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“It’s About the Two Selves”:

Experiences in Code-Switching between Home and Academic Environments

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Communication and Performance

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Communication and Storytelling Studies

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by

Travis Wolven

December 2022

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Keywords: home, school, generation, culture, communication, code, college, student, languages

ABSTRACT

“It’s About the Two Selves”:

Experiences in Code-Switching between Home and Academic Environments

by

Travis Wolven

This qualitative research study is an exploration of how college students navigate code-switching between their home and academic environments. Data were collected from five participants using interview and small group methods. Through the lenses of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) and Memorable Messages (MM) frameworks, the researcher explores how key MMs affect how participants coordinate and manage meaning in communications with others in their home and college environments. Findings were fourfold: 1) participants chose between following established and creating new rules when code-switching; 2) participants shared experiences and strategies regarding knowing when and how to code-switch; 3) preparing audiences for information disclosure was a key element of code-switching and 4) there was a need for community and a space of non-judgement for students who experience large differences between their home and academic cultures.

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DEDICATION

To the students who still feel lost between cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of the help for those who will not be mentioned here. So many people in my life currently and in the past have helped me get to where I am, and I am grateful to you all. Thank you.

To my mother, my fathers, and my sister: thank you for being there for me in so many different ways since I began this process. Thank you for your love and patience.

To my partner: thank you for being a breath of fresh air, a rock, an experience of love, and for everything you continue to do. I would not be here without you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

I was on fire that day in my junior year at Berry College in my Victorian Literature class. Instead of lecturing, our professor decided to play a team trivia game in class and offered a $25 gift card to the winning team. My team was winning. The prospect of a free snack would have been quite the victory because I was completely broke and had not eaten in two days. On every question, I shot my hand up whether I knew the answer or not. I even spoke over other teammates to get answers out more quickly. In retrospect, my peers were getting annoyed with me, but I did not care at the time. At the end of the game, there was a tie between my team and another. Our professor held a vote to determine the winner, and I pleaded with the other students to vote for our team. Students on other teams side-eyed me while my teammates glared and tried to get me to stop. My heart dropped when the other team won the vote at the end of class. As everyone began picking up their belongings and leaving the classroom, I snapped out of my fervor to notice that the $25 was of little concern to anyone else. My classmates shook their heads at me as they walked out of the classroom. I felt stressed, alone, and my stomach ached.

Coming from a working-class family with parents who never graduated college, I often reflect on this occurrence and how much of it amounted to communication differences. I assumed everyone wanted to do well in the Victorian Literature class game. However, communicating that I wanted to win as opposed to simply doing well appeared offensive to my peers. I now recognize that I drew from my family's communication behaviors, or conversational codes (Gumperz, 1982), of being more direct and boisterous when I wanted to win something. However, my behavior in the college classroom appeared to be undesirable and even embarrassing to others. At the bottom of this experience was the fact that I never communicated my need for food or money to anyone.

A few months later, I shared this experience with my parents while family friends were visiting hoping that everyone could appreciate my challenges in college. I also had the notion that it could be enjoyable to analyze the experience together. Instead, my family was appalled that I did not let them know I needed food. Our family friends never said anything about it, and no one seemed interested to offer social commentary or analysis. After our family friends left, I apologized for the stress my story had created for my mother. She admitted there was probably nothing she could have done at that time to help me; she said we were just glad to have all made it through the difficult times. I never told my family my harder stories of being without while in college. I refrained from telling my peers as well. Experiences like the day of the class game were just everyday moments of difference for me.

Reflecting now on these events, it is easy to observe dynamics of cultural and class differences. In the classroom experience, I failed to follow college culture by being like my home culture when playing the trivia game. At home, I failed to recognize that conversational analysis would *not* be of interest in a situation of need. Early on in college, stumbling through these experiences seemed to cause grief for more people than just myself. Of course, my undergraduate institution was a great practice ground to learn about navigating home, school, and economic class differences in communication styles.

Berry College was originally founded as a school for "academically able but economically poor children of the rural South" ("Martha Berry (1865-1942)", 2022). However, it was also anecdotally known for having wealthy students attend. My family was between low- and middle-class income, and I was a first-generation college student. When I was accepted, we were grateful for the financial assistance afforded to us by the school and from federal aid programs. Although the aid helped me attend the school, it did nothing to address the cultural

divide in perceptions, decision making, and overall behavior I experienced during undergraduate studies. Recognizing how these differences sculpted my college experience led me to look at how this affects other students in similar circumstances.

Understanding how college students navigate the realms of school and family is paramount to aiding their futures. Nearly 20 million students enroll in postsecondary institutions annually (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). For ages 18 to 24, this is approximately 40% of the U.S. population (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020). As of 2020, approximately forty percent of students are older than 25, 44% are students of color, and 34% are first-generation students (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2020; Higher Learning Advocates, 2018). If we hope to enrich the growing, diverse student body with a positive college matriculation experience, we need to understand how we can best prepare them to navigate the academic world of colleges and universities.

College preparation programs have existed over the last few decades—such as TRIO, Talent Search, and high school/college dual enrollment—to aid students in gaining the necessary support for attending universities and colleges (Miller et al., 2008; Venezia & Jaeger., 2013). Currently, though students in need continue to matriculate, many never receive these services as funding is limited (Soria et al., 2022). Analyzing the communication strategies students use to meet their needs could allow for new intervention strategies. Identifying such strategies would not only make better use of the limited funding existing for these programs, but it may also create the opportunity to procure more funding through new programs and methods. Moreover, understanding how students navigate communication across school and home cultures have far-reaching possibilities regarding improving school culture, teacher training, and bringing knowledge to students themselves.

This thesis examines experiences of students who are changing communication styles, or code-switching, between family/home and college/academic environments. Specifically, this study focuses a communication lens on how college students navigate conversations and why they code-switch to accommodate communication expectations in each environment.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Examining individual communication experiences of college students and the systems that place them into collegiate environments is a multifaceted phenomenon that has been continually tackled by a multitude of disciplines. In addition to research regarding college students generally, community college students, low socio-economic background students, I focused much research on first-generation college students (FGS) in order to understand major differences between home and college cultures: 1) FGS are one of the most diverse student groups in postsecondary education (Balliro, 2020). 2) FGS have overlap with continuing-generation students (CGS) because FGS also include families with parents who had some college experience without attaining a degree and siblings who graduated from college (RTI International, 2019). 3) FGS research tends to focus on student discrepancies with college culture (Smith, 2015). Understanding the differences of FGS and CGS maps the terrain of differences most students face when communicating needs and desires in home and academic environments.

Decades of research indicates vast differences between college culture and home culture for first generation students, low-income students, and countless students who have families with home cultures who are at odds with the experiences of college (Brooks-Terry, 1988; London, 1989, 1996; Moreno, 2019; Mosier, 2022; Orbe, 2003, 2004, 2008; Stierlin, 1974; Venezia and Jaeger, 2013). In this chapter, I examine research literature that informs our understanding of those differences, their impact, and how they are navigated. Specifically, I investigate: (a) college preparedness (b) individual education expectations and college outcomes, (c) family needs & support, (d) discord & intervention, and (e) memorable messages in education experiences. I then introduce code-switching and theoretical frameworks for moving forward

with the study goals and close the chapter with identification of research gaps, a plan for helping to fill those gaps, and the research questions that framed my work.

College Preparedness

Even though cultural, class, ethnic, and gender disparities exist in nearly all educational outcomes, "no notable gaps exist in students' aspirations to attend college" (Bryan et al. 2018, p. 95). However, McFarland et al. (2018) found that 83% of students from high income backgrounds immediately enrolled in college as compared to 63% of students from middle and low income families (p. 30). Given the equitable student interest across identity groups and the vast population of students who are likely between cultures, there is a need to understand how to meet the needs of students who are highly likely to experience gaps between their own academic capabilities and their continuing-generation college student (CGS) peers. The gaps widen when considering who pursues and attains bachelor's and advanced degrees.

Without intense personal efforts and/or additional knowledgeable support regularly accessed by many of their CGS peers, first-generation college students (FGS) often lack the necessary tools to perform well (Balliro, 2020). Access to and ability to graduate from postsecondary schools "for historically underserved student groups remain a major challenge for America's higher education system" (Moreno et al., 2019, p. 1). As Venezia and Jaeger (2013) explained: "The reasons why more high school graduates are not ready for college are complex and highly dependent upon individual circumstances" (p. 119). Primary challenges to this readiness emerge both within and outside of academic culture. Secondary schools are able to control some factors, such as classroom environment, courses offered, and extracurricular activities. However, family variables and outside peer influences—both significant factors in preparing students to attain a college education—are beyond their reach (Venezia and Jaeger,

2013). In relation to support, college dropout and lower matriculation rates highly correlated with family income and first-generation status (Redford & Mulvaney-Hoyer et al., 2018; RTI International, 2019).

"College preparedness" is a key term used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and U.S. Department of Education. The 2017 U.S. Department of Education's Status in Brief defined "college prepared" students are defined as those who:

> Have a B+ or better high school GPA and have completed four years of English, three years of math, two years of a foreign language, one year each of biological and physical sciences, plus an additional year of one or the other (in total three years of science), one year of history/government, and one year of arts. (Redford & Hoyer, 2018, p. 34)

If the U.S. education system is basing postsecondary preparedness upon "B+ or better high school GPA" and basic course offerings, then there is no addressing of the "individual circumstances" referenced by Venezia and Jaeger (2013). Given the fact that high school graduates from middle and upper class socioeconomic statuses (SES) are five times more likely to earn a postsecondary degree than their low SES counterparts (Hoffman, 2007, pgs. 17-18), it is concerning that this trend will continue for low SES students until the cultural gaps between those familiar with college culture and those not are addressed. Of course, these cultural gaps do not only exist for FGS.

Over the years of research, FGS demonstrate the gaps existing between different worlds of family culture and college culture (Demetriou, 2017; London, 1989, 1996; Wang 2012). Family members of FGS struggle to or fail to understand the demands and rigor required in the world of college (Inman et al., 1999; London, 1989; Venezia et al. 2003). The tension between students' home life challenges and the difficulties colleges face providing support lay the

groundwork for “ineffective counseling and limited networking opportunities” for FGS (Gandara & Bial, 2001, p.33). FGS often lack appropriate access to financial advisement and are not trained in the college application process (Gandara & Bial, 2001, p.34). As such, FGS are matriculating into colleges that are less likely to meet their needs and expectations.

Venezia and Jaeger (2013) discuss how children from higher income households were more likely to attend college: “In 2007-08, approximately 91 percent of twelfth-graders in low-poverty schools graduated with a diploma, compared with 68 percent of twelfth-graders in high-poverty schools” (p. 120). Additionally, research echoed that “students whose parents have gone to college are more likely to attend college themselves” (Goyette, 2008, p. 461) because the parents are able to connect students to cultural behaviors and networks of individuals who can advise and reinforce collegiate familiarity (Nichols & Islas, 2015). Additionally, CGS were more likely to view their parents as instrumental resources for college (Nichols & Islas, 2015). Families with college graduates are better able to provide community and cultural support dynamics necessary to collegiate success for students (Bial & Gandara, 2001; Goyette, 2008; Venezia, 2003). Individual student efforts and expectations also have a meaningful impact on student success (Conley, 2003; Costa et al., 2000; Gibbons et al., 2004). Examining outcomes for student efforts and expectations will allow for deeper understanding into student sense-making.

Individual Educational Expectations & College Outcomes

Overall, student expectations tended to guide outcomes for FGS and CGS students alike. Research has demonstrated how FGS and students from diverse backgrounds had mismatched perceptions regarding which university would best serve their interests (McDonough, 1997; Miller, 2008; Ross et al., 2012; Venezia 2013). Since first-generation students perceived less support from their families for attending college, they tended to become more cautious in their

decision making (Anderson et al., 1991; Gibbons, 2004). As such, they chose lower-ranked universities believing they would be less challenging. Despite the fact that "the most rigorous courses might be the ones that have the best capacity to teach them" (Gibbons et al., 2004, p. 93), the challenges of post-secondary education appear overwhelming to FGS. Sadly, these students are more likely to be unaware of compatible school cultures or student support in their college choice criteria (Bryan et al., 2017). As such, many students choose schools which do not work for their needs and find themselves in difficult contexts.

