

**Cross-cultural Travel: A Study of How International Travel at a Young  
Age Impacts Communication Skills as an Adult**

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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A STUDY OF HOW INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AT A YOUNG AGE IMPACTS  
COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS AN ADULT

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Communication Skills as an Adult

Presented to the Faculty

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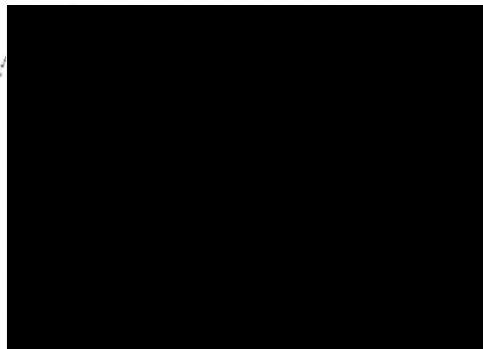
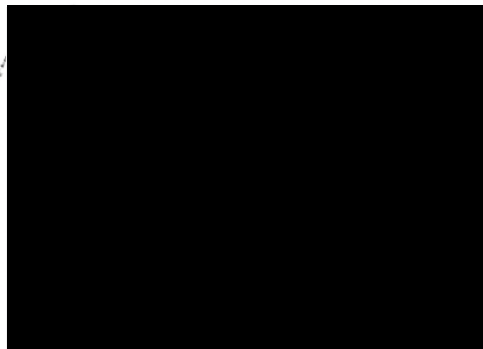
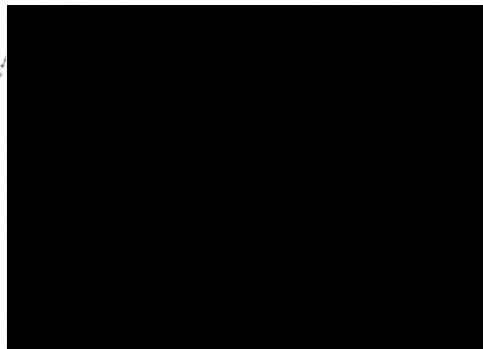
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**Abstract**

The purpose of the study "*Cross-cultural Travel: A Study of How International Travel at a Young Age Impacts Communication Skills as an Adult*" was to gather the perception of the weight of impact that traveling to foreign countries throughout childhood carries upon the individual later in life. This qualitative research approach focused on individuals who have spent extended periods of time in foreign cultures around the globe and with the inhabitants thereof, and assessed through interviews how past intercultural experiences through childhood contribute to effective engagement and communication throughout adulthood. This research provides insight for the audience in terms of how cross-cultural immersion throughout childhood provides valuable tools and life skills, but also displays the benefits of spending time in foreign cultures, as individuals prove to walk away with an increased understanding of various global lifestyles, regarding cultural norms, intercultural communication, and an applicable sense of how to integrate gained skills daily. This topic provides value through its distinctive findings regarding how intercultural engagement is beneficial for the individual growth and development of human beings, specifically within the realm of communicative behaviors, norms, and practices.

*Keywords: cross-cultural experiences, intercultural communication, interpersonal communication*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
Cultural Intelligence & Intercultural Communication.....	16
Culture Shock & Readjusting.....	20
Communication Skills.....	27
Intercultural Communication.....	29
Nonverbal Communication.....	33
Nonverbal Communication in Cross-cultural Settings.....	35
Kinesics & Physical Appearance.....	36
Proxemics & Haptics.....	37
Oculesics.....	40
Chronemics.....	41
Interpersonal Communication.....	46
Psychological Development.....	53
Theory.....	57
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	63

A STUDY OF HOW INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AT A YOUNG AGE IMPACTS COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS AN ADULT	7
Purpose.....	63
Selected Methodology .....	64
Participants.....	64
Research Techniques .....	65
Coding & Sampling .....	66
Interview Questions .....	66
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....	68
Presentation of Collective Findings .....	68
Participants.....	69
Themes & Sub-themes.....	73
THEME 1 / CHART 1 .....	73
THEME 2 / CHART 2 .....	83
THEME 3 / CHART 3 .....	99
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	113
Discussion & Summary of Findings.....	113
Age as a Contributing Factor .....	115
Theoretical Implications .....	117
Limitations .....	117
Future research.....	118

A STUDY OF HOW INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AT A YOUNG AGE IMPACTS COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS AN ADULT	8
Conclusion .....	119
References.....	120
Appendix A.....	125
Appendix B.....	127



## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **Introduction**

The overall purpose of this research is to bring light to the topic of how communication skills may be tied to cultural immersion through international travel from a young age, and how this type of travel may contribute to daily communication skills. The inspiration for this study drew from the thoughts and considerations of how those who grew up traveling overseas may have been influenced by their cultural exposure, as compared to those who have remained confined within the surroundings of their everyday home life. These initial ideas eventually led to this study, that is, the exploration of any patterns or themes that are seen in the lives and communication skills of seasoned travelers who have been exposed to intercultural environments from a young age.

In one sense, international travel has become a more frequent commodity for many individuals, due to the simplicity of booking a flight within minutes and planning personalized trips around one's schedule. However, this privilege is often only enjoyed by those who are financially positioned to afford this luxury. Moreover, those who now operate within a financially stable source of income may have spent their childhood in a family with a lack of financial resources, and thus, had limited opportunities to expand their cultural horizons overseas. While this segment of individuals may now be able to explore new international realms, they still may not have been able to grasp these experiences during their developmental years. Hence, the sparking interest and hope behind this study is to be able to draw distinct contrasts in the results, identifying any similarities or differences in communication skills between those who have expanded their cultural positioning from a young age, as compared to those who have not. While this study will focus primarily on United States citizens, it will also

assess select international students who currently live in the United States but grew up living overseas for a portion of their lives.

### **Cultural Intelligence**

To effectively approach this study, it is important to begin with some key terms, so as to establish clarity for the sake of continued research. The first essential term to define is “culture,” which may be defined as a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, rules, and norms shared by a group of people (Hamilton & Creel, 2019). The term “culture” in a broad sense does not only refer to international or global settings, as it can be narrowly focused down to people groups within very concentrated settings, such as within a school, a workplace, or friend groups. However, for the majority of this study, cultural studies will extend to cross-cultural experiences on a global scale; that is, engagement and immersion within varying countries that are different from the country of origin for the given individual.

The second term to identify is “cultural intelligence.” A common result of spending extensive time overseas is the gradual formation of “cultural intelligence,” due to a daily and consistent immersion within a specific foreign culture. Livermore (2011) defines this as “the capability to function effectively across a variety of cultural contexts, such as ethnic, generational and organizational cultures” (pg. 15). The author continues to state, “The emphasis is not only on understanding different cultures, but also on problem solving and effective adaptations for various cultural settings... High CQ [cultural intelligence] doesn’t come automatically, but anyone can develop it” (p. 16). As gathered from this definition, cultural intelligence equates to the capability of effective functioning in a setting that is foreign or different from the culture of origin. Strong levels of cultural intelligence allows individuals to

learn how to adapt and intellectually grasp concepts or rituals that may be different from their native cultural norms and practices.

Another note from Livermore (2011) is an expression of thought in how others process cross-cultural experiences, stating, “Even if you and I have the same cultural background, we’ll experience new cross-cultural situations differently according to who we are as individuals” (p. 17). From this statement, the author begins driving the idea that the weight of impact in how the partaker of the cultural experience perceives their surroundings is based upon their own state of individualism. Thus, gaining cultural intelligence is a process that takes a different form for each individual, depending upon how they approach, perceive, and interpret symbols of communication along the way.

An additional key term to be defined is someone who is referred to as “multicultural.” Research shows that when referencing an individual who is very seasoned in traveling, and who is particularly familiar and comfortable with differing cultures, this person may be categorized as someone who is “multicultural” (Crowne, 2013). According to published research by Crowne, the term multicultural references the following,

Evidence of the impact of cultural exposure can be seen in individuals who are considered ‘multicultural’. These are individuals who possess high amounts of cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility. These individuals are likely high on cultural intelligence because of their cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, and flexibility and they are also likely high on emotional intelligence because of their emotional stability and flexibility. Thus, it seems that a ‘multicultural’ person would likely be high on both intelligences. (p. 5)

Having established this, it is clear that the author highlights the notion that someone who is multicultural gains skills which help in relating to others more effectively, including the listed characteristics of empathy, social initiative, open-mindedness, etc. Henceforth, the argument could be made that as a result of this, the communication skills of one who is multicultural are sharpened and applied more effectively than one who is not multicultural. Further research within the current study will highlight specific instances and situations which require the individual to utilize these particular skills of multiculturalism, as well as how these skills may be applied upon the return of the individual to their home country.

In addition to being multicultural, it is important to understand the concept of cultural intelligence as a whole. As Thomas et al. (2008) states in a research study of cultural intelligence, “Knowledge of self and one’s own culture are also important components of cultural intelligence. Knowledge of cultural identities, values, attitudes, and practices makes for greater predictability in social interaction, more accurate attributions, and ultimately more effective intercultural behavior” (Thomas, p. 8). This description highlights the importance and value of holding knowledge in a wide array of topics that are cross-cultural. Thomas draws the connection between how this knowledge can lead to applicatory results, such as predictability in social settings and greater effects in intercultural behavior, as compared to the individual who is not culturally seasoned. Moreover, it is also important to have a firm basis and establishment of oneself, being rooted and grounded in individuality, so as to hold a confident perception of both others and one’s own individual self. Having this rooted sense of personal identity will contribute towards an effective cultivation of communication skills, enabling the individual to relate well with others in multicultural contexts.

### **Communication Skills**

Along with the aspect of cultural intelligence, another key component of this study includes “communication skills,” and the understanding that is associated with this description. As human beings, communication skills are an essential part of living. It is critical to be able to communicate effectively with others. The skill of communication is a broad category and can be divided into a number of classifications that comprise the art. However, according to Hamilton & Creel (2019), the areas of expertise to be deemed as a competent communicator focus upon being ethical communicators, using verbal and nonverbal symbols effectively, listening effectively, application of interpersonal skills, creating and maintaining successful relationships, effective participation and problem-solving within teams, and speaking effectively. For the sake of this study, these are some of the key techniques that will be analyzed and referenced when reviewing relevant literature.

Traveling overseas comes with several different forms of communication. For instance, the communication techniques of nonverbal communication and body language can vary drastically from one country to another. Similarly, the selection of vocabulary used can differ, depending on the surrounding context or the format through which public rhetoric is delivered, based on the set environment. International travel encompasses a wide variety of communication fashions, and thus, this study will assess multiple forms of communication, and how they are incorporated into the experiences of the individuals being researched and interviewed.

### **Theory**

In terms of selection of communication theory, the social learning theory will be applied to this study. One definition of this theory comes from Dr. Sunday Edinyang (2016) as,

Social (or Observational) Learning Theory stipulates that people can learn new behaviors by observing others. This also refers to the reciprocal relationship between social

characteristics of the environment, how they are perceived by individuals, and how motivated and able a person is to reproduce behaviors they see happening around them.”

(p. 40)

Based on this definition, it can be stated that individuals learn through observation of their surroundings, and by the specific people around them. The assumption here is that human beings become natural imitators of the behavior they watch in front of them, whether that is a conscious or unconscious adoption of these habits.

This study will assess how the social learning theory is intertwined with cultural immersion, and if, or how, this theory is applied towards the experiences of individuals who grew up traveling overseas. This research will explore how the adoption of this theory impacts the communication skills of those who have been culturally immersed in other countries outside of their country of origin.

### **The Problem Statement**

The purpose of this study is to serve as an analysis of the experiences of those who have grown up traveling internationally, and how their cross-cultural encounters have shaped their individual communication skills in the present day.

### **Research Question**

**RQ: How does international travel and intercultural experiences at a young age impact communication skills as an adult?**

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this study is to clearly distinguish the patterns, benefits, or detriments that come with cross-cultural traveling during youth, and how they positively or negatively impact the communication skills of individuals later in life. This study aims to contribute to the field of

communication research by offering light in the subject of communication within the context of travel. One potential outcome of this study is the result that international travel does contribute towards sharper communication, implying that this research would be able to assist in properly educating individuals to pursue this opportunity in order to grow in their skills. The other possible result from this study may be the discovery that perhaps international travel poses negative outcomes for the communication growth of the individual, and thus the results of this study may assist in awareness towards specific aspects or components to avoid within cross-cultural experiences.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **Literature Review**

The primary elements to be integrated into this research will focus upon cultural intelligence, communication skills, and concepts of the Social Learning Theory. Additional miscellaneous factors to be incorporated include psychological growth and the growth of the human brain, as it pertains to the development and integration of communication skills. The literature selected for this study has been sourced from various scholarly journals, articles, and independent research studies, all of which contain in-depth analyses of the material.

#### **Cultural Intelligence & Intercultural Communication**

One of the foundational elements of this study to first assess is the idea of cultural intelligence and the skills that may derive from a frequency or comfortability when immersed in varying cultures. As previously defined, cultural intelligence refers to “knowledge or understanding of how a person from a particular country, race, religion, etc. lives and behaves, and how this affects the way they do business” (Merriam Webster, n.d.). This definition portrays the idea that humans need to be able to properly understand the fundamental values and components of intercultural lifestyles in order to be able to fully comprehend how other humans conduct daily life and business. Based upon this definition of cultural intelligence, it is valid to recognize the importance of identifying an effective way to grasp a concrete understanding of foreign cultures. The reviewed literature pertains heavily towards how cultural intelligence can be shaped, impacted, and ultimately grow as a result of being exposed to other cultures.

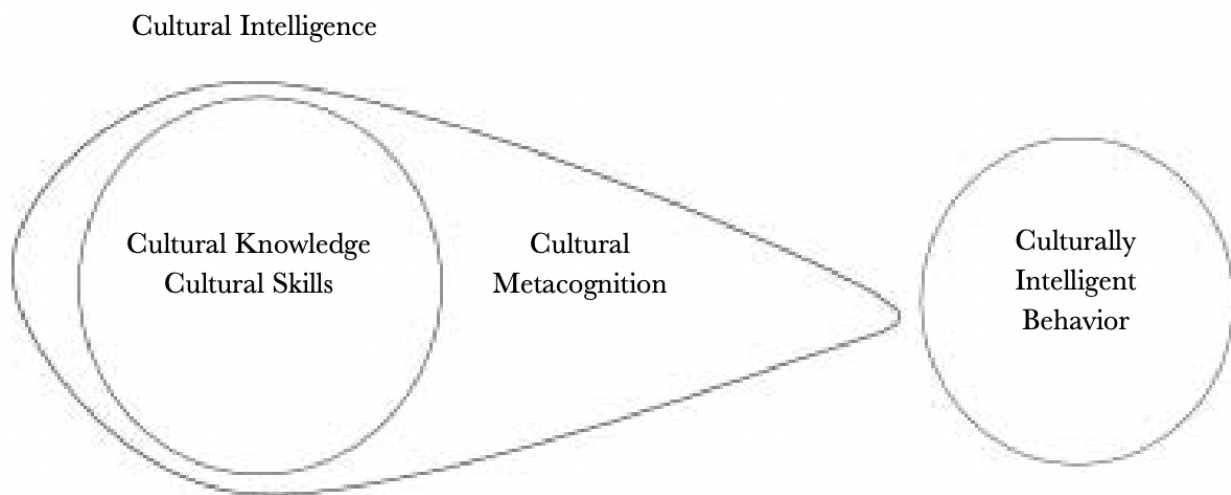
Concerning intercultural communication, research shows that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in being able to deeply engage with others cross-culturally. Crowne (2013) places a high emphasis on emotional intelligence, studying how intercultural interactions



mold individuals' abilities to process and regulate their personal emotions, as well as being able to properly cater to the emotions of those around them. The author notes that this foundation of emotional intelligence contributes towards the growth of cultural intelligence as well, helping shape strong communication and management skills. Crowne directly states that "Emotional intelligence and social intelligence are both thought to be associated with global leadership success and development of a global mindset" (p. 7).

In efforts of simplifying the basic ideology of cultural intelligence offered, Thomas (2008, p. 7) provides a graphic figure to illustrate the concept.

128 *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 8(2)



**Figure 1** Domain of cultural intelligence

Thomas (2008) breaks down this diagram by explaining,

We define cultural intelligence as a system of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, that allows people to adapt to, select, and shape the cultural

aspects of their environment. This definition puts the construct in the domain of multifaceted conceptualizations of intelligence. Thus, not only does cultural intelligence include multiple types of knowledge (understanding of a body of information) and skills (mastery of an application of knowledge), it involves both cognitive and metacognitive (knowledge of and control over one's thinking and learning) dimensions (p. 7).

Essentially, Thomas (2008) describes cultural intelligence as knowledge and skills that may be gained from a variety of places and different cultures. However, this only includes the knowledge and general things learned from other cultures, whereas the measurement of influence that it has upon the lifestyle of an individual carries over to the cultural metacognition of an individual, that is, the knowledge of and control over one's thinking and learning (Thomas, 2008). Cultural metacognition is the component that takes various concepts, skills, and pieces of knowledge gained, and puts them into everyday practice, allowing these things to shape thought process, daily decisions, engagement with others, and ultimately contributes towards final cultural intelligence behavior, as Figure 1 explains above.

Ultimately, the aim of the research conducted in Crowne's (2013) article focuses upon discovering whether or not cross-cultural travel benefits employees within the workplace. Some results pointed towards gaining a deeper sense of cultural intelligence including the ability to develop accurate perceptions of others, strengthen leadership skills, the ability to respond well under heavy stress, empathize with other individuals, maintain a healthy function within a group context, and provide optimism within a work environment. However, the author does note that in order to gain intelligence, adaptability is essential for the individual partaking in a cross-cultural experience.

Naturally, cultural encounters with foreign individuals is the most beneficial ways to cultivate increased levels of cultural intelligence (Thomas, 2008), as such experiences assist in molding perception of thought, impacting the attitude and open-mindedness of an individual, becoming more perceptually aware towards surroundings, and being mindful of the function of other unfamiliar cultures (Thomas). These types of experiences also leave a mark on features of individuals' personalities, with the specific example of being able to practice more openness (Thomas). This may be due to the fact that when placed in a foreign culture, everyday customs, language, habits, rituals, routines, and leisure activity, are altered significantly, depending on the specific culture in which one is immersed. This includes the way in which peers or friends may interact with one another on a variety of different levels, which may include intimate and friendly interactions, or perhaps more conflict-resolution settings. Regardless of the specific setting or situation, foreign cultures typically approach these matters differently than the culture of origin, simply because of the nature of being immersed in a different context.

Experiences of witnessing these types of scenarios, however, gradually can influence and shape the mannerisms, and therefore personality traits, of individuals, causing them to adopt similar habits of thought processes, which also may be affected by elements of the social learning theory, which shall further be discussed later. When initially being introduced to an entirely new cultural environment with different daily values, norms, rituals, and practices, the immediate human instinctive reaction can be that of discomfort, unfamiliarity, and overall "culture shock" (Niendorf, 2015). Not always, but oftentimes, this set of feelings can lead to a sense or craving for that which is familiar, and aid in a closed-minded perspective that makes quick judgements, sometimes with ill thought towards that culture (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

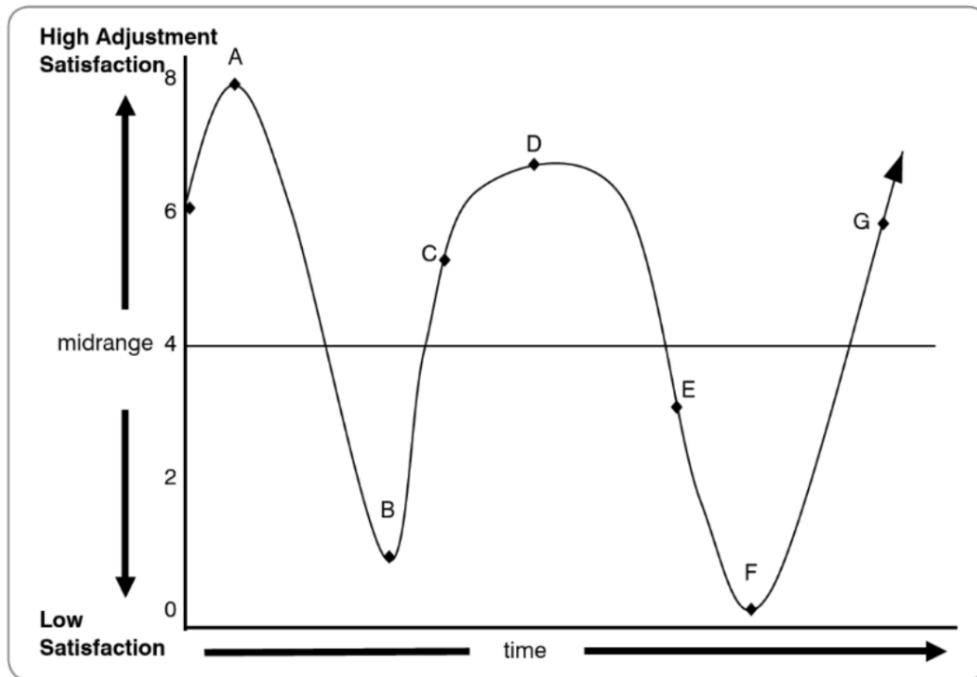
The effects of culture shock are not always negative (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012), however, but rather, are instinctive human reactions to the removal of familiarity and replacement of new and unknown. Niendorf (2015) expounds upon this, mentioning that “there is a human tendency to be biased or prejudiced against outgroup members (p. 511)” and that “one [also] tends to use his/her own in-group norms as the basis for judging outgroup members. (p. 511). Ting-Toomey & Chung additionally comment that “labeling” and “selective interpretation” are large contributors of this, because “our perceptions of others are highly subjective, selective, and biased” (p. 161).

An increase in cross-cultural encounters, however, can eventually create the end result of being more “open,” rather than closed-minded, as the individual being exposed to the new culture can then walk away with a broadened idea and perspective of how foreign cultures may each differently approach a certain matter.

### **Culture Shock & Readjusting**

In 1955, Lysgaard interviewed over 200 Norwegian Fulbright participants in the U.S., which led to the formation of the U-curve system of intercultural adjustment. The U-curve contained three phases: 1.) initial adjustment, which often starts on a high note, due to the fresh excitement of embarking on a new journey, 2.) crisis, in which the individual encounters elements of stress, unfamiliarity, and discomfort, and 3.) regained adjustment, in which the traveler has learned how to adequately cope, effectively adjust, or even warmly embrace the culture in which they are residing.

The U-curve model eventually progressed and evolved into the W-shape model (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) pictured above (Ting-Toomey, 2017, p. 87), which shares similar features, but with a more dynamic approach, assessing the U-shape layers on a deeper level and



**FIGURE 3.1.** The revised W-shaped cultural adjustment model. A: honeymoon stage; B: frustration/hostility stage; C: rebound/humorous stage; D: in-sync adjustment stage; E: ambivalence stage; F: reentry culture shock stage; G: resocialization stage.

expanding the model to include the return effects for the traveler for if, or when, they revisit their culture of origin. The W-shape covered 3 additional phases, renaming each stage to: 1.) the honeymoon stage, 2.) frustration/hostility stage, 3.) rebound/humorous stage, 4.) in-sync adjustment stage, 5.) reentry culture shock stage, and 6.) resocialization stage.

Stages one through three remain with the same characteristics as the U-shape model, as the traveler begins with optimism and excitement, until the culture shock becomes overwhelming to a point of frustration, which eventually rebound to a stage of recovery and perhaps humor, as they learn to laugh at themselves and the barriers that they have overcome to reach the current state of stability. Stage 4, “in-sync adjustment stage,” indicates that the traveler has reached a

level of settlement and comfortability within the new environment; at this point, much of the initial culture shock has subsided and has become familiar and even “homey.” For travelers that return home, they experience the shock of reentering their own native culture in stage five, as they transition from their newly adopted culture that has become familiar and comforting, and experience reverse culture shock upon returning to their old home. Through stage five, the individual learns how to readjust to old norms, until reaching the point of resocialization in stage six (Ting-Toomey, 2019).

Stage six is where vastly different outcomes may occur: some individuals “(i.e. the resocializers)” (Ting-Toomey, 2019), are able to resettle back into their old life as if they never left, having quickly stripped off their newly adopted foreign cultural norms, and reverting back to the original ones with ease. Other “individuals (i.e., the alienators), however, can never “fit back” into their home cultures again. They are always the first to accept an overseas assignment. They feel more alive abroad than at home” (Ting-Toomey, 2019, p. 91).

Ting-Toomey (2019) dissects a third pool of individuals who fall into the mix, stating  
Yet other individuals (i.e. “the transformers”) are the ones who act as agents of change in their home organizations or cultures. They mindfully integrate their new learning experience abroad with the positive qualities of their own culture... They apply multidimensional thinking, enriched emotional intelligence, and diverse angles to solve problems or to instigate change for a truly inclusive learning organization... [they are] the change agents who bring home with them a wealth of personal and cultural treasures to share... they do so with interpersonally sensitive and responsive skills - something they have learned in the foreign environment. (p. 91)

Some of the main indicators of individuals who carry this “third culture” demeanor of seasoned cultural intelligence include: good personal adjustment, development, and maintenance of good interpersonal relationships with culturally different others, and lastly the effective completion of task-related goals (Thomas, 2008). Regarding the first outcome of good personal well-being, the Thomas states that this outcome is,

[This is] indicated by feelings of contentment and well-being. Individuals who are well adjusted would say that they feel comfortable interacting with this culturally different person, or in this culturally different situation; and experience no greater stress than they would experience in a similar interaction with a member of their own culture and in their own cultural context. (p. 5)

Kohls (2008) writes about key skills that are necessary as a “survival kit for overseas living” (p. 3). The author presents the following graphic (p. 84), which has a dual perspective, depending on how the viewer views the image. Some viewers immediately see an old woman, while others are unable to see the old woman, and instead, see a photo of a young woman. The art remains the same, yet the viewer can have an entirely different perspective than the person next to him. Kohls explain that this same situation can often take place for the experienced versus inexperienced traveler or culturally-aware individual (p. 84).



Kohls (2001) continues to state that “We are selective in what we perceive (psychologists call it “selective perception”). In fact, most of what we are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or feeling at any moment is screened out by our conscious minds... But what determines what it is that we consider important? It is our enculturation, our cultural training. This culturally determined perceptual set is the great steamer trunk in the cultural baggage we haul abroad” (p.



86). Kohls drives home the point that humans are selectively perceptive based on their familiar surroundings. Their minds have been trained to observe and imitate that which is immediately in front of them, and thus, impacts the way they perceive certain things.

This is true in application to culture as well, in the sense that human brains experience culture shock when immersed in a new, foreign environment, and thus, must teach their brains how to adapt over time, as previously mentioned. Kohls does state, however, that some important techniques to keep in mind are tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness, empathy, warmth in human relationships, flexibility and adaptability, perceptiveness, ability to fail, and many more. All of these are key beneficial tools which may assist in the transition of stepping foot into a new culture and ease the initial shock that swarms the mind.

Additionally, cross-cultural encounters aid in the formation of learning the various processes in execution of tasks, value of relationships, and the image of self (Thomas, 2008). Each of these things are concepts which may be of greater or lesser value depending on the culture in which one resides. For instance, immersion in Latin American cultural settings will find a higher emphasis on slow-paced, relational engagement than a rapid pace of urgency to complete a list of goals or tasks by the end of the day, upon which perhaps American or German individuals would place a higher value. Thomas speaks on being able to effectively accomplish task-related goals. Strong cultural intelligence helps an individual to understand the appropriate time and place for these things, and how to adapt the individual self to best suit the setting.

Thomas states,

Based on these dimensions of self, relational, and task effectiveness outcomes, we would thus expect cultural intelligence to be positively related to expatriate adjustment, task completion by culturally diverse groups, effective decision making in a multicultural

context, leadership of culturally different others and a host of other cross-cultural interactions (p. 127).

From this, it is evident that those who have their perspective broadened through cross-cultural travel can better approach difficult situations, and be able to adapt to situational issues, and find proper conflict-resolution methods of approach, whether these situations arise in a foreign or native cultural environment. As can be gathered from this research, regardless of the setting, the culturally seasoned individual with a sharpened sense of cultural intelligence seems to be able to effectively navigate challenging scenarios and how to find resolution among a group of varying opinions.

When individuals may find themselves limited in opportunity for face-to-face or immersive cultural engagement, it is still possible to pursue a basic sense of understanding in cultural intelligence by beginning with learning foundational elements of knowledge regarding a specific culture or cultural sensitivities. As interest grows over time, individuals may find themselves with a desire to experience a specific culture in a tangible setting.

Regarding where individuals acquire knowledge about other cultures, Thomas (2008) shares the perspective that where others acquire cultural knowledge and expertise may be based upon their natural state as distinct individuals, in regard to their already-existing human characteristics, or inherent interests, which may draw them to a certain aspect of a culture. For instance, if an individual errs on a heavily creative state of mind, and travels to a destination of choice in Europe, they may be more likely to choose somewhere that celebrates art and anthropology, than to venture somewhere which focuses heavily upon historic manuscripts or war ruins. The idea here is that human passions, hobbies, or interests, can in fact influence the specific items which the individual may desire to see and experience, while also cultivating a

mindset of openness and flexibility to learn and grow from their surroundings, regardless of the emphasized feature of the culture.

As can be gathered from this compilation of research, it is evident that there is a heavy amount of evidence that attributes sharpened cultural intelligence and cognitive reasoning skills to the experiences that individuals have in intercultural settings. The gathered literature offers concrete examples of how global immersion, or even the basic stages of exploring and gaining knowledge of cultural affluence, can benefit the individual in emotional and cultural intelligence, hence proving to be profitable later in life as well.

### **Communication Skills**

In addition to the formation of cultural intelligence, individuals exposed to foreign cultures are said to gain “skills in a variety of domains” (Thomas, 2008, p. 9), which includes the previously focused skill of cultural intelligence, but also widely extends to the cultivation of communication skills (Thomas). Concerning the topic of communication for this study, a wide array of factors must be considered in order to properly measure communication skills. The primary focus of the study is to be able to determine if and how cross-cultural experiences contribute towards sharpened, enhanced communication skills. A key element to focus on is how to properly define “communication skills,” as this is a broad term that can apply to a general range of items.

According to Alex Kelly’s book (2018), “Social Skills,” social skills and interpersonal communication consist of body language, eye contact, listening, and the art of holding conversation, including starting, stopping, and maintaining two-way discussions with other individuals. These are some of the basic communication skills to be assessed, incorporated with other daily communication techniques that may arise with further research.

Regarding the definition of terms, as previously mentioned, the term “culture” is defined as “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc. of a particular society, group, place, or time” (Merriam Webster, n.d.). Based upon this definition, the idea of “culture” is interpreted and lived out differently daily, as it is dependent upon the surroundings of which an individual is immersed, whether that is in a foreign or native setting. When traveling overseas especially however, the idea of “culture” holds a drastically different meaning for the foreigner than their familiar definition, based on their country of origin.

The art of communication can be shaped or molded based on the cultural surroundings. In an article published by the University of Houston, the author states, “In [a] complex world of communication, cultural differences stand out as one of our biggest challenges. Different cultures affect how individuals participate in groups and how they work within communities” (2020, para 2). This statement attests to the fact that cultures shape the way that people participate, and therefore communicate, with one another. The differences manifest themselves in the way that individuals approach conflict, complete tasks, execute decisions, or even obtain knowledge. A specific way that this is demonstrated is seen in the way that individuals use symbols as outlets of expression and communication.

In an intercultural communication study, conducted by Anastacia Kurylo (2013), the author shares about “symbols”; that is, creative or expressive ways to communicate emotion and feeling. The author states that symbols simplify communication to a form of physical expression, rather than verbalization. Kurylo states,

People use symbols to represent meanings that are relevant to their experiences. Consider for a moment how you would explain love, freedom, or justice without using these symbols. It would take much longer, be more difficult, and likely produce more

confusion than clarity to try to express these ideas without these symbols. Symbols provide a way to express cultural experience with others. A cultural representation involves the use of symbols to reflect various aspects of a shared group identity. In other words, culture can be expressed through symbols. This is the expressive function of communication... When eating certain food, engaging in certain mannerisms, using certain expressions and language, and by talking about a culture, people work together to create cultural meaning. (p. 3)

To adequately define “communication skills,” Miranda Ferrara (2015) deems “the most important elements of communication are knowing what you want to say and expressing it [the objective] as clearly as possible” (p. 3). She comments on multiple facets of communication, including written, oral, and nonverbal or symbolic communication.

For the written and oral communicator, she emphasizes the importance of placing deep consideration and thought into choosing precise words, which may capture and entice an audience, rather than drive them away. She states that this ability to utilize appropriate vocabulary is an element which distinguishes good communication from adequate communication, as well as the asset of knowing key technical terms, which may be applicable to a certain field or position, setting the individual apart in professionalism or elite communication skills, compared to others in the field. Lastly, for the oral communicator, she mentions the importance of prioritizing logical and calm execution of verbal communication, without allowing emotional reactions to overcome the individual.

### **Intercultural Communication**

For this study especially, it is important to focus on addressing a clear understanding of intercultural communication, as cross-cultural engagement relies solely on this skill and practice.

A leading expert within the realm of intercultural communication, Stella Ting-Toomey (2019), defines intercultural communication as the following,

Intercultural communication is viewed as a symbolic exchange and meaning negotiation process between persons of different cultural communities. The general goal of effective intercultural communication is to create shared meanings between intercultural strangers in an interactive situation in a sociocultural-macro environment. (p. 28)

Another definition states “the general goal of intercultural communication is to create shared meanings competently – so that what I intended to say or imply is accurately decoded by the culturally different other and simultaneously, in a culturally appropriate manner.” (Niendorf, 2015, p. 33)

Having a proper understanding of a given cultural context is of the utmost importance when it comes to achieving the goal of effective intercultural communication. Ting Toomey (2019) states,

Language infiltrates a culture’s social experience so intensely that neither language nor culture can be understood without knowledge of both. To understand a culture deeply, we have to understand the culture’s language, its emic meanings, its situational usage, and the language’s philosophical-historical roots and development of its particular verbal motifs. To understand language in context, we have to understand the fundamental beliefs and value systems that drive particular language practice in particular circumstances. (p. 210)

When analyzing interaction and communicative exchanges within intercultural environments, interactions can be categorized into two systems: high-context and low-context (Hall, 1976). Low context refers to direct verbal communication, with little need for additional

social cues or underlying messages. This form of communication is typically found and practiced in countries or regions that are clear, blunt communicators. High-context, however, falls on the other extreme where there is a high need for additional cues or nonverbal messages to aid in the verbal message being conveyed. There are more hidden layers within high-context communication that may often require more assertiveness towards details such as facial expressions, body language, presence of silence, etc. Ting-Toomey (2019) summarizes the two by stating that in low-context surroundings, “the sender assumes responsibility to communicate clearly” (p. 218), while in high-context environments, “the receiver or interpreter of the message assumes responsibility to infer the hidden or contextual meaning of the message” (p. 218). The characteristics for each are summarized on the table below (p. 218).

**TABLE 7.1. Low-Context and High-Context Communication Framework**

<b>LCC characteristics</b>		<b>HCC characteristics</b>	
Individualistic values		Group-oriented values	
Self-face assertive concern		Other-face and mutual-face concerns	
Linear logic		Spiral logic	
Direct style		Indirect style	
Person-oriented style		Status-oriented style	
Self-enhancement style		Self-effacement style	
Speaker-oriented style		Listener-oriented style	
Verbal-based understanding		Context-based understanding	
<b>LCC examples</b>		<b>HCC examples</b>	
←————— X —————→			
Germany Switzerland Denmark Sweden ↑	United States Canada Australia Great Britain ↑	(France)	Saudi Arabia Kuwait Mexico Nigeria ↑
			Japan China South Korea Vietnam ↑

Within high-context settings, it is much more important that the receiver of the message is apt to “read between the lines” so as to gather all important details and subtle implications of the message that may not have been explicitly verbally expressed by the sender (Ting-Toomey, 2019). Although there can be much confusion when individuals from different contextual settings engage, it is important to recognize that ambiguity does not automatically equate to rudeness during an intercultural exchange, but rather, a difference in contextual cultural background (Niendorf, 2015). Nonetheless, a lack of mutual understanding of the guidelines that accompany a high or low context setting can be a major proponent of miscommunication for both the sender and receiver.

Ting-Toomey (2019) offers an example of how an interaction within high and low context environments might take place. Low-context settings are individuals who are direct, clear, and rely on verbal messaging more than body language, such as Americans and many European countries, such as Germany, Denmark, and Switzerland. High-context regions include a large majority of Asian countries, such as Japan, China, Vietnam, and South Korea. Thus, Americans speaking with Americans and Chinese engaging with Chinese are more than likely expected to be able to hold a conversation with ease and effectively conclude it with mutual clarity on both ends, as the two groups are comfortable and expectant of the social cues within their appropriate cultures.

Ting-Toomey (2019) poses a scenario in which the two are mixed: an American and Chinese are engaging with one another, and the Chinese individual is hoping to ask the American for a ride to the airport. While in conversation, the Chinese individual mentions an upcoming trip, hoping the American will offer to drive them to the airport. The American, on the other hand, hears the news, comments on the exciting experience that it will be, and carries along with



their day. What the American failed to recognize was that this was the typical way that someone from Chinese culture would ask for a ride; that is, bringing up the trip and waiting for an offer from the receiving end to drive them to the airport. These context clues, which contain subtle, unspoken messages, are practices and social cues of which those who are familiar with Chinese culture are conditioned and expectant; however, for a foreign individual who has had minimal interaction or knowledge with this setting or cultural interaction, these cues are invisible and meaningless, and effective intercultural communication is not achieved, as was the case in this scenario.

### **Nonverbal Communication**

Over time, research has found that at least 55% of communication is nonverbal (Mehrabian, 2007), highlighting that the majority of human communication takes place by use of gestures, body language, silence, and more. Nonverbal communication carries a significant role within the art of communication, as Ting-Toomey & Chung (2012) state, “it is nonverbal communication that embodies the rich and nuanced meanings of the culture” (p. 133).

Because nonverbal communication extends to such a broad range of study, experts have simplified the field of nonverbal communication into roughly nine categories, including the following: kinesics (body movement), proxemics (spacial usage and awareness), haptics (use of touch), oculosics (eye contact), vocalics, physical appearance, environment, olfactics (smell), and chronemics (timeliness). Each of these communicative practices are seen on a daily basis across the world, but with distinct variances depending on the given culture. For the purpose of this study, the majority of attention and focus will be placed upon kinesics, proxemics, haptics, and chronemics.

Ferrara (2015) comments on the notion of symbols and nonverbal communication, mentioning how body language can play a significant role in the art of effective communication. Bowman (2021) defines nonverbal communication as “any communicative characteristic or behavior that intentionally or unintentionally conveys a message without the use of verbal language” (p. 8). Aspects such as facial expression, use of auditory elements, such as tone and pitch of voice, and overall body language signals can send messages to other individuals, whether consciously or subconsciously, contributing towards positive or negative engagement of a particular audience (Ferrara).

A significant feature of nonverbal communication is that it carries historic primacy, as research has revealed that some of the earliest ancestors did not function with verbal communication in day-to-day life; rather, they relied solely on forms of nonverbal communication and physical gestures to convey meaning with one another, which is known as “phylogenetic primacy” (Bowman, 2021). While there may be nuance regarding the specific emotion being felt in the moment for a nonverbal expression of communication, certain behaviors, such as laughter, can imply the general meaning or understanding of experiencing happiness to some degree on a universal scale.

Moreover, nonverbal communication holds ontogenetic primacy, which is “the idea that nonverbal communication comes before any other form of communication in each individual experience” (Bowman, 2021, p. 11). This is especially seen in newborn infants, who are fully incapable of communicating with humans on a verbal basis yet communicate their needs on an hourly level through vocalic nonverbal communication: crying. Over time, as infants grow and learn from their surroundings, they adopt and mimic the behaviors they see around them, such as their parents’ hand motions, words, physical positioning, and more. This idea also correlates to

the social learning theory, pertaining to the notion that humans are creatures of mimicry, adapting to and learning from their immediate surroundings. This theoretical framework will be elaborated upon further along in this study.

### **Nonverbal Communication in Cross-cultural Settings**

Considerations of nonverbal communication expand even more greatly when it takes place in a foreign or cross-cultural environment. Studies pertaining to security and clinical studies show the significance attached to understanding this communication of emotion in a format that considers behavioral sciences, computational sciences, and neurological sciences (Mandal, 2015). Such studies prove the power that lies within nonverbal communication, which is highly applicable to this study in terms of a worthwhile field of communication to explore, and the weighted value that it contributes towards cross-cultural experiences, and the messages that are relayed in such a setting.

A present danger to be aware of and avoid is miscommunication, perhaps even to an offensive extent, when immersed in a new cross-cultural setting. Niendorf (2015) writes that “one [can] tend to draw conclusions regarding other people without truly examining and understanding their cultures” (p. 511). Moreover, Ting-Toomey & Chung (2012) encourage others to “approach non-verbal means of communication with sensitivity, respect, and open-minded attitudes as good first steps in gaining nonverbal entrance to a culture” (p. 152).

While nonverbal communication is practiced everyday worldwide, some behaviors carry a universal meaning, while some carry vastly different ones. Some behaviors, such as a smile or animated laughter, generally universally conveys a level of happiness or pleasure to some degree. Additionally, a head nod in a conversation may imply being in a state of an agreement in most regions of the world. However, there are some nonverbal practices that are second nature in

their meaning within one culture, but carry a vastly different, or even inappropriate meaning in other cultures. For example, winking at someone in the Western culture communicates a state of light-hearted amity, whereas in various regions of Asia, winking insinuates a very vulgar meaning behind it, and is therefore heavily discouraged. Thus, while nonverbal communication is practiced daily by all individuals, the nuance and meaning behind a certain gesture of behavior can vary drastically depending on the given cultural context.

### **Kinesics & Physical Appearance**

In Manas Mandal's (2015) book, "Understanding Facial Expressions in Communication," Mandal discusses the significance that lies within the understanding of the effects which stem from human facial expressions, including cultural, psychological, neurological, and biological elements. The author analyzes the idea that facial expressions can be both automated, as in reflexive or impulsive, specifically when an individual is caught by surprise or reacts in a matter caused by a sheer lack of expectation, as well as facial expressions that are "manual," or formed with more intention. Such instances of manual expressions may include moments where an individual has trained themselves to maintain a proper state, such as being placed within a formal environment which requires professional attention, therefore requiring the individual to conduct a posture of respect and neglect any inappropriate humor displayed on their face.

On a cross-cultural level, kinesics can vary significantly as gestures carry different cultural meanings in foreign contexts. For instance, while smiling and laughter generally indicates happiness and joy, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congolese couples refrain from smiling on their wedding day; "if they do smile, it would mean that they aren't serious about marriage" (Mattia & Park, 2022, para 4). Smiles from a bride and groom on a wedding day is something that is expected and celebrated in nearly every other culture of the world for the

entirety of the day, as it is an expression that captures the zeal of the excitement of the day.

However, this is a cultural facial expression that fluctuates; the Congolese couple can still be elated with joy despite the more reserved face on their faces. Rather, this is simply a cultural practice and expectational norm that indicates maturity and devotion to the other as they vow to become one together.

### **Proxemics & Haptics**

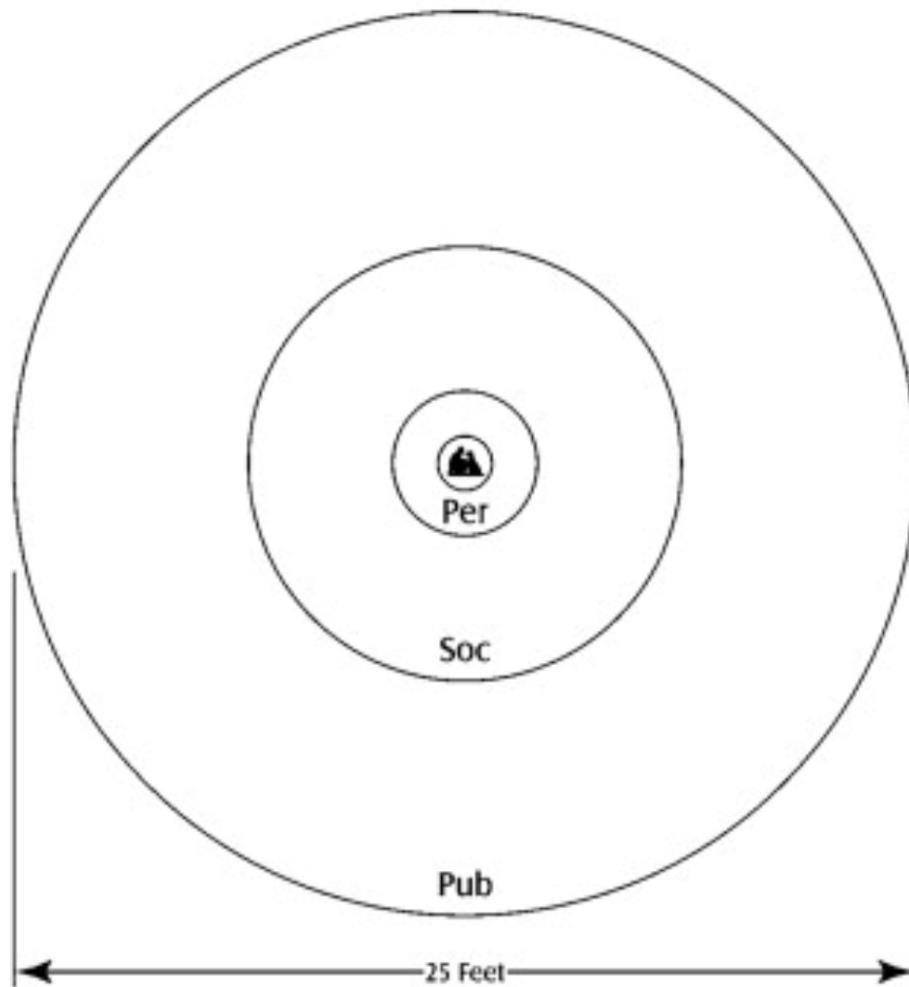
In efforts to adequately define proxemics, the term may be referred to as, the study of how individuals use space to communicate... Proxemics focuses not only on the ways individuals orient themselves to other individuals and objects in their immediate physical environment, but also on the perceptual and behavioral impact of these spatial orientations. (Eaves & Leathers, 2017, p. 107)


Proxemics can be most often considered regarding how close in proximity individuals allow or desire themselves to be around others, which can depend on their level of closeness with another person. Edward Hall (1976), a pioneer in the study of proxemics, categorized four different levels of personal territory, being,

- 1.) Intimate zone: 18 inches to 0 inches
- 2.) Personal zone: 4 feet-18 inches
- 3.) Social zone: 12 feet- 4 feet
- 4.) Public zone: 25 feet to 12 feet

Hall designed this zone (see below) structure (Eaves & Leavens, 2017, p. 111), so as to reveal the ways in which humans naturally tend to allow or prevent others from entering a certain zone, based on levels of comfortability and intimacy, or a lack thereof, with individuals (Battle, 2012).

## Proxemics Personal Territory



-  - Intimate Zone - 18 inches to contact
- Per - Personal Zone - 4 feet to 18 inches
- Soc - Social Zone - 12 feet to 4 feet
- Pub - Public Zone - 25 feet to 12 feet

Proxemics, the usage and awareness of space, and haptics, the meaning behind physical touch, can indicate different meanings depending on the given cultural context. The zones that Hall (1968) offers help serve as a guideline for assumptions of the spatial preferences of others (Eaves & Leathers, 2017). This may certainly be true when residing in a culture of origin and familiarity, however, it can experience an immense shift when entering a foreign culture, in which proxemic norms vary significantly. For instance, warm cultures such as Latin America, are quick to embrace and express physical touch, perhaps categorizing a new acquaintance automatically in level two, whereas, in Romanian cultures, they are more preservative of their personal space, and prefer some healthy physical distance until the relationship progresses further (Erickson, 2017).

Culture does not only categorize by country but extends to levels much deeper than that. There are subcultures that exist even within countries and people groups, which can be broken down to very concentrated levels. Within Latin American culture, for example, certain groups of people from various subparts of the region interpret proxemic communication differently. Costa Ricans prefer to stand much closer to others than those from Panama or Colombia, who prefer to have a bit more physical space; although still less physical space than what would be the preference of North American individuals (Shuter, 1976). Similarly, when analyzing proxemic behavior in Europe, studies show that those who live in high-traffic cities like Paris, Rome, and Barcelona interact with others at very close proximity, as they are familiar to function in tight-quarters due to such a high population. Those from the rural parts of each of those countries, however, are much more comfortable with the open space and freedom offered to them in their living environments, and consequently interact with others at lengthy distances (Eaves & Leathers, 2016).

### **Oculesics**

Eaves & Leathers (2016) state, “Oftentimes, eyes are the mirror of the soul, and can often reveal the true nature of the self” (p. 56). Eyes can, for the better or worse, expose the feelings of another without even having to use verbal communication. Oculesics can be defined as “the nonverbal code dealing with the use of one’s eyes to send a message” (Bowman, 2021, p. 43), and the significance of communicative implications from eye contact can vary significantly depending on the cultural surroundings at hand.

For instance, the United States tends to be a much more direct, straight-forward country as compared to other regions of the world. Thus, eye contact is attached with a meaning of being direct, honest, offering attention, and depending on the context, approachability (Evason, 2022). Again, while this a general assumption for the country as a whole, this can still carry nuance and variety depending on what region of the country is being assessed. In the southeast, it is very common for strangers to make eye contact and smile or wave to fellow pedestrians in public, regardless of whether they are acquaintances or strangers. However, in northern, fast-paced cities such as New York City or Boston, elongated direct eye contact can breach an irking demeanor of hostility and silent or verbal expression of “mind your own business.” However, generally speaking, for the North American region of the world, it is fair to assume that when in conversation with someone else, it is polite and expected to maintain intentional eye contact with that person to communicate attentiveness and listening towards the individual.

This is not the case in every region of the world, however. In East Asia for instance, countries such as Japan teach others not to hold much eye contact, as it communicates disrespect to the individual, whereas in other countries, such as the United States, failure to maintain direct eye contact would be a form of disrespect and rudeness (Uono & Hietanen, 2015). As can be



gathered, simple cultural norms that may appear to be second nature to a certain group of people can be interpreted with vastly different meanings depending on the context and surrounding of the situation, which calls for a sense of awareness when entering a foreign context, so as to communicate with respect and honor towards others.

### **Chronemics**

Another significant element of nonverbal communication is that of chronemics, which may be defined as “the way members of a given culture define, experience, structure, and use time” (Eaves & Leathers, 2016, p. 352). Time is something that carries different weights of significance, in terms of urgency or a lack thereof. As is the case for all elements of implications of communication when immersed in a new culture, learning the norms and values associated with them can benefit the individual in the context, so as to operate with a relevant and accurate understanding of the daily practices (Moore et al., 2013).

While time is a structure observed by cultures around the globe, the level of urgency by which groups operate may vary based on a culture’s outlook on time. Hall (1976) classifies time into two categories: monochronic and polychronic time. “Monochronic time (M-time) means paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time. Polychronic (P-time) means being involved with many things at once. Like oil and water, the two systems do not mix” (p. 17). Countries that function off M-time include more task-oriented, fast-paced, punctual cultures such as the United States, Switzerland, Germany, and Scandinavia, especially when conducting international business. All these countries set time and deadlines as the priority, oftentimes more so than focusing on people. P-time, rather, is more frequently observed by slower-paced, relational countries who are less rigidly concerned about being bound by the confines of a digital

sequence of numbers, and rather maximizes focus upon people, recognizing that “many different business activities might occur at the same time” (Eaves & Leathers, p. 352).

Countries which strictly operate by deadlines and punctuality to the clock include North America, Western Europe, East Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Countries which place a looser emphasis on the day-to-day, offering flexibility on the concept of punctuality include Latin America and South Asia, usually choosing to focus on relational, interpersonal engagements instead. Americans are estimated to spend 80% of time on tasks and 20% on social time, while South Asian and Latin American countries distribute 50% of their time to tasks and social concerns equally (Eaves & Leathers, 2016). Regarding North America’s obsessive adherence to punctuality, Eaves & Leathers writes,

North America is infatuated with its strict guideline of being on time. In fact, many colleges and universities have now placed atomic clocks in their hallways to ensure that students arrive “exactly” on time for their classes. If you show up late these days with no apology, you send a grave nonverbal message about yourself to the receiver. (p. 353)

The “time is money” mentality is even visible through the nonverbal manner of communication of pace and walking, especially in Americans’ constant paces of hurry and rushing, which views wasted time as lost time (Kim, 2001). Samovar et al. (2016) observes,

From fast-food restaurants, to one-stop gas stations, to microwave cooking, to computers that use fast processors, Americans live life at a very hectic pace. Even the expression “rush hour” describes how commuters in major cities are hurrying and dashing to get from point A to point B. Most other cultures would not even have a literal translation for the two words ‘rush hour.’ (p. 293)

When comparing differences in relative perceptions of punctuality, Argyle (1982) asks the question:

How late is 'late'? This varies greatly. In Britain and America, one may be five minutes late for a business appointment, but not fifteen and certainly not thirty minutes late, which is perfectly normal in Arab countries. On the other hand, in Britain it is correct to be five to fifteen minutes late for an invitation to dinner. An Italian might arrive two hours late, an Ethiopian after, and Japanese not at all—he had accepted only to prevent his host from losing face. (p. 68)

As can be gathered from this excerpt, punctuality infers different levels of weight and significance around the world. While the American may be panicked at arriving 10 minutes late to an event, Chileans deem it as rude to arrive on time to a social gathering (Roraff & Camacho, 1998). This closely aligns with the Nigerian philosophy of time, as they carry an old-time phrase that says “a watch did not invent man” (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 293), viewing time as a flexible concept which may be adjusted as needed, which is a drastic shift from the American perspective of time as a strict, unforgiving deadline which must always be met. Moreover, in Indonesia, a common phrase is used that conceptualizes time as “rubber time,” which may be stretched, shrunk, and overall, is flexible (Harris & Moran, 1966). All of these outlooks contrast significantly from that of Americans; in fact, the hurried lifestyle of America can even be perceived as grounds for distrust as one who is attempting to cheat, such as is the case in regions of Africa, which operates at a much slower pace of daily life (Samovar et al., 2016).

The value emphasized upon time is conditioned within children at a very young age, due to their cultural upbringing. Considering chronemics, some children are raised to place a high

value on time punctuality, while others grow up with a more flexible perception of time. As Samovar (2016) emphasizes,

Children in the United States grow up hearing others tell them not ‘to waste so much time,’ differ[ing] from the Latin proverb, ‘Haste manages all things badly,’ or the Mexican saying, ‘You don’t have to get there first, you just have to know how to get there.’ (p. 293)

Instilling these values at such a young age is what ingrains the cultural value as a daily norm later on in life, as the child learns the meaning and significance of cultural practices, such as time, at a very young age, and thus finds the habit to be rigid or loose on time, depending on the cultural background, to be ingrained over time. This also applies to the psychological development pattern of children, which will be further discussed within this study, as far as formulation of habits, and the lasting skills that may be gained from a young age.

Lastly, in regard to chronemics and viewpoints of time is the recognition of orientation within a culture, which can either be past, present, or future. Past orientation indicates that much time is spent dwelling or reminiscing things of the past, while present is focused on the current state of being, and future orientation dedicates thought and vision-casting towards what is yet to come. Members of the United States are hyper-focused on the present and future, always wanting to “get ahead,” with much less attention fixated on things of the past (Martin & Nakayama, 2007). Other countries in Europe function in the same mindset of living in the present and futuristic state of mind. As a result of this train of thought, however, the concept of silence and idleness is something that causes significant discomfort, as they would rather fill the time with the noise of doing something productive (Samovar et al., 2017).

In contrast, Asian cultures especially, which function more so along the lines of past orientation mindset, have little to no qualms when it comes to silence, especially when it comes to taking a moment of silence to respectfully reminisce on historic events (Samovar et al., 2017). Similarly, countries like Italy and France place emphasis upon “learning from the past,” dwelling upon historic events and creating space to remember them often. Children in these environments are raised to comfortably function in and expect moments of silence as a social norm (Samovar et al.), varying significantly from the upbringing and ideology of silence within present and future oriented cultures, such as North America.

As can be established from the gathered research, it is safe to state that the perception of time and chronemic communication is practiced in vastly different ways around the globe. However, each culture and its people groups have learned how to best function for their environment, creating their own sets of strengths and weaknesses that may vary from other cultural groups. For instance, countries which operate as fast-paced modes with task-oriented mindsets often see an increased level in productivity and economic stability within the workplace, and therefore, for the entire country’s economic structure, than perhaps is reflected in slower-paced countries.

However, it cannot be dismissed that the high emphasis on completion of tasks and goals is a consequential inducer of stress. Hecht & Allen (2005) found that individuals that operate in fast-paced work environments are significantly more predicted to suffer from heart disease and other physical and mental health strains than that of slow-paced cultures. Thus, while there are strengths for both M-time and P-time cultures, there is an opportunity cost of either health or productivity that can occur for each type of culture as well.

After a thorough assessment of various forms of nonverbal communication found across the world, including kinesics, physical appearance, proxemics, haptics, and chronemics, it can be concluded that meanings associated with everyday nonverbal manners of communication vary significantly depending on the specific cultural context. As a result, the culturally unseasoned individual may struggle with intuitively grasping key indicators that convey the meanings behind these nonverbal messages, and thus, may interpret them incorrectly in a way that could be propose a number of different meanings, whether that may be humorous, offensive, or something else. However, as Eaves & Leathers (2017) state, “The sensitive observer of a foreign culture can learn what is and is not proper within that culture. As a result, many of the misunderstandings and misrepresentations associated with culture-bound notions [of time] could be eliminated or minimized (p. 353).

### **Interpersonal Communication**

In addition to mindset shifts and the recognition of symbiotics and nonverbal communicative distinctives, some other common valuable skills which may be gained include intercultural sensitivity, cognitive perceptual management, relationship management, and self-management, which extend greatly to the realm of interpersonal communication. Research shows that exposure to other cultures aids in the development and maintenance of good interpersonal relationships with culturally different others, as individuals are better equipped to be capable of seeking out and fostering flourishing relationships with those from varying cultures (Thomas, 2008). It becomes gradually more natural and less foreign to engage with them, as the familiarity of being exposed to unknown cultures becomes more normalized in the individual’s life.

Moreover, travelers often gain the most impact from interactions with people who are very stable

and grounded in their own individual selves (Thomas). This confidence and stability produce contagion that influences those observing and engaging with them,

Our categorization of the skills component of cultural intelligence builds on this literature to derive three skill sets (perceptual, relational, and adaptive), with the fourth (analytical skills) conceptually similar to cultural metacognition described ahead. In order to specify the skills elements of cultural intelligence, it is important to recognize the dynamic nature of cultural intelligence. (p. 10)

This includes learning to cultivate a state of “open-mindedness, tolerance of uncertainty, and non-judgmentalness” (Thomas, 2008, p. 10) In regard to these three skills, Thomas emphasizes the importance being flexible in situations, and mastering the ability to adapt behavior as needed, in order to best maintain an appropriate countenance. Thomas notes that this skill “involves being able to exhibit behavior that is chosen from a well-developed repertoire or is quickly developed during the course of an intercultural interaction” (p. 10).

Thomas (2008) closes out this philosophy with the idea that,

Culturally intelligent individuals can shape the context of the interaction to create a unique environment, as opposed to merely adjusting to it. They do this by facilitating positive attitudes and behavior of the culturally different other(s) with whom they interact. High levels of adaptive skills may be positively related to effective cross-cultural interactions. However, for this adaptive skill to demonstrate cultural intelligence, it must be based on the knowledge of culture and on cultural metacognition, which allows specific knowledge to be translated into behavior appropriate to a new intercultural interaction. (p. 11)

In essence, Thomas (2008) continuously drives the point of ensuring that individuals are cognitively aware of their cultural surroundings, adapting as needed to exercise societal respect and attentiveness, without compromising their individual characteristics. As a result, formation of these skills may also be linked to the sharpening of interpersonal communication skills, which focuses heavily on learning how to adapt, engage, and effectively exchange messages with individuals, whether the two are conjoined by many similarities or stark differences.

Spitzberg (2008) states that “Social skills are the essential processes through which we initiate, maintain, and manage our relationships with others” (p. 21). Inspired by the study of interpersonal communication, the researcher began vigorously analyzing the weight that social and interpersonal communication skills carry in the average individual’s life, finding shocking results. Spitzberg states that those lacking adequate social skills tend to,

be lower in self-esteem, academic success, and occupational success, and higher in levels of loneliness, shyness, depression, mental illness, marital distress, hypertension, stress, and anxiety. Psychological problems such as depression, social anxiety, schizophrenia, eating disorders, personality disorder, and mental health are all deeply affected by the interpersonal skills through which social life is conducted. (p. 22)

It can be difficult to narrow down the most pertinent communication skills, however, in a study from Spitzberg and Dillard (2002), they specified 12 key traits to be assessed, nine of which happened to be nonverbal communication skills, showing that nonverbal and interpersonal communication carry significant overlap, heavily affecting the other depending on the given situation. As 75% of the traits that Spitzberg and Dillard analyzed were nonverbally focused, it is clear that this style of communication is highly prevalent in the field of communication, playing



a significant role in daily routine. For this very reason, nonverbal communication will continue to be addressed further along within this study.

Spitzberg and Dillard's (2002) 12 key traits analyzed included, response latency (the average or total amount of time it takes after one person stops talking before the other person begins talking), eye gaze, eye contact, smiles, head movements, adaptors (e.g., finger-tapping, hair-twirling, or ring-twisting behaviors), volume, vocal variety, and talk time. (p. 22)

The two researchers continued on in their study with the intention to measure the most relevant communication, and in turn, assess the skill level of communicators on an interpersonal level. The assessment included the questionnaire below, with self-ratings for each category. Results could equal on a scale from the value of 30-160, 30 indicating a poor level of communication skills, and 160 being the highest, or most excellent possible level. The table on the following page (Spitzberg, 2002, p. 23) depicts the ranked questionnaire given to participants (Guerrero et al., 2008).

**Table 2.1 The Conversational Skills Rating Form**

**Conversational Skills Rating Scale (Rating of Self Form)**

Rate how skillfully **you** used, or didn't use, the following communicative behaviors in the conversation, where:

- 1 = **Inadequate** (use is awkward, disruptive, or results in a negative impression of communicative skills)
- 2 = **Fair** (occasionally awkward or disruptive, occasionally adequate)
- 3 = **Adequate** (sufficient but neither noticeable nor excellent; produces neither strong positive nor negative impression)
- 4 = **Good** (use was better than adequate but not outstanding)
- 5 = **Excellent** (use is smooth, controlled; results in positive impression of communicative skills)

Circle the single most accurate response for each behavior:

- 1 2 3 4 5 Speaking rate (neither too slow nor too fast)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Speaking fluency (pauses, silences, "uh," etc.)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Vocal confidence (neither too tense/nervous nor overly confident sounding)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Articulation (clarity of pronunciation and linguistic expression)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Vocal variety (neither overly monotone nor dramatic voice)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Volume (neither too loud nor too soft)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Posture (neither too closed/formal nor too open/informal)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Lean toward partner (neither too forward nor too far back)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Shaking or nervous twitches (aren't noticeable or distracting)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Unmