They would advise new returnees to:  a) build support groups (of people who understood what they were going through); b) avoid withdrawing; c) share their stories; d) use technology like the Internet to stay connected with international or expatriate friends, e) develop a positive, proactive attitude; f) learn what to expect upon their return before going; g) gauge audience to see when best to share; and h) focus on the present.  In summary, they said, sojourners should be sure to find some outlets to talk about their experiences, but remember where their listeners are coming from, too.

Having the opportunity to talk about experiences is an important part of the readjustment process.  When their accounts of their international experience are limited, readjustment can be frustrating and even depressing.  So, this study concludes that returned sojourners, and their families and friends, need to keep the returned sojourners desire to talk about their experiences in mind and plan for it to be a part of the readjustment process.

Communication and the Challenge of Sojourner Re-entry: An exploratory study

**Informed Consent Form**

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. **Completion of this survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least eighteen years old. It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response.**

The primary purpose of this research is to check with respondents to determine whether or not the results of the initial analysis of their information corresponds with their own experience. Participation is voluntary.

You will be asked to write your answers to four questions after reading a summary of the research results. This will be followed by a brief phone call to check understanding of what you have written. The call will be recorded, and your tape will be labeled with a pseudonym for anonymity. **The surveys will be sent out and the follow-up phone calls made between April and June, 2009.** We do not anticipate any risks with this study. However, if you do feel uncomfortable with any question, or the interview itself, you are free to withdraw from it at any time.

The information collected about you will be used by Mary Anna Kidd to complete her research into repatriation. The researchers will not share information about you with anyone not specified above unless required by law or unless you give written permission. Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By **completing this survey** you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

**You** have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Mary Anna Kidd; 2965 ½ Pacific Street, Omaha, NE 68105 **(402-502-7020)**. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above. Questions about procedures should be directed to **Mary Anna Kidd (see information above), or Dr. Tracy Russo, Communication Studies Department, 102 Bailey Hall, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045 (785-864-9877).**

**If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, KS 66045-7563, email mdenning@ku.edu.**

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