FGS have shown a trend of higher likelihood to exit postsecondary school than were other students, although usually for reasons other than academic failure (Karp, 2015). For CGS and FGS, family culture often held the keys to student failure and success. On the one hand, students can be inspired by parents to attend college (Saenz et al., 2007). On the other hand, differences in college expectations between parents and children can lead to worsened student performance (Agliata & Rank, 2007). Oftentimes, inappropriate college choice or family-related constraints will stall student performance. For FGS, often higher education is seen solely as a means to a good job (Brooks-Terry, 1988; Orbe, 2004). Parental conversations tended to vary based on status. CGS "found these [parent] conversations more helpful and of higher quality than first-generation students, and higher quality was related to higher first year GPAs for these students" (Palbusa & Gaulvain, 2017, p. 112). Unsurprisingly, parental support indicated student success regardless of college generational status (Palbusa & Gaulvain, 2017). Recognizing pathways of knowledge regarding family and career goals can shed light on the disconnects for many students.

There is a disconnect between what high school instructors teach and what postsecondary instructors are expecting in relation to students' preparation for first-year college courses

(Venezia et al., 2003; Venezia and Jaeger, 2013). As such, FGS enter their first year unaware of the demands which will be placed upon them (Orbe 2004, 2008). Meanwhile, many CGS still require support if they Additionally, they have constraints such as "a higher likelihood to live at home and work part-time" (Brooks-Terry, 1988, p. 122). Family needs and support often add complexity to the students' academic experiences (Irlbeck et al., 2014). Research indicates that full-time students who also work in paid employment perceive adapting to the stresses of the college environment as more difficult than those who do not work (McGregor et al., 1991; Karp 2015). Seeing as these students will need support given the additional stresses, this leads to the examination of general support and family support systems.

Family Needs & Support

Families often offer support to students in college, but this is potentially at a price. Whether it is an agreement to lengthen a visit home, or asking for financial contributions, families may offer contradictory messages of showing pride for their collegiate child while also showing negative emotions for changes in personality or identity with their support (Mosier, 2022). Research demonstrated how family tensions cause difficulties in the students' academic career (London, 1989, 1994; Orbe, 2004, 2008; Mosier, 2022). Sadly, FGS experience less support from family than their peers do (Sy et al., 2011). In fact, many FGS may have parental figures and other family members who are not supportive of their decision to attend college at all (Ward et al., 2012). As a result, conflict may arise and students may begin to reassess their relationships with family (Ward et al., 2012). Along with these tensions, FGS who have a job may have internalized messages from their families that they are responsible for providing financial assistance for their family (Ward et al., 2012). Given that families tend to be unaware of collegiate expectations (Orbe 2004; Palbusa & Gaulvain, 2017; Ward et al., 2012),

choreographing movements between cultures may have multiple impetuses and meanings for students.

Having conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen undergraduate first-generation students, London (1989) provided clear information that complex and nuanced differences exist for FGS in relation to their CGS peers. According to the interviews, family relationships can often cause strain and difficulty for FGS. Even so, first-generation students often feel that they often have "a strong desire to go to school close to home" (Inman & Mayes, 1999, p. 4). Being more likely to have more financial dependents, lower family incomes, and increased work requirements, first-generation students tend to have a lower likelihood of being involved in campus activities (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Orbe, 2004), leading to more social isolation and challenges connecting with college life (Ford, 1993; Inman et al., 1999; London, 1989). These challenges appear to have roots in diverse background interconnected multigenerational family cultures that inform students' perceptions of identity and decision-making while at college.

London's (1989), Ford's (1993), and Gibbons' (2004) works each cited multigenerational family cultures as a critical component of the student's understanding of their achievement capability and academic outlook. Although dated, London and Ford examined the lives of students who hoped to succeed in the world of postsecondary education. Their research indicates that multigenerational family experiences are worth exploring and heavily influence students' perceptions of success. Miller and Tatum (2008) note that, often due to the perception that college is a path to upward mobility:

> Students face internalized processes of cultural change that can undoubtedly create obstacles to their ability to persist in higher education. These internalized obstacles include the role of family support, the complex interplay of intergenerational

relationships, and the conflict presented by students changing their belief and value systems. (p. 42)

Experiencing the conflict between using an academic lens as a student and following preset family traditions can easily lead to discord for students regarding decision making (Irlbeck et al., 2014). Next, I examine literature regarding discordant student experiences and how intervention plays a role in this experience.

Discord and Intervention

Both quantitative and qualitative research, it is clear that both FGS and CGS have been continuously led down discordant paths of expectations, preparation and family support. Often students lack the ability to find ways to meet their needs. Sadly, worsened mental health has been related to poor academic outcomes for FGS (Stebleton & Sorie, 2013). As was previously noted regarding mismatched perceptions of college choice (McDonough, 1997; Ross et al., 2012; Venezia 2013), students often derived misperceptions from confusing messages communicated by previous generations in their family. Families often present conflicting desires such as wanting their children to succeed academically while simultaneously wanting them to maintain the same life goals as the family (Mosier, 2022). These confusing and contradictory messages can be confounding for students and can even create or perpetuate tension with family members. Such tensions can lead to lack or removal of family support and contribute to student dropout (Palbusa & Gaulvain, 2017; Stebleton & Sorie, 2013).

While many researchers observed these discordant experiences in students, others such as Venezia and Jaeger (2013), Ford (1993), and Gibbons and Schoffner (2004), looked at intervention programs. They attempted to engage and understand academic Core Curriculum Standards Systems (CCSS) and interventionist programs such as Upward Bound, TRIO, and

Talent Search in hopes of finding ways to promote further and more coherent outreach to first-generation college students. Each of these intervention programs provides positive outcomes for the students it serves. Additionally, research illustrates that FGS experience an increased sense of belonging in the presence of institutional support such as faculty who express interest in aiding students' learning (Means & Pyne, 2017).

In light of the challenges of FGS, some universities such as Florida Atlantic University and University of Michigan at Ann Arbor have taken steps to reach out to FGS (Piper, 2018). Florida Atlantic University provides an Office of First-Generation Student Success, which guides academic support programs for FGS, financial advisement and assistance, and degree completion (Piper, 2018). University of Michigan at Ann Arbor offers a space, First-Generation Student Gateway, for students to connect, feel safe, and discuss everyday life issues and discrepancies (Piper, 2018). Spaces like these seem to slowly be appearing across the US so that FGS may finally have a chance to communally address the "hidden curriculum" of college (Chatelain, 2022, para 1). Unfortunately, this growth toward on campus FGS may be too slow and even inaccessible for some.

Sadly, some FGS found that as they matured, learned, and changed, they were confronted with "taunts" from family members about their "new ideas, taste in music, clothing, hairstyle, and other such outward signals that change is taking place," resulting in the students' disorientation and estrangement "from the comfort zone of the family of orientation" (Miller, 2008, p. 41). Orbe (2004) also shared interview experiences from students who experienced taunts and negative feelings while visiting their home environments. These students were left disempowered, unable to easily speak the language or navigate the culture of either their home or college worlds. London (1989), Orbe (2004, 2008), and Irlbeck (2014), all discuss how students

continually face and overcome these challenges. However, experiences such as these can lead to academic despondency, drop out, and continued life difficulty given potential disconnections with family members.

Examining distinct memories when students change their communication styles between home and school environments illustrates how they navigate the kind of negative experiences explored in the research presented above. These felt experiences appear to form a body of knowledge for each student which additionally informs their communication choices. CGS and FGS alike have memories from their families' communications which inform how they, in turn, choose to talk, behave, and make decisions about their futures. Next, I turn to a discussion regarding Knapp et al.'s (1981) concept of memorable messages can shed light on how students draw from that knowledge as they figure out how to cultivate their communication skills.

Memorable Messages in Education Experiences

Memorable Messages (MMs) are messages that are remembered for long periods of time and may have an impact on an individual's behavior (Stohl, 1986). They are useful to examine because they are ''a rich source of information about ourselves and our ways of communicating and socializing'' (Stohl, 1986, p. 232). Nazione et al. (2011) explained that memorable messages "have yet to be examined with the purpose of investigating how students navigate college challenges" (p. 124). Since then, numerous researchers specifically looked at college life navigation. Wang et al. (2012) found that "memorable messages continue to be a powerful linguistic tool" for FGS, who can use such messages "to interpret meaning in future experiences" (p. 352) when navigating decisions in postsecondary education. Examining how communication and memories interact became an emergent feature of the literature review because research studies continuously relied upon important messages from participants' memories as a source of

data to examine. Knapp et al.'s (1981) concept of memorable messages (MMs) informs how specific messages influence individuals' sense of who they are. Through connecting these influences to communication behaviors, student decision-making can be given more illumination.

Messages communicated through memory are important because memory is the nexus between students' experience and cultural citizenship (Benmayor, 2002). Through countless messages, FGS process from their experiences, some messages are remembered (Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001). In order to ground understanding and discussion of MMs throughout the research, I use Wang's (2012) reasoning in examining the importance of these messages for qualitative research: (1)They are personal, legitimate, and occur at pivotal moments. (2) These messages are kept and not forgotten. (3) Memorable messages are internalized. (4) Memorable messages have a long-lasting effect on our lives. Discussing memories allows researchers to examining how MMs inform student decision-making.

MMs are a pivotal factor in recognizing positive growth during life transitions in postsecondary education (Kuh, 1993; Louie, 2007). Wang et al.'s (2012) research demonstrated how positive MMs with mentors were key motivators to continue building those relationships (Wang 2012). Kuh (1993) found that students use memorable moments to cement learned concepts of personal and pragmatic development, cognitive abilities, academic capabilities, and positivity toward others. Although they can be contextually specific when enacted, MM content can be applied to many situations (Knapp et al., 1981). Thus, students can take what they have learned from their home environment and apply it to school and vice versa. According to Kuh (1993) and Wang et al. (2012), this had both positive and negative portents for students. In some

cases, MMs from family inspiration allowed students to persevere because they felt they were worthy of success.

Given this adaptability, Xyst (2016) posited that students are not simply knowledge receivers, but they also engage with their environments and surrounding messages to construct their social realities. He stated: “knowing emerges from an intentional process of creating connections between actions and consequences, between the student’s behavior and the effect of it on and within the environment” (p. 16). However, it is important to understand how this experience that Xyst (2016) points out of knowing and creating can instigate either recursive cycles or new experiences. Using Xyst as a foundation, Campbell’s (2018) dissertation posited that students could use this “knowing” as Xyst described and build “new standards of the self” (p. 52) through analyzing MMs. Playing off Wang et al.’s (2012) research, this seems like it could create positive outcomes for many students finding themselves in negative spaces. Understanding the interplay of communication around these elements may provide further insights into navigating life between home and college.

Defining Code-Switching

The first appearance of the term “code-switching” appeared in a scholarly review by Hans Vogt (1954) regarding Urial Weinrich’s work, *Languages in Contact* (1953). According to Vogt (1954), code-switching is “an alternation in the form of communication that signals a context in which the linguistic contribution can be understood” (p. 368). Influential researcher of linguistic code-switching, John Gumperz (1982), defines “conversational code switching” as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems” (p. 59). Including broader elements of communication such as gestures, and behaviors, Nilep (2006) argues that during code-switching events “codes emerge from

interaction, and become relevant when parties to discourse treat them as such" (p.17). As such, participants may choose, or switch, codes during interactions.

Study Focus and Research Questions

Although researchers have begun to map the terrain surrounding the contexts, motivations, and creation of MMs in student life, more work is needed that examines the decision-making processes when communicating needs. Other than research from Nazione et al. (2011) and Wang et al. (2012), there was a lack of recent literature regarding decision-making built upon multigenerational or diverse family backgrounds. Given COVID-19 and other vast global shifts in the last five years (Shatakshi & Nardev, 2020), re-evaluation of communication decision-making regarding the daily interactions between FGS and other generations is necessary.

Data and findings from the scholarship reviewed here primarily focus on the external, behavioral elements of what happened to the students. Seldom did the interviews explore cocreation or management of meaning when communicating needs other than research from Nazione et al. (2011), Orbe (2003, 2004, 2008), and Wang et al. (2012) explored the Additionally, there was a lack of research connecting code-switching with Memorable Messages (MMs) or Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM).

Research literature echoed the call for more studies exploring the needs of diverse populations in postsecondary schools to improve expectations and college outcomes (Orbe 2003, 2004; 2008; Palbusa & Gaulvain, 2017; Wang et al., 2012). Secondly, it outlined literature regarding the complicated family support systems that exist for many students. Third, it discussed how discord and challenge emerge for students and some of the intervention attempts

made through programs like TRIO and some university systems. Lastly, research regarding MMs provides a new lens through which to examine and access student communication.

Though my initial plans were to address some of the gaps in literature regarding code-switching and how meaning is created and managed through decisions regarding code-switching, I realized that general exploration was necessary. Simply naming and examining specific code-switching behaviors was an exciting and emergent experience in the research which I could not find in any literature. I hope this study inspires further research into code-switching between the home and college cultures.

Theoretical Framework

While conducting interviews, I noticed there were many reflexive and recursive experiences expressed by participants about communication and switching codes. For this reason, I chose to focus on Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Theory to explain behaviors. This seemed insightful because participant responses appeared to focus on co-creation and making meaning with others—a hallmark of CMM.

CMM is a communication theory researchers Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen established as practical approach to understanding context within interpersonal conversations (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). Rooted in social constructionism, CMM holds that meaning is co-created through interactions. According to CMM, communication is based on rules. Interestingly, two rules from CMM, *constitutive* and *regulative*, emerged among the themes from findings. Constitutive rules communicate how behaviors should be interpreted. Regulative rules communicate what happens next in a conversation (Cronen et al., 1979, p. 26). Additionally, CMM sheds light on *unwanted repetitive patterns (URPs).* These are recursive communication patterns which pertain to recurring events that are deemed unwanted by the individuals

experiencing them (Cronen et al., 1979, p. 225). Sense-making regarding this phenomenon was also part of the findings.

Applying Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) and Memorable Messages (MMs) offered insights through its focus on meaning built through interactions. In order to better comprehend the inner workings of classroom culture (and its impacts), understanding "how people initiate, sustain, and transform patterns of communication" is key (Hedman et al., 2015, p. 42). CMM helps to identify which interactions work for the participants, and which may appear undesirable in their decision-making processes. "CMM takes a standpoint of seeing communication as central in making social worlds (Pearce, 2007)," and code-switching inherently constructs boundaries and scaffolding in social worlds (Hedman et al., 2015, p. 42). Naming boundaries and scaffolding provides structure for understanding how first-generation students see and engage with family. In specific, asking questions such as "What are we making together? How did that get made? How can we make better social worlds?" (Pearce, 2007, p. 53) are paramount to creating positive and supportive environments for students and their families. The answers to these questions will be many and varied among students and families. Thus, research should also consider when these interactions are taking an alternative course or bifurcation, which I explain below.

According to Pearce (2007), bifurcation moments occur when directions alter due to the path of the conversation and the future plans of its participants (p. 10). "To make wise choices for action, there needs to be awareness of the connections between personal actions and cultural stories told within an organization" (Pierce, 1999, p. 46). When considering the "wise choices" made in first-generation college student interactions, explorations of how bifurcations in interactions in home and school contexts create new or reflexive experiences.

I viewed the data through the lenses of CMM to search for reflexive connections between meaning and action where bifurcation moments are occurring, given the family power dynamics that study participants encountered. My ultimate goal was to contribute to the body of work regarding decision-making in hopes that it will provide tools and insights for students

Understanding reflexivity is important to the exploration of first-generation college student experiences. First-generation students who become more adept at academic culture tend to become less fluent in their family culture and vice versa (Mosier, 2022). This constant state of transition can easily place them in a subordinate position given the lack of fluency and resource access. Their unique experiences, perceptions, and needs may be overlooked or ignored. I seek to shine a light on those needs through the structure of this research.

Research Questions

When I began this research, I formed my first two research questions based on my prior experience code-switching and my first review of literature regarding student navigation of home and college cultures: 1) What are the experiences of college-students when code-switching between home and academic environments. 2) How do narratives around code-switching inform experiences? After another round of literature reviews and the first two interviews, I added additional research questions: 3) How do participants decide to code-switch? 4) How are participants affected by their code-switching? 5) How do participants navigate stigmas associated with home and academic environments?

Chapter 3. Methodology

I committed to this project as a first-generation college (FGS) graduate student who has also been a teacher, tutor, and mentor for over fifteen years. I continue to see both the instructor and student perspectives of academic and non-academic cultures. I am passionate about this issue and bringing learning and healing to the educational community regarding the wounds that continually form and scar over due to difficult decisions students need to make daily in pursuit of higher education. bell hooks (2014) states in *Teaching to Transgress* that “as a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (p. 8). I seek to create meaningful classroom communities that foster excitement. As such, conversations regarding the navigation of careers and postsecondary education are ever-present. My primary goal as a researcher was to listen without judgment and examine the ways students communicated their needs and desires during transitions between home and academic environments. Learning more about the participants’ backgrounds and experiences will allow for a closer reading into the research.

Participants

All five research study participants volunteered and self-identified as meeting the following criteria: 1) being over the age of 18; 2) currently living in the United States; 3) speaks English at home; 4) and currently attending or having previously attended college in the last five years. In the study ads, my intent for the terms “home” and “academic environments” was to allow for the participants to interpret their own meaning due to the changing nature of educational and familial contexts due to the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This flexibility aided in avoiding limiting interviews to any one population and offered a more

inclusive approach to the research. I created the “English at home” limitation in an attempt to simplify understanding the code-switching for myself and readers. My intent was to provide as much focus on the tensions regarding code-switching between home language and school language as possible. Through focusing on one official language, my hope is to get a sense of how participants labor to choreograph the communication between the environments of home and school.

My recruitment efforts focused mainly on the social media platforms Reddit, Facebook, and Instagram. I shared recruitment flyers (see Appendix A) as posts to my personal pages and asked viewers and potential participants to share my posts either globally on their own pages, or individually with potential participants they knew. Despite posting on several places on Reddit, I received no responses there. I recruited five participants across two months via the other platforms. A number of people responded through various phone, text, social media, and email channels. However, many potential participants did not speak English in their home environment, were abroad during the interview periods, or were unable to meet due to schedule conflicts.

I invited all participants who volunteered and met the criteria to participate in the study. The group of participants comprised one male-identified individual, two female-identified individuals, and two nonbinary individuals. At the time of the interview, there were two nonbinary participants: Katrina and Alex. Katrina used she/they pronouns and Alex used they/them pronouns. Ages ranged from 23 to 39 years old. All participants held a bachelor's or higher academic degree. One participant, Ellen, had previously earned an undergraduate degree from an Ivy League institution. Two participants were working on a master's degree, one was

working on an Architecture degree, one was in a PhD program, and one had recently received their PhD.

At the time of the study, the participants lived in the following areas: Colorado, Illinois, Southern California, and one had homes in New York and Virginia. Three participants identified as white/Caucasian, one identified as Latinx, and one as East Asian. Three participants identified as having been raised in "middle-class" families and two identified as having been raised in "working class" or "poor" families. Two participants identified as being "straight" and three identified as being members of the queer community. Two participants additionally identified as being polyamorous. When asked about religious affiliation, no participants identified as being part of any organized religion. One participant identified as "spiritual" and practicing pagan and witchcraft practices. Two participants were raised in Catholic families, but no longer maintained those beliefs or practices. Two participants claimed FGS status. Interestingly, all five participants appeared quite interested in follow-up interviews regarding code-switching experiences.

Data Collection

I collected data using one-on-one interviews. The questions I asked were from an IRB-approved interview schedule (see Appendix C). All interviews were conducted over Zoom. The interviews were recorded using both the Zoom recording function. along with a generic Google Pixel 2 smart phone recording application named "Recorder". All interviews were recorded on two devices: phone and laptop, transcripts were de-identified; all participant names were exchanged for pseudonyms and any specific town or city names were exchanged for names such as: town in western Pennsylvania.

I chose the Zoom videoconferencing format for the "interactional space" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 57) it might afford the participants in their discussion of their experiences. I encouraged

each participant to plan the day and time of their preference for our interviews. When each interview began, I greeted them, asked if they required additional accommodations, asked if they were in a safe, comfortable space to begin, and asked their permission to record audio on my phone and video via Zoom. I would then explain to them the overview of the interview—that I would review the informed consent document, ask demographic questions, and then ask four categories of interview questions. After explicitly asking for their consent and awaiting an affirmative response, I would begin the interview by asking them a few warm-up questions regarding their day and how they were feeling. Afterwards, I would preview the interview questions, encourage the participant to only answer questions they feel comfortable with, and model ways that they could say no or move onto other questions should they prefer that.

Looking to Berg (2009), I sought to build rapport that allowed for open-ended interview questions designed to elicit experiential and behavioral responses in the form of personal stories. When constructing the questions, I considered potential life experiences of students who need to regularly think about code-switching. As such, I came up with the question categories of: Connection & Disconnection, Fluency, Identity, and Outlook. Additionally, because I recognized that I had no idea which categories would garner the most attention and I hoped to have a more flowing conversation, I came up with a list of questions for each category so as to be sure to hit on each topic even if the participants had discussed the themes in earlier answers. Hopefully, the interviews with participants will be enough to begin larger conversations to heal the daily wounds incurred by all students finding difficulty navigating home and school cultures.

For me, regularly traversing the boundaries of home and school has increasingly become an alienating experience. In order to make the participants comfortable about a more technical

sounding term like “code-switch”, I told each participant a similar message while giving an overview of the interview:

> The study is about how we change our communications between home and academic environments. Communications can be anything. It can be any way that we express ourselves. It can be language. It can be intonation. It can be clothing or ways of phrasing things. It could be ways of gesturing or mannerisms.

Each participant tended to nod at this or say they are “familiar with” or “know about” code-switching. They all appeared comfortable with the aforementioned explanation. For the first interview, I asked the participant specifically what they termed “home” and “family.” In subsequent interviews, I followed my sense of how they took up the various terms and language, which appeared to lead to clearer, streamlined communications about their experiences.

According to Charmaz (2014), using “some of your participants’ key terms in advance can help you form questions and put your research participant at ease (p. 51). I used my prior research and life experiences to build basic language around some of the statements. I used terms such as “direct” and “disclosure” to inquire about the participants’ communication styles in various contexts. This especially proved invaluable given that most participants had not regularly discussed or read about the particular topic of “code-switching” either in depth or at all.

Thankfully, finding connections through the participant interviews allowed me to feel there was a community and hope for bridging differences. The participants appeared to be positively impacted by the interviews. Specifically, participants had much to say regarding the first interview question: “What are ways that you feel connected or disconnected to your college and home environments? Do you notice these differences in the way you speak?” All five participants openly thanked me for engaging them on their code-switching experiences. Three

participants openly expressed joy at learning that there was active research on this topic. Their positivity to talking about this seemed to inform their openness to discussion.

Participants seemed open to discussing their experiences, but often ended up slowing down their speech patterns during critical moments of explanation. In these moments, I would offer thanks or positive head nodding or other forms of response in support of their disclosure. Although I felt I could relate to a great deal of their experiences, I refrained from over-relating to allow the participants to form their own narrative space.

Although code-switching was a common occurrence in their lives, they often would respond to direct inquiries about code-switching by stating: “that’s a great question.” Afterwards, they would usually pause and relate how they had never openly discussed their code-switching behaviors before. This created various opportunities and challenges both for the participants and for me as the researcher. For example, sometimes participants would explain that they could not think of an example regarding a behavior. Then within 30 seconds to a minute, they would come back and say that they could provide a clear example. One participant, Ellen, often stated that she code-switched “a lot throughout the day.” However, she did not provide any specific examples until later in the interview. Once she was able to remember a specific interaction with a peer from her architecture class, she seemed to have a plethora of examples. Thankfully, all of the participants were more than willing to explore their experiences and create ways to discuss them.

Understanding how CMM (Pearce, 2004) factors into communication experiences for the participants helped me understand how I may need to go about interviews with them. As individuals who regularly vacillate between levels of power and privilege, the participants may not feel comfortable disclosing the decision-making processes they used to change communication styles. As I discuss in my findings in Chapter 4, several participants felt guilt or

grief for their decision-making when code-switching. Working hard, as an interviewer, to create comfort for participants is paramount to creating a safe context for disclosure of their thoughts and decision-making processes. As more interviews occurred, I became more aware of my non-verbal cues such as nodding, looking off camera, and facial expressions of agreement and understanding. As such, I would explicitly tell my participants at the beginning of the interview that I might look off the camera for a moment to write a note or check the recording instrumentation.

I used simple statements such as "I hear you," "I feel you," or "Understood" in a soft tone to reflect the participants' distress and confusion in a compassionate manner (Berg 2009). I believe this echoing allowed for deeper exploration into the emotional territories of participants. I say this because early in the interviews, participants would answer more simply in an overall narrative manner regarding how they need to code-switch as part of their life experience. When later asked about stories or anecdotes regarding these experiences, the participants had to pause in order to parse out details. I was excited to see numerous "Aha!" moments from the participants when they started to connect their experiences into larger themes. These moments usually led to more detailed explanations in the interviews.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I wrote brief thoughts and connections about the experience in a journal. I would usually circle a few notes I had written during the interview and write an arrow towards a question or a thought I had towards the end or after the interview. This approach aided in coding data because it allowed me to remember key moments or feelings that did not appear to readily spring forth from the transcripts. For example, in my interview with Alex, they appeared

frustrated at a number of moments during the interview. I was better able to make connections of their experience through notetaking and post-interview reflections.

In order to analyze the information covered in the interviews, I used transcriptions by my recording app, Recorder, on my Google Pixel 2 phone. I would then put all transcripts on a Google Document where I would go through and immediately de-identify names and locations to maintain participant confidentiality. I checked all transcripts against the audio recordings and corrected them for accuracy. Afterward, I chose to code by grouping data from the transcripts into themes through "lumper coding" for the first round of manual coding as demonstrated by Saldaña (2015, p. 24). This helped me get started in conceptualizing thematic codes.

Additionally, I drew from Charmaz's (2014) discussion of grounded theory methods and used "gerund" coding for my first round (p. 120). This helped me to get closer to being a research element of the data. In specific, I was able to identify implicit meanings and "interact with them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121). From gerund coding, I identified initial codes such as: conflict with family, emotional distancing, community support, and more. In my next level of analysis, I used in vivo coding as described by Saldaña (2016) and identified words or short phrases "from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (p. 105). Given that many participants appeared to be discovering language and other realizations during the interview, I honored their language choices and attempted to follow their usage of terms. For example, I inquired about and used definitions for words they employed such as: "matter of factly" and "hedging." In following this approach, Stringer (2014) explains that researchers "are more likely to capture the meanings inherent in people's experience" (p. 140). As noted above, most of the participants had a low level of experience in thinking about code-switching in the ways I was

asking them to, and they often felt disempowered in many of their code-switching exchanges. Thus, I strove to use interview methods which provided space and empowerment for their voices.

After finding and identifying numerous in vivo codes from the interviews, I also found myself naturally looking towards holistic coding. According to Dey (1993), this method is an effort "to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole rather than by analyzing them line by line" (p. 104). I had initially believed I would do more of a narrative coding analysis where I would treat the codes as part of a story (Saldaña, 2016, p. 145). However, I quickly realized that many of the participant responses were detailed anecdotes and flashes of experiences rather than stories. Once an event or stimulus occurred, the participant would switch codes and maintain the new code for a limited time period Understanding that the memories of codes were tied to stories and anecdotes helped me finish my first round of coding.

After I finished all initial coding, I began my second cycle of coding by organizing the data into a Google Sheets file. I categorized transcript data by interviews and codes. During this time, I also followed Charmaz's (2014) recommendation and wrote memos of "emerging data" (p. 169). Through this method, I was able to see connective patterns among the interview data sets. For example, there were thematic elements among all interviews regarding decision-making processes prior to communications as well as themes regarding joyful community engagement. Thus, I began my focused coding process, which yielded themes of decisions regarding communication rules, how the participants understood which rules others were using, sense-making regarding disclosure, and finding community.

Looking at coded data on the spreadsheet, I arranged them by common themes and came up with a structure. In the following chapter, I elucidate the themes and sense-making processes of the participants.

Chapter 4. Findings

Participant data revealed four themes: 1) Participants used code-switching to both follow established, constitutive, rules and create new, regulative, rules in conversations. 2) Participants were adept at understanding the codes others used during interactions. 3) Participants prepared themselves and others for disclosure of personal information. 4) Participants experienced a strong desire and need to engage with a non-judgmental community that understood their challenges navigating between the worlds of home and college.

Throughout each interview, I learned about the inner workings of the participants' decision-making regarding code-switching. Furthermore, participants shared their narratives surrounding the outcomes of their experiences. Each one presented different scenarios and life experiences given the diverse range of participant backgrounds. Whether it was Phillip's difficulties with feeling behind or Ellen's issues regarding when to be direct, Memorable Messages (MMs) regarding challenges informed their decision-making to switch communication codes.

Hedging or Matter of Factly?: Choosing between Constitutive and Regulative Rules

All participants discussed having to choose between being indirect and direct in communication. Making these choices occurred in minor everyday moments as well as emotionally intense ones. The term "hedging" came from my interview with Alex who used it as a term to describe communicating indirectly about needs. "Matter of factly" derives from my interview with Ellen who used it to describe "direct" and "to the point" communications of needs. Making decisions between indirect and direct in order to follow constitutive rules or create regulative rules was a main theme in participant interviews.

Using *in vivo* coding, I picked up how Ellen's Korean cultural background caused her to often think about "how direct or indirect" people are being because Ellen intimated that "directness" is a large concern in Korean culture. Thus, she often focused on how "matter of factly" she spoke in each context. She explained how she loves the phrase, which she picked up from a podcast she listens to about communicating in the workplace. It appears that her podcast listening experience was a bifurcation moment where she decided to engage more with creating regulative rules.

Using Pearce's (2007) notion of bifurcation, when directions alter due to the path of the conversation (p. 10), Ellen's language behaviors instituted a bifurcation that led to a regulative rule being created. Ellen intimated that she felt herself to be an ambitious individual. She explained how she felt "a little bit unique in a way" because she had "a little bit of a design background." While in an architecture class for beginners, she was "not here to you know, like fuck around and like, you know waste my money." Ellen said she was "very outspoken" about expressing those feelings to "my professor, to the people in my department, like to the chair of the program and stuff." As such, Ellen created regulative rules about how forthcoming a person should be in classroom contexts. Given her previous attendance of Ivy League schools, she compared her university in central Appalachia: "I was like—Harvard doesn't do it this way." I never gained clarity in my conversation with Ellen on the degree to which she was able to change the classroom culture in her program. Yet, it was clear that she had a positive outlook about her actions.

Her outlook about creating regulative rules was different for her friendships and conversations at home. The same directness that brought her success in college became problematic in her interactions with her partner and friends when she would offer solutions

instead of listening more or providing validation. Ellen's worry for not being matter of fact about her concerns with professors and class peers was that she might "appear whiny." For her, this was worse than appearing assertive, even if the latter held the potential of making her "look bitchy." However, with her personal relationships, she would adapt her behaviors when her college friends would say that they "didn't want solutions" and they "just want to be listened to." Ellen explained how she was continually working to be a better listener in her personal relationships even though she preferred "solution-oriented" communications.

Like Ellen, Phillip experienced dissonance within the academic community in relationship to his skilled background when talking to individuals from other departments. In his classroom interactions, instead of creating regulative rules or being matter of fact, he tended to follow constitutive rules of not "stirring the pot" and causing problems as he would . In relation to talking about his career interests with family, he said: "I feel like I would downplay a little bit just because I feel like the people aren't going to be as receptive of it." He characterized it as the "opposite of imposter syndrome." That is, he felt to be at such a level of expertise that his presence was stressful to others and caused him to downplay his differences. Experiences like this appeared challenging for him at times given his tense facial expressions and pauses. His example reads similar to Mosier's (2021) research on FGS and conflicting family support messages.

Although Phillip was not an FGS, his family's expectations track similar patterns in this instance. Moving back to the example, Phillip's family is proud of his academic achievements to be studying for his PhD and enjoy pointing out this fact. However, his family does not want to engage in discussion of his interests because it differentiates his personality from the family. FGS often encounter this issue (Orbe 2004, 2008), though it is not limited to FGS. Additionally,

Phillip acknowledged the constitutive rule of his family that if he mentions his skillset, they will feel perplexed. Thus, he created his own regulative rule for himself that he would "avoid" and "downplay" any discussion of his coding skills or ability around family.

For his PhD research, Phillip worked with public schools and perceived that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)-related teachers in primary school systems felt their own knowledge was inferior to his. Phillip believed that this feeling of inferior knowledge caused these teachers to avoid communicating with him. Here, there is a mirroring of experience with his family. Like the family, the school ostensibly wants him on the premises; however, the other teachers have a challenging experience interacting with him. As such, Phillip follows the same constitutive rules as his family. He did his best to simply listen and follow his own regulative rule to "avoid weird situation[s]" through "downplay[ing]" his skills. From his sigh and tone, this appeared to be an unwanted repetitive pattern (URP) for Phillip as well. It was interesting to watch the role reverse when he discussed interfacing with other university departments for required classes in his PhD curriculum.

Ironically, while interacting with individuals in other departments, Phillip felt intellectually inferior. He developed a phrase: "Phillip's corner of helping him." During class time, he would often feel uncomfortable as if he might break a constitutive rule of keeping everyone focused and not be "distracting the group" if he were to "ask a clarifying question." This type of behavior falls in line with Nazione et al.'s (2011) research regarding MMs and how students "use heuristics devices" to navigate through their experience (p.125). As such, Phillip further demonstrated how he internalized his difficulties and followed what he perceived as constitutive rules to "make my little corner" and wait until after class to ask or hope that

someone else might ask the question instead. Often because of his "embarrassment," he would "hedge" his communications in order to follow the rule of not "distracting the group."

Alex explained how at age 39, they are quite direct about their desires. They became more direct as a result of their experiences in the academic community as well as the bondage, discipline, dominance, submission and sadomasochism (BDSM) community. In each environment, Alex would consider how they "had to be very specific" about how they were going to go about a given interaction. They explained how this directness was a response to being "raised to be palatable." Alex disclosed that, being raised in a "brown-skinned Latinx" family, they were "raised to not ruffle feathers" and found it "very difficult to be very direct" when they were younger. As such, at age 19, Alex also "would hedge" often. Alex is an FGS. In this case, their behavior directly ties into Nazione et al.'s (2011) research regarding FGSs following available heuristic devices in college environments.

One of Alex's experiences with seeking housing while they were homeless is an illustrative MM. In related conversations, they might state: "I don't have a place to stay," hoping someone might respond: "I have a place if you want to stay." Alex followed perceived constitutive rules of not "causing issues" which stemmed from MMs as a child where his family pushed him to "be palatable." Alex described their previous inability to directly state needs: "I didn't really know how to express what I needed." Alex was cognizant of their own inability express their need, but they "didn't want to offend." Perhaps Alex encountered URPs of not receiving help because they continually followed constitutive rules due to the plethora of internalized memories of needing to "be palatable" and "not ruffle feathers" with their needs—even if those needs were dire.

Eventually, Alex made it clear that they "just stopped being fucking palatable" once they gained "higher degrees" in academic studies. They referenced how being asked "How do you do that?" in an open inquisitive way with things from others caused them to feel more empowered. As such, being asked questions in a meaningful way were MMs that communicated their worthiness. As such, they began to break out of URPs related to constitutive rules they were following stemming from MMs of needing to "be palatable."

Hedging and being direct were also themes in Sara and Katrina's interviews. Although not overtly stated, both participants also experienced code-switching between constitutive rules and regulative rules. However, their experiences revealed additional layers of disclosure experiences regarding sexual and gender identity with their family. I will discuss these experiences in the following sections.

Choosing Birds: Deciding How to Switch Codes

Unsurprisingly, each of the participants noted how they needed to choose their communication style and content based on their listeners' expectations. However, what I perceived as unique about the participants was that they based their communications almost entirely on what others were thinking and expecting. Constitutive rules appeared to completely control their approach to conversations. When I asked Alex how they decided to go about code-switching, they said that they typically would try to work from the language and thinking of their interactional partner, rather than introduce their own language and thinking. To illustrate, Alex said that if they told me to think of a bird, I would "probably most likely think of an image in [my] head about what this bird would be." However, the bird I pictured in my head is most likely not the bird that Alex is "explaining" to me. Instead of trying to explain their own bird idea, Alex would attempt to work with my bird idea "as a framework for our conversation" Thus, Alex

would choose the communication code of adhering to white culture based on constitutive rules of adhering to dominant culture. It became apparent that the "whatever reason" was actually what Alex considered "white culture" to be. Although Alex identified as Latinx and described themselves as growing up in a "Latino, Chicano" background, they had to conform their ideas to that of the constitutive rules of white culture since starting public school as a young child. Much like participants in London (1989) and Orbe's research (2003), Alex demonstrated that it felt easier to conform to concepts of the dominant culture than to communicate in ways similar to his sense of authentic self.

They went on to explain how others seemed to have issues understanding Alex, even when Alex tried to create their own regulative rules at the university where they teach. This especially appeared to be the case in public speaking events when they were speaking alongside white peers:

> I've had people try to train me on things that I've created. I have said among board members that have told me, I said out loud: Here's the plan. This is what we need to do: X, Y, and Z." Then a white man got up and said the same fucking exact thing verbatim, and everyone was like: "Wonderful!"

Later Alex elaborated that when they shared their idea with the board, there was a non-response from their audience. Alex returned to the bird concept as they explained:

> It will always fall flat to those who have no idea what my culture is, or what that comes with, and then how to interpret it, because they're still thinking about the damn fucking bird in their own minds.

Throughout the interview, Alex expressed how their communications were met with silence specifically because "maybe I was too impassioned" and their "inflection got up." Interestingly,

these comments echo Nazione et al. (2011) research regarding internalizing heuristics. What was originally being raised to be “palatable” has become Alex questioning whether they were “too impassioned” at a work meeting. Alex pondered if this difference was due to the perception that they did not appear “cool, calm and collected” to the audience. Arguably, this was an MM which contributed to a bifurcation in the typical URP Alex experienced. Here, they intimated their perception that needing to appear “collected” rather than “too impassioned” was more about being “white.” Alex later referenced this experience as to why they were leaving their position at their institution.

The three white identifying participants seldom overtly expressed the need to switch cultures other than between home and academic work environments. Sara discussed how she knew what to wear and talk about with her family. She identified as white, lesbian, and agnostic. However, whenever she would visit or speak with her family, who identified as Roman Catholic with “traditional values,” she expressed how she would choose topics and clothing that were palatable for their “very conservative” and “religious” preferences:

> I think, the most common thing I hear at home is like, *oh those*, you know*, liberal universities have brainwashed you.* So that kind of makes me not want to communicate because it's just not worth it to me and I won't. I won't ever agree with them. So, I just say nothing.

Sara decided that the constitutive rule in this occasion was that she should always act in a manner representative of their conservative expectations. As such, she decided that she would “just say nothing.”

However, Sara put in great efforts to maintain contact with her family. Thus, she tried to find ways to work with constitutive rules agreeable to her parents' concept of sharing

information. She would choose to follow the constitutive rule of deliberately communicating daily moments due to her parents' expectations of daily contact. She pointed out: "I think that it's that navigation of how much to share making them still feel like they're part of my life." As a result, she would "send TikToks," which she explained were examples of "me selectively over sharing with my parents so they think I tell them everything." Here, we see nuance in Sara's approach to her parents' expectations. She is creating a regulative rule with herself to truncate messages of personal identity that her parents may find problematic. Additionally, she is following constitutive rules with her parents' expectation that she might accidentally "over share" information. Through creating rules with herself about how she will present as following parental expectations, she is cocreating meaning with her family. However, each individual in the communication may have a different concept of what is being created. Regardless, Sara appeared humorous and confident about her efforts in this example of "oversharing" where she created the illusion for her parents that they knew her inner thoughts even though she had revealed little about her authentic self.

Conversely, some participants found challenges in adhering to the regulative rules of others. Indeed, Ellen felt empowered to be direct in her approach. She preferred conversations with her professors over those with her peers because her professors wanted her to be "very straight up" about her thoughts, goals, and strategies. She loved it when people engaged with her using *Ellen's* regulative rules in conversations, such as everyone sharing their "true feelings" about each other's work. However, when her class peers would share their academic struggles with her, Ellen admitted that learning how to respond to them was "a large learning arc" because she preferred to offer solutions rather than simply listen and relate. In moments when her peers expressed their struggles to her, Ellen began to interpret as a constitutive rule that they were

looking for a listener, rather than a problem-solver. She began to develop gendered responses. For example, she stated that "girls don't really want a solution." She eventually learned to ask herself: "What does [this friend] actually want right now, right? Like she wants me to be a friend who can like listen and just like empathize with her." Like Sara following her families' constitutive rules, Ellen was able to maintain her relationship with her friends by following their regulative rule of listening and validating rather than presenting solutions.

Sadly, not everyone was successful in their attempts to follow constitutive rules. Phillip had his own set of difficulties with academic peers in that they all had different terminologies relating to their fields of study, to which he was a newcomer. He had difficulty understanding constitutive rules regarding how to read and examine topics. He explained that some of the terminologies his peers used "feel like it's that cross point where each of us have like this common vocabulary…. And then we find out, like, *oh, you don't know what that means*." Phillip explained that when "talking to CS [computer science] people. I felt like we have a common language and style." However, when he encountered "English [Literature] students—like the way they phrased things, I have to reread what they wrote. I have to play back in my head what they just said because their phrasing is different." Phillip explained that he had challenges with their "elegant" phrasing and would often ask them to "rephrase" what they were saying. Ultimately, he did not appear to be successful in code-switching between the two academic environments and admitted that he would often "return to my corner of needing help." This reaching out for help and then retreating to his "corner" appeared to be a regular feature of Phillip's experience, an unwanted repetitive pattern (URP). Phillip tried to laugh about it, but it did not appear to be a positive experience for him. I wonder if there will ever be a new

memorable moment or experience to create a bifurcation where Phillip can find a way out of this pattern that troubled him.

Often, the recursive cycles of switching cultures placed participants in situations where, like Phillip, they assume the position of the person who needs to “figure out” what to do to “fix” the potential, real, or perceived misunderstanding. Although the concept of needing to “fix” speech recurred in my conversation with Phillip, others talked about it as well. Alex perceived that when they are one of the only people of color at a university faculty meeting, members of the meeting will feel more comfortable with their white counterparts. “They look at me like *what the fuck are you doing*?” he said. Alex explained that they understand that others are “perceiving that I am angry” regardless of Alex’s actual emotion. According to CMM, experiences like this create bifurcations which lead into or out of communication URPs. Given the URPs Alex hoped to avoid in their communications with peers, they decided they needed to leave their university.

Though the roots and long-term outcomes of these experiences are quite different, Phillip and Alex both felt compelled to resolve miscommunications and disagreement by internalizing the stress these problems induced and communicating less about their respective experiences. Resolving situations in this manner flows with research regarding FGS and their challenges in communicating needs (Stebleton & Soria, 2012, p.10). Considering this continual contextual difficulty, it is little wonder that study participants were also contending with “preparing receivers” in their code-switching activity. Participants explained that in this work they would regulate or create contexts that allowed for more disclosure of their personal views.

Preparing Receivers: Managing Disclosure

Interestingly, all participants appeared to feel justified in their reasoning for choosing to be rule-oriented and careful about what they shared and with whom. Ellen and Alex were careful

to cultivate direct honesty with those close to them while Phillip, Sara, and Katrina tended to be careful not to disclose certain pieces of information. All five participants created rules around their communications and disclosures. Doing this through ownership, boundaries, and rules appeared to help them.

Despite Alex's upbringing, which taught them to "avoid ruffling feathers," they did create regulative rules with their partners and close friends. Alex explained: "I have to be able to train them to say: this is what I mean when I say this." Although Alex never elaborated on specific training strategies, they explained that the need to "train" came from interacting with people from other cultures: "When I'm among people that have grown up similar, whether it's my family or cousins or people that when I say [hand me] 'that thing over there,' they give it to me because it's understood a little bit differently." It was this difference that Alex noticed while growing up, and later they realized that not only did they train to speak in the dominant cultural form, but they could also train those around them.

Alex's training as a mental health therapist allowed them to have a better understanding of "rules of communication." As such they were in a continual process of simultaneously preparing themselves and preparing those with whom they were planning to communicate. They found training their friends and partners to be necessary for clearer communication. Even during intimate activities at home, Alex was quite mindful about communication and its consequences, particularly regarding being concrete about pleasure needs:

> I'm mindful of that, its challenge of not verbally expressing with the needs because, especially in videos in a kink, I want to have an orgasm …. The goal for the other person is to have an orgasm .... And if we both kind of blindly say, like, "Well, I kind of like that," then that's not going to happen, right?

MMs of empowerment appeared connected to his change to create regulative rules which over time carried over from his professional life into his personal spheres. Alex later elaborated that this kind of directness with partners occurred after they decided to become “more direct generally” in their early 30s.

Regardless of activity, Alex felt it was necessary to always verbally express needs and to cultivate relationships of respect for clearly communicated expectations. Reading between the lines, constantly feeling as a disempowered outsider was a primary motivator for these behaviors. In Alex’s professional and academic spheres, they often appeared unable to have control over how others perceived them. Alex shared throughout the interview that they constantly felt in conflict with the people in their surroundings. This sentiment was echoed by numerous researchers regarding FGS from diverse backgrounds (London, 1989; Moreno, 2019; Orbe, 2003; 2004). For Alex, there was regularity with unwanted repetitive patterns (URPs) during conversations with coworkers, and it appeared that his primary solution was clear communication.

Interestingly, Ellen also felt more comfortable with creating regulative rules in her approach to communicating and even when asking for space to vent frustrations:

> If I'm like, always bitching about my professor, I'd be like, okay, I know I talked about this a lot, but I just want to vent, and I will just want you to listen. And like, this is what happened in class, and I hate it. Thank you for listening.

In these experiences she clearly lays out expectations and even provides a verbal sign when the content of her message has ended.

When Ellen encountered a classroom peer who also felt the criticisms were “too soft.” Ellen felt understood by this friend who had similar feelings and tried to cultivate more

relationships where “harsh criticism” could exist. She expressed moderate levels of success as well as frustration with the attempt to avoid URPs. Both Ellen and Alex made references to being understood by people with similar cultures and how they desired to be understood without having to engage the unrelenting and exhausting work of preparing others to understand their preferred method of communication.

Alex made several references to how people from his own cultural background could understand them well without words just by “looking at the same thing.” Their tonality and expression emoted relief at mentioning this concept. Ellen talked about how stressful it could be to always have to raise issues of directness regarding class criticisms. Alex appeared to feel drained from seeming to have to “always have to” do extra work to prepare people from “white culture” in order to feel comfortable with them. Although Orbe (2008) discusses the ability to navigate multiple identities as a marker of academic success, these experiences also appeared to take a toll. Sometimes it seems this toll caused participants to talk or engage less.

Preparing receivers also occurred through negation and avoidance. Although this example is not a transition between home and college for Phillip, it is an example of a liminal space between college culture and lay culture. In this case, it appeared that his only strategy was to say less in order to follow the constitutive rule of adapting to the local dialect. Phillip never explicitly said that he felt powerless, but the content of his messages implied such feelings. As such, he felt he had to “think about how to rephrase everything” when he leaves his “home turf.” He explained his experience of going to high schools in “more rural” regions of the Midwest where he recruited students to attend his college:

> I feel like that in discussions between a college environment and non-college environment. I feel [I experience] within areas where they don't value education, or it's

not seen as important. It's really hard to discuss things where I have to make sure my vocabulary is more on their level, and they don't feel like I'm talking down to them."

Phillip also experienced pressure to become more adept at knowing when and how to code-switch from his college recruiter peers. Phillip never shared any stories of becoming more fluent in switching in ways that the recruiters liked. It appeared that his only strategy was to say less in order to follow the constitutive rule of adapting to the local dialect.

As an Information Technology (IT) PhD researcher, he became starkly aware of his need to revise his IT jargon when around family members. As he became the general IT handler for his wife and extended family, he would often try to explain IT issues with responses of "glazed eyes" or critical comments about him being "smart." At other times, he received sighs and comments about how people could not understand his "intelligence." Although Phillip did not outright say it, he appeared perplexed or frustrated with commentaries on his intelligence. He explained: "Like I changed the way I discussed—it sort of sounded too high and mighty." He discussed his comradery with his brother-in-law who is a nuclear engineer who also tries to downplay his engineering background: "He would never bring [his nuclear engineering background] up because everyone has this image of him being like some smarty pants." It was clear that the challenges from these labelling practices by friends and family were painful enough to prompt him to avoid discussing his life and career goals with his own family.

Phillip had a laugh as he reflected on these considerations, but it was also clear that he felt an element of pain in how alone he was in his experience with being between cultures. While reflecting on this myself, I wonder if or how this separation might play out for Katrina and Sara and individuals with related experiences. Katrina and Sara had less turmoil in terms of direct and indirect communication behaviors because each of them had decided to completely hide their

lifestyle, sexuality, and gender experience from their respective families. Although these issues begin to reach beyond home life and academic life, the alienation created by maintaining roles through code-switching is apparent in each area of life.

Along with Ellen, Katrina and Sara also reported that they preferred speaking with people from academic cultures. Sara claimed to have a study-focused lifestyle where she highly prioritized her time toward academics and did not report much about her experiences with friends or romantic partners. She called herself “a nerd” in relationship to her social life. Given her academic interests and achievements, she would qualify as a successful student as by Demetriou (2017) and Ojeda (2019) for her connection with school programs, honors level work, and connection with professors. Connecting her with FGS research also appears reasonable because of her need to reach out to university support if she hopes to be successful.

Sara’s experience within her family environment was that she felt reasonable if she went home and stayed for three days or less. Yet, if it was beyond three days, the persistent communicative labor of “walking on eggshells” caused her to feel “drained.” In an effort to manage this drain, she set clear rules and boundaries with her family. Regarding her family tensions, Sara explained:

> It presents in different ways, like my brother and I will have head-to-head scream fights where I've told my mom, “I won't come home and visit if he's home because the last time I was home he was—he literally put me through hell.” [My brother’s] like “Well, you know, it's great that you want to get a master's degree, but also you're failing as a woman because you're supposed to have a lot of children.”

The takeaway from this MM appeared to be that her brother’s values were seen as non-offensive to her parent, but that Sara’s were welcome to be questioned harshly. Similar to Alex’s

"training" of close relations, Sara engaged in cultivating how her family could continue to communicate with her. According to Sara, they all agreed on a "don't ask, don't tell policy." Even without sharing her lesbian and non-religious identity with her mother, Sara said "my identity has changed [my mom]." Simply by changing her hair color or revealing something not religiously aligned about her life, it seemed from the interview that Sara's family was completely affected by her decisions. As such, it appeared pressure-inducing for Sara to ignore preparing her family for her conversations and interactions with them. Similar to the other participants, she also expressed being alone in her identity and interest changes.

As an FGS, Katrina discussed how her college opened her up to relationships with her current primary partner and to polyamory. Not only does she attempt to separate her lifestyle from her family, but she also finds herself battling with separating her family identity when coming home to her partners. According to Katrina, her family "does loud really well." This "loud" behavior is not simply about volume; it is also about their being emotionally driven, "quick to anger" behaviors. Katrina sometimes has difficulty "bouncing between" the different lifestyles.

She noted a particular experience directly after visiting her family when she was attempting to park at her apartment but was blocked by her boyfriend's car. She found herself getting enraged in a way that was reminiscent of her family's "loud" behaviors. She told herself: *We are not our emotions. Don't get out of control. It's like that in the real world. It's not what we do. We know that he absolutely didn't mean to. He will come fix it. Just ask*. Here, she elucidated the emotional challenge of choosing to switch from her family's typical communication code of yelling in anger to instead respectfully asking for her partner to move his car.

When her boyfriend came down to the parking lot to move his car, he noticed she was upset and asked if she was “okay.” She responded as such: “I'm still pissed about the spot, for no good reason. But if you just like, give me a second and we just walk inside. Don't talk about it. I'm just gonna pretend it didn't happen, and by the time I get inside, we'll be fine.” Here, Katrina used regulative rules to break away from an important URP of lashing out in anger. She emoted a sense of self-satisfaction at being able to navigate conflicting codes in this moment.

In juxtaposition to her positive experience of preparing her partner to receive her, Katrina admitted that her family believes she is “completely straight” and in a “heteronormative relationship.” Yet, as previously mentioned with her polyamory, nonbinary gender categorization of she/they, and pansexual identity, she does not disclose the truth to her “very Catholic” family. Like Phillip and Sara, Katrina uses negation strategies and omits parts of her life narrative from her family because, as she said, “I know it's for like the ease of my existence.” Katrina left a moment of silence after this statement and the conversational tone of the interview became a bit more somber.

Ultimately, each of the participants used code-switching to maintain their past selves with their family while also living in and achieving life goals in academia. Although the challenges are real, everyday experience for them, it also shows that they are willing to work on themselves and cultivate their relationships to maintain a foot in each world. Of course, keeping a foot in each world is made possible through positive benefits and experiences of each world. Throughout each interview, the theme of finding community became apparent.

Finding Community - The Self and Selves

Listening to each of the participants’ stories, I was impressed by their strength and ability to maintain their state of mind while also being somewhat isolated in their experiences. With the

advent of social media and the inherent networks within academia, I was convinced that college students would have an easy time finding community for these experiences. However, this did not seem the case for study participants. It appeared that through the exhaustion found in simply getting through life and maintaining their relationships, each of the participants did not have strong, clear communities specifically to help them navigate the different cultures of their home environments and academia. When I asked participants how they coped with these differences, they all described their concerns regarding the constant flow of cultural navigation. Additionally, participants discussed the difficulty and great necessity of community connections.

No Reprieve Outside of Talking or Revolution

The need for communal recognition seemed to be universal among the participants' experiences with community. Sara felt that "in order for there to be safety, you have to code-switch." However, later she explained that talking to other people "who understood" her experience really helped. Similarly, when I asked Alex how they deal with the everyday stresses of navigating oppressive environments, they said:

> How do I deal with it? There's really not a place to deal with it. Other than my finding more community members that understand, maybe what I'm going through. Because even the question that you're asking—it's like there's really, there's no reprieve, really … unless there's like some institutional types of like, systemic change.

Alex expressed that he worked hard to develop and be a part of the BDSM and kink communities as a safe space of support, but in terms of a place to completely feel safe they explained: "there's no utopia." This seems to parallel the case with Alex's family.

Even within their family community, Alex explained: "My grandfather told me straight up, he's like: "You're gonna become the fucking white devil. Don't do that, don't go to school."

Here, there are still clear issues regarding their life in totality. Within their family and the Latino community, Alex felt connected but only to a certain degree because of their affiliation to school and queer culture. However, among academic cultures, they found themselves to be the only "brown-skinned person," which also held challenges and offenses to their person.

The lack of "utopia" was echoed in Phillip's explanation of coping. He explained that the different styles of speech "serve their own purposes" and went on to explain that everyone he encounters requires him to change *his* language style. Although Phillip's reality did not appear as harrowing in regard to his code-switching needs related to identity, it is interesting that there was a shared perspective among participants that this is just the way that it is.

Although I interviewed Katrina and Sara individually, they are friends. Each of them hails from more rural areas in their respective states of Illinois and California. Both were raised Catholic, white, heteronormative, and with parents who had some level of postsecondary education and degrees. However, within both of their undergrad experiences, they both became self-identified as "liberal." Sara felt comfortable to disclose her lesbian sexuality to peers in the college community but made sure to keep that information hidden from her family. Both Katrina and Sara feel they cannot disclose such information to their respective families. As noted previously, Sara had tensions with her family and, as she described, "my academic environments in my academic choices have changed how my brother sees me." As such, she has to be selective in her interactions with family members. Sara explained that she does not actively think about code-switching because she does it automatically, "almost like a trauma response." Learning how to heal from these trauma response code-switching requires safe spaces.

Finding People Who Get it

Considering how historical trauma affects communities, I wonder what healing practices people use to cope with these demanding code-switching experiences as they occur. Listening to and communicating about experiences is important to growth and learning new strategies. Considering the theme of community engagement, I asked each participant a question akin to: How do you cope with the personal/cultural differences that initiate code-switching? Katrina humorously answered that she "bitched to people who will understand it." At this she laughed, shrugged, and mentioned her friend Sara. When I separately asked Sara the same question prior to Katrina's interview, she posited:

> I think in the academic environment I've coped by just finding, you know, a few, like two or three people that really align with my views and I get along with really well, and I think having that core group wherever you are is important, because you always have them to lean on.

Each participant directly and tacitly communicated that friends and compatriots in these experiences helped them. Whether it was Phillip's brother-in-law at family gatherings who was also labelled as having a "genius" intellect for his PhD, or whether it was Ellen's peer who also sought out "harsh criticism" for the classwork, each participant seemed to have someone to "lean on."

Alex and Katrina spoke about how their romantic partners have helped them cope through direct commentary or through simply being present and supportive. Alex explained that they find "people with similar experiences" and talk to them about those experiences. Ellen also spoke about the support of her partner and friends. According to her, her partner and friends are happy to exchange listening time for regulative rule time with Ellen. When communicating, she

reported feeling “good” about listening and validating experiences if they listen to her solutions when she offers them. Her take on experiencing these differences was: “I think it's just something that I'm gonna deal with for the rest of my life … It’s about two selves.” Like Phillip, when I asked Ellen about her outlook on code-switching, she appeared to believe that the two codes (home and academic) would always be separate.

For the most part, participants spent little time explicitly describing their communities. However, their communities were in the background of their responses regarding difficult family communication and easier school peer communications. Other than Sara who identified as single, participants’ romantic partners created a sense of safety through clearly cocreated rules of communication expectations. One of Alex’s partners planned “fun games;” Katrina’s partner “provided weed” and listened; and Phillip’s wife listened and “was supportive.” Although Ellen never directly talked about her boyfriend, I could see his shadow in the background of her room during the Zoom interview. I noticed her smile and relax in his presence. In fact, much of the interview was in his presence and she appeared to feel completely comfortable sharing her code-switching struggles with him there. All these partners created well-communicated spaces with clear constitutive rules. Additionally, when participants wanted to change the communication dynamic, there was always a moment of cognizance about it.

Although each participant had clearly thought about their challenges and how to overcome them, they saw no clear path to victory. Likewise, Katrina, Sara, and Alex had a futile view of ever escaping the need to code-switch so regularly in their everyday lives. However, the other Phillip and Ellen had accepted code-switching as a reality that dictated most of their communicative interactions. Whether it was through challenge or empowerment, code-switching between home and school was a constant in every participant’s life. Ellen commented that she

actually preferred the academic style of communication, and Phillip appeared happy to engage with the challenge of code-switching as a life-long puzzle.

Conclusion

The difficulties regarding "internalized processes of cultural change" (Miller, 2008, p. 42) discussed in Chapter 2 were experienced by participants in this study. Each participant discussed and appeared to have levels of success regarding what Orbe (2008) described as multidimensional navigation. Ellen's comment that "Harvard doesn't do it this way" is a transition from considering the Harvard way being a constitutive rule to creating her own regulative rule that she would find a new way to do what needed to be done. Ellen's breaking of the cycle of being raised in a South Korean culture to "not cause problems" skirts the line of research regarding understanding achievement capability from diverse multigenerational family cultures as described in research by London (1989), Gibbons (2004), and Ford (1993). Playing off the memorable message (MM) of the "Matter of Factly" podcast, she was able to create a new narrative for herself that broke the URP of familial teachings. Such experiences parallel research literature regarding the fact that individual student efforts also have an impact on student success (Conley, 2003; Costa et al., 2000; Gibbons et al. 2004). Understanding this and looking at other participants' experiences helps illustrate how code-switching can bring positive change to students' lives.

Likewise, Alex had a similar experience in that he was taught by his Latino family to "be palatable" and had attempted to be as "palatable" as possible before his early thirties. Their description of avoiding direct language and having academic failure in his early college life follows research by Karp (2015) regarding the fact that first-generation college students had a higher likelihood to exit postsecondary school for reasons other than academic failure. Although

they eventually went on to receive a PhD, this was not without leaving and returning to academia. Being unaware of the demands placed on him while in his undergraduate studies, Alex's experience followed much of what was found in research by Orbe (2003; 2008) regarding FGS awareness and navigation of college expectations while existing under multiple identity categories.

The fact that Ellen, Sara, and Phillip attended college and were currently in advanced degree programs fell in line with the body of research regarding the fact that students of parents who attended college are more likely to attend (Goyette, 2008). Katrina and Sara's experiences with their family bordered Orbe's (2008) research regarding demonstrating family success through studying along family preference lines. Both participants had similar experiences of having Catholic, conservative families that each respectively avoided sharing personal information with. Both participants hid their sexual orientation from their family in what seemed to be an attempt to avoid what Stierlin (1974) described as family expelling behaviors where they would get kicked out of their respective families. Their avoidance of being expelled from their families motivated their cognizance of code-switching while with their respective families.

For Sara and Katrina, MMs played a role in avoidance of personal disclosure. Katrina insinuated that her family would "become really upset" if they found out about her identity changes to pansexual and polyamorous. Katrina's memory of being accepted by their graduate assistant peers for their change in clothing and hairstyle at their school office bolstered her sexual identity exploration. This fell in line with Wang et al.'s (2012) research connecting memorable moments as motivators for building relationships with mentors as well as Kuh's (1995) research regarding positive experiences from out-of-class education in college.

Sara's example of her brother screaming that she needs to be "getting married and having children" was a memorable moment that caused her to also avoid disclosing her differences with her family. In her avoidance of creating unwanted repetitive patterns (URPs), she regularly expressed to her family that she would not visit her family home if her brother were present. Sara's creation of regulative behaviors establishing what she will not tolerate supports pragmatic personal development (Kuh, 1993). Supporting this learned behavior of pragmatic personal development, Sara made it clear that she has strong rules and boundaries between social time and academic work.

There was a clear lack of information in the literature regarding the moments of decision making for the participants. Research from Miller (2008) and Orbe (2004; 2008) generally referred to issues participants encountered with their family, and Karp (2015) explored non-academic pressures and potential isolation for FGS like Alex and Ellen. As noted by Nazione et al. (2011), "because college is unlike anything previously experienced by most students, it is likely that they use heuristic devices as they make their way through college life" (p. 125). Additionally, research shed light on how MMs can motivate the self-assessment of behavior (Ellis & Smith, 2004; Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001). This data did illuminate that memorable moments played a pivotal role in Phillip's decision making to avoided sharing successes with his family and why Sara and Katrina were sure to switch codes to switch clothing styles and romantic relationship representation around their families. However, previous research did not discuss the in-moment decision-making or felt experience of their code-switching. Such information would be paramount to understanding why they chose to follow one heuristic device over another.

Listening to Katrina's car parking experience of emotional transition, I wondered why it was in *that* moment that she decided to break the URP of being quick-to-anger like her family? When Alex explained that their work in the medical community and engagement with the BDSM community motivated him to become more direct, what was the specific moment of that transformation and why did it happen after his early twenties? What was it about those specific communities that led him there? I ask these questions to consider the opportunities provided by these brave and candid participants in disclosing personal information.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The primary goal of this research was to simply explore how others experienced code-switching in their lives. As someone who has had to code-switch regularly throughout life, I have observed its impact on navigating relationships and social situations. In addition to challenges that the work of code-switching itself can present, code-switching between home and academic environments presents a new set of challenges because our success in both environments is paramount to our personal success. This study attempted to explore how students navigate code-switching, from their own perspective. Also, the study sought to understand the differences students experience when they change codes in school or academic environments. The anecdotes, stories, and life experiences shared by participants shed much light on these experiences.

Findings included strategies for how participants navigated code-switching during communication events based on the meanings of MMs. First, participants used code-switching to both follow constitutive rules and regulative rules during conversations. Second, participants demonstrated skill at understanding the communication codes used by others. Third, based on MMs and personal interests, participants prepared themselves and others for disclosure of personal information. Finally, participants discussed their experiences of longing for and looking for accepting, non-judgmental communities that understood their particular challenges.

Implications

Existing between college culture and home culture can be a challenge for anyone given the vastly differing expectations possible in each. These expectations require commitment to playing completely different roles, listening skills, and communication types. These differences cause FGS to develop strategies based off Memorable Messages (MMs) they internalize from

their interactions with others. From these MMs, students decide how they will code-switch. Managing meanings from code-switching helped participants find community and break cycles, but it also contributed to isolation and non-communication of needs. Code-switching for participants appeared to have some similarities, but also maintained numerous subjective differences. Regardless, there are a number of implications for future research directions.

Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) is a practical framework for assessing the way students assign meaning to interpersonal conversations through constitutive and regulative rules, which allow individuals to understand the contextual expectations (constitutive rules) and create what should happen next (regulative rules). Understanding code-switching based on these rules can allow researchers to observe when and how bifurcations occur, which can be helpful in helping at-risk student populations set a course or change it. Whether these bifurcations lead to positive experiences or URPs may be determined by subjective factors and is currently difficult to predict.

Connecting the framework of CMM to an understanding of Memorable Messages (MMs) allows further examination into these experiences that are personal, remembered, internalized, and have long-lasting effects. Understanding what each MM means to a given student may provide insights into their meaning construction and decision-making. The findings in this study point to the necessity of code-switching for survival and to try new forms of communication. Additionally, the findings indicate the need for students to be able to discuss the differences they encounter integrating into college life with a larger community.

As a performer and student of storytelling, I posit that the community garnered by storytelling story circles could bring healing, connection, and enlightenment to students struggling to navigate these cultural differences. Storytellers could be instrumental in providing

connective narratives to the college/home cultural experience as well as holding workshops for students to construct meaningful accounts of their impactful moments. According to Campbell's research (2018), students could create "new standards of self" (p.52) through reflecting on MMs and recognizing how those messages appear in each student's stories (p.51). According to Campbell's theoretical framework, students could then create new personal behavioral standards based on mindful determinations about what elements they want to maintain from their MMs and what elements they want release themselves from. Helping students to develop these determinations could be a powerful tool. Hopefully, through listening, creating, and conceptualizing stories and how to heal through them, students could build communities that recognize school-home culture challenges.

Additionally, college preparation programs such as TRIO and others developed by universities to retain FGS could integrate any of these practices into regular and Freshman week workshops and Freshman Orientation course material. Perhaps in concert with university counseling programs, Communication professionals could discuss MMs and their role in communicative code-switching. Recognizing that code-switching is a common behavior can help students let go of shame-oriented thinking when strategizing communications.

Considering ways to further integrate working with CMM, MMs, and code-switching, colleges could add to intervention programs like TRIO, counseling centers, and college advisor and mentor training to adapt strategies to coordinate meaning with students through exploring MMs as suggested by Elkin et al.'s (2000) and Wang et al.'s (2012) research on MMs and student experiences. Through these methods, the discourses of self that Orbe (2003, 2004, 2008) highlighted that are challenged could be hybridized "by mixing two or more discourses of the self to create new meaning" (Baxter, 2011, p. 139). Hopefully, blending discourses could have a

more direct instructional approach to meaningful healing in addition to the aforementioned storytelling and story crafting.

As pointed out by numerous researchers, FGS have difficulty identifying and communicating needs. Thus, this research could have implications for identifying when students are switching to a code that is noncommunicative of needs or one that enables communication of needs. Providing students with knowledge about code-switching, how it appears to others, and its consequences, would be an empowering tool.

It is certainly the case that there is more to learn about students' navigation between home and school. Given the current state of political affairs, college students like Sara, Alex, and Katrina are experiencing severe pushback from their siblings and families for their identity changes while still attempting to complete advanced degrees. Students like Phillip and Ellen are continually trying to find footing in their code-switching and disfluencies while navigating highly skilled academic territories. Indeed, these students and individuals in similar positions can provide insight into the personal, pragmatic changes that occur as individuals from uninitiated backgrounds penetrate further into positions of power and influence. This is important.

Limitations

Among the numerous challenges found in this study, I quickly stumbled upon the limitation of definitions for: home, academic environment, and family. The discussion of these terms led to some minor confusion because the first participant had multiple concepts of “family” and “home.” After the first interview, I had to differentiate between home of upbringing and current home. Seeing as all participants were adults who were in graduate school or beyond, they all lived away from their families of origin. Three clearly had established homes outside of school and for the other two, Sara and Katrina, it was unclear where their permanent home would

be. Therefore, discussing home environments became fraught because it could be argued that the home environment of each participant was similar in culture to their academic experience. As such, I sought to explore experiences of the participants' families of origin. Of course, this brings about the questions of chosen home and chosen family. If I had any participants who were self-emancipated at young age or came from abusive households, the interview process would need more careful and precise language.

In a similar vein, academic environments were also difficult to define. Given the state of the world in 2022 regarding COVID-19 protocols, Zoom and other online implements, the lines were blurred between home and school environments. I never asked the participants about their navigation of identity during COVID or how the zoom environment affect this. Regardless, the participants all reported attending physical class, research, and work environments at the time of the study. However, due to the previous two years of quarantine, the participant experiences and collected data may be much different from previous years. Also, it may have been difficult for participants to have differentiated in which environment events took place. Finding it counterproductive during the interviews, I never specifically asked whether academic conversations were taking place on Zoom or in person.

Another limitation was that many participants had never specifically discussed code-switching before. According to Ellen, it was her first time actually talking about it in length with anyone. Alex had heavily considered it as part of his life since childhood, but it was unclear when and where he was talking to others about the specific phenomenon itself. As for Sara and Katrina, there were many responses to my questions akin to: "That's a good question. I have never thought about that specific topic before." I wonder what results would show if they were

regularly having conversations about it. In Ellen's case, it was so fascinating that she expressed great interest in following me up and even emailed me Tik Tok clips about code-switching.

In regard to the *Aha!* moments found in the interviews when participants considered their code-switching behaviors, I outlined a variety of code-switching categories with the participants including: clothing, posture, facial expressions, language, and vocal tone. Given the limited interview time and lack of familiarity with code-switching discussions, participants tended to focus on verbal communication code-switching. Much was left to speculation as to other forms of behavioral communications.

Furthermore, interviewing only five participants leaves out countless groups and individual identities from providing information regarding their experiences. Hence, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research strategies may provide more effective and applicable analyses determining achievements and sense-making when navigating academic and home cultures.

Future Directions

When considering future directions of research, I am first drawn to the voices of my participants who expressed excitement in the fact that information from this research study could lead to consulting postsecondary education programs to provide counseling and other support for people facing difficulty acclimating to the college and university cultures. Chatelain (2022) uses the term "hidden curriculum" to describe acclimating to college culture for first-generation college students (FGS). As such, my first recommendation for future research would be to find ways to uncover the seemingly veiled culture of college for current and potential students. Judging from research and anecdotal experience, it is challenging to know the effectiveness of various programs. Comparison studies would be helpful. Programs like Upward Bound focus on

FGS and low income primarily, however, many students who might identify as continuing generation students (CGS) would certainly benefit from programs shedding light on how college culture works.

A second recommendation would be to do qualitative and quantitative research into the experiences and behaviors of college professors and individuals working in mentor capacities with college students. Clarity on their abilities and strategies in student outreach and connection are important to understanding how classroom and school culture are being constructed. Additionally, promoting more healthy connections between students and faculty appears important to student success as Demetriou (2017) and Ojeda (2019) have pointed out.

Third, I would recommend more research into post bachelor's experiences. All five of my participants were working on or had degrees advanced beyond a bachelor’s degree. As more students matriculate in advanced degrees, this will become more important. Additionally, there seemed to be much less support for advanced degree students despite the increased intensity of rigor.

Fourth, I would argue that more research into student MMs in post-bachelor experiences and how it relates to their workload and multiple roles played. Each one of the participants had multiple roles at their respective institutions. It is worthwhile to consider how navigating these roles plays into their successes and failures. Especially given the amount of funding required per student in post-bachelor degree programs, it seems like a ripe endeavor.

Along with understanding student perspectives, future directions may also include researching parental and sibling relationships to college students as they progress through college. Searching for research regarding family experiences of college students was limited to parent experiences. Roksa et al. (2020) examined the impact and waypoints of sibling

socialization regarding college student experiences and how it promotes success for both siblings in postsecondary education. However, sibling research in this regard was absent and arguably necessary especially among low-income and FGS households where siblings may be primary support structures while the parents are working or absent.

Finally, future directions also include revisiting participants after periods of time to get their perspective and experience on communication decisions after consequences have emerged from their choices and the recognition about them. Having long-term studies in the experiences and consequences of code-switching behaviors for individuals living, working, and studying between different cultures would allow for deeper analysis and discussion into this phenomenon. Additionally, it would allow participants to build in their own insights and confidence in examining and reporting their own experiences. As such, both the participants and researchers could benefit from richer explorations of code-switching and its outcomes.

Research Reflections

Understanding the boundaries between home culture and school culture is astoundingly challenging for students. However, there seems to be a discrete, knowable difference between the two. As highlighted in the participant interviews, characteristics of each have influence on the other. How these influences affect student communications is interesting to me because I recognize school as a place of supposed empowerment. Through this research process, it appears to me that as college students gain empowerment through college experiences, their home of origin tends to become a more disempowering environment. Learning details about the communication and code-switching strategies that others used caused me to reflect on my internal experience of changing the way I am communicating when changing environments.

Code-switching is a behavior that often leaves me feeling like a manipulator. I know that I can make people from non-academic backgrounds feel more comfortable through switching from words like "ostensibly" to "it seems like." Also, I can make the conversation more relatable when I avoid asking what someone's source is on an idea and instead switch to agreeing and using a phrase such as: "Huh. Where'd that come from?" Ultimately, my concern about manipulation subsides once I recognize that this seems to be the only way to smoothly navigate conversations. These sentiments were echoed by the participants. It was enlightening to hear how they connected their past experiences and their communication decisions.

My original intent was to do research on collaborative storytelling for language learning when I joined the ETSU Communications & Performance Department as a graduate student. I had been an ESL teacher for over fifteen years in multiple countries and believed that student-led work that was novel and dialogue based would be a powerful teaching technique. I had seen great results in my language classrooms over the years and wanted to explore the world of collaborative storytelling for educational purposes beyond simply language. Interestingly, many of the same factors that motivated me to consider ESL also brought me to questions about cultural differences between home and academia.

Once I began the application process for ETSU, I encountered what my participant Phillip experienced in his family gatherings. My family often referred to me as "smarty-pants" or "over-achiever" or "genius" for applying to a master's program. I always felt a slight edge in those labels. Those comments often felt like they served the purpose of differentiation and separation more than edification or familial warmth. From the first days of being accepted to ETSU nearly two years ago, I began to think about my differences as a student given my first-generation college student (FGS) status. Ten years prior, I had worked for Upward Bound at

ETSU which specifically focuses on low-income and potential FGS high school students seeking to attend college. I remember some of the vast cultural differences that many students faced when confronting campus life, study expectations, and ways of dialoguing.

Returning to thoughts about teaching English as Second Language (ESL), most of my interest in continuing down this track came from outside research. One source was Dr. Stephen Krashen, who theorized the Input Hypothesis and developed teaching models that included families in the curriculum when it came to students of marginalized communities, particularly immigrant families. In these education models, the lifeworld of the families was considered in creating classroom language and culture. In addition, the goals of the students and family members were considered when creating curriculum and lesson plans. I carried the inspiration of this knowledge with me as I continued to teach.

I remembered the success found during my 2012 experience at ETSU while working with Dr. Ardis Nelson and teaching volunteer ESL classes for children and parents at Cherokee Elementary. This is when I began to ask myself: Why don't we have more programs that integrate conversations from family and student life? I certainly understand the fact that students need to separate from families in their early adult years. However, offering guided workshops and moments of community discussion could help give students and their families tools to understand each other. Especially in the case of FGS, this could prove invaluable to their feeling less alienated.

One of the hidden issues in teaching ESL is that students from families non-English speaking families find themselves lacking fluency in both English *and* their home language. Thus, the alienation felt by students in this position follows them to their family interactions. Anecdotally, I have often observed that students internalize this alienation and begin to withdraw

socially and academically. Not only do students in this situation feel misunderstood, but they also may feel as if they do not fully comprehend the academic world or their family's world. This speaks volumes to their academic performance and life goals. Generally, the volumes that it speaks are full of difficulty, feelings of despair, and the need for support. When considering my passion for working with students in these circumstances, I quickly saw myself in their shoes, given my own FGS status. I often struggled with my sense of purpose or enjoyment of school since my family tended to portray disinterest and confusion toward my academic interests and intellectual pursuits.

Regardless of generational status, I noticed that many of my college peers simply felt at odds with their family values. Students who have recognized changes or differences in their sexuality, gender, body image, spirituality, worldview, and more likely feel the same. Watching friends switch codes while discussing these topics with families continues to be fascinating to me. I often ask myself: What is the best way we can engage in our identities around family? How will we be affected by protecting our identities from our family? I realized that through analyzing code-switching, I could potentially investigate these issues. Moreover, I simply wanted to know what people were thinking when they were changing their communication patterns at school and at home.

During the first two interviews with Ellen and Alex, I struggled not to over relate to their issues because I connected with much of their struggles. Some of the struggles I related to include Alex's overt outing of his parents raising them to be more "palatable," both needing to properly navigate direct and indirect communication at appropriate times throughout their life, and feeling their difference from their family of origin. Observing the participants discuss how they had never discussed the topic of code-switching before, despite regular usage in their daily

life, was profound to me. I wonder: Had they trained themselves to be so adept at code-switching that they could skillfully switch codes without any awareness of doing so?

Experiencing participants walk through their personal strategy of information disclosure was intense. Additionally, listening to private information regarding sex and relationships was quite intense. Listening to Sara walk through such a detailed itemization of how, in her words, she "lies" to her family and cultivates moments that appear as if she is oversharing on social media so that her family feels like they know her was astounding to me. The length she goes through to ensure that her parents never know that she is a lesbian, and her intensity of liberal identity got to my heart. I had to take time to myself after the interview. I was impressed by her personal strength not only to be honest with me about this, but also to navigate these two separate worlds in order to maintain a relationship with her family that she feels she will lose if she discloses her identity. Although I am sure this experience adds to the critical lens important to academic exploration, I wonder about the daily emotional toll this takes on her as she works diligently on her goals. What issues continue to be internalized, and what are the ways in which this affects her life? These are questions I considered in the days and weeks following my interviews. I know there are a large number of students around the world experiencing similar issues.

Through these interviews, I considered that it is hard to separate where academic culture ends and other cultures begin. While discussing with Alex and Ellen their transition to becoming more direct in their speech, the personal and the professional were heavily intermingled. Ellen's attempts to become more adept in her code-switching were motivated by friendships with her peers. She did not want to "appear bitchy," and she wanted to connect with people she personally cared about. In Alex's case, they were quick to discuss polyamory and the BDSM community as

an initiation point to their being more direct in academic and professional settings. I will never forget the direct commentary detailing, if they "want an orgasm, they need to be able to tell people directly" what they want their sexual partner to do. On the one hand, it was profound in its simplicity and importance. On the other hand, I wondered how we went from talking about code-switching in academic culture to discussing physical sexuality within 30-40 seconds of time. I did my best to appear calm and collected, without seeming too distanced from the level of intensity of their claims. Given Alex's commentary and my process of response, I feel the academic and the personal are so tightly interwoven that it almost felt absurd to try to separate them.

This line of inquiry leads me to consider how distant I feel from my family as I pursue my own personal explorations. Also, it caused me to reconceptualize life exploration. The academic model focuses on critical engagement, which requires change. For my family, their life goals appear to focus on enjoying the world around them, getting ahead economically and avoiding difficulties with health or finances. Therefore, it can be at odds with my outlook because I am almost purposefully seeking out problems to tackle in my academic exploration. Additionally, I have cultivated a place where I regularly challenge my beliefs and the beliefs of those around me intellectually. I could imagine that this might appear exhausting and even disingenuous to my family members. I can conceptualize that they might believe that I am not serious about my beliefs if I so regularly question them. Yet, for me it is the ability to question that allows me to believe. This seems to be a key element to collegiate culture that appealed to each participant, and I wonder how this speaks to the divergence of collegiate and lay cultures.

I have great hope for this project and other projects that might spring forth in this area of inquiry. Watching the participants unpack every day and extraordinary moments was a wake up

for me. I felt excited to review our interview transcripts and consider the connections, differences, and mysteries in their perspectives. I found myself hoping that I could justly portray their experiences while balancing my own shared lived experience. I hope that there are more investigations into similar experiences with code-switching. I hope through learning about some of the difficulties faced by individuals navigating these worlds, strategies are found which can dismantle the power structures perpetuating the growing rifts between collegiate culture and everyone outside of it. These tensions and differences may appear separate and individualized, but they speak volumes to our ability as a society to grow and connect.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Online Flyer

East Tennessee State University Communication and Storytelling Studies – www.etsu.edu/commperform

COMMUNICATION STYLE STUDY

Do you change how you *communicate* between *home* and *academic* environments?

YOUR STORY MATTERS!

Seeking participants for research on how people experience and navigate changing communication styles between home and school environments.

All interviews will be held online via Zoom.

Contact:
Travis Wolven
Graduate Student at ETSU
wolven@etsu.edu
(732) 861-4128

Must be 18+, physically present in the U.S., & willing to do a 1 hr online interview

Appendix B: Social Media Posts

Online Posts:

Excited to announce my thesis research topic!

Want to share your experiences changing the way you communicate when you're at home and when you're in college and academic settings?

Feel free to reach out and email me at wolven@etsu.edu.

Please share! Thank you!

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Code Switching Between Home & Academic Environments

Interview and Focus Group Questions

The PI will conduct interviews guided by the following four overarching questions. As needed, the PI will offer prompts to help open up ideas for participants, and probes that ask participants to elaborate on something they've said. Examples of prompts are included below.

1. **Connection & Disconnection**. When people attend college or university, their life experiences are often different than in their home environment. What are ways that you feel connected or disconnected to your college and home environments? Do you notice these differences in the way your speak?

Possible Prompts:

- Do you feel your peers or professors speak similarly or differently from how you speak?
- What are the ways your peers or professors point out the way you speak?
- What are the ways your family and individuals from your home environment point out any changes in your language variety or vocabulary?
- How do you feel about these experiences?
- What are ways you cope with these differences?

2. **Fluency**. Can you describe for me, perhaps by way of a story, how you adapt your speech when in academic environments? What about when you are at home?

Possible Prompts:

- Tell me about a time that you feel you made a misstep in your speaking.
- Do you have discussions with anyone about the way you speak at school or at home?
- Do you notice others who may have speech differences from their academic or home environments? Do you relate to them or their experiences?
- Have you noticed your everyday speech patterns change since you began attending college?
- Are there unintended conversations that have arisen from code-switching missteps or language changes while communicating with others?

3. **Identity.** Can you share with me, perhaps by way of example, how your speech relates to your identity and feelings of self?

Possible Prompts:

- Do you feel your speech behavior changes reflect any changes in your identity?
- Does code-switching, changing your language variety, affect how you feel about yourself? Why?

- Can you tell me about anything you have learned about yourself in these experiences?
- Do you feel your identity has changed since you began attending college? Do you think this be observed in your speech behaviors?
- Can you share any experiences about identifying with others through your speech? Any De-identifying experiences?
- Do you believe others have changed their perception of you through your use of language since attending college?

4. **Outlook.** For this last part, I am hoping you can tell me how these experiences have affected your outlook on yourself, people in your lives, and society.

Possible Prompts:

- What have you noticed about yourself with these code-switching experiences?
- What have you noticed with those you are speaking to?
- Do you plan to continue code-switching the language you use?
- Have changes in your language changed any of your relationships? With friends? Family?
- Since having these code-switching experiences, have you changed your outlook on any relationships in your life?
- Have you changed your outlook on how you relate to society?
- Once you are out of an academic environment, do you believe you will maintain your current language patterns? Why?

- If you had your choice without criticism or fear, do you have a preferred way of speaking?

VITA

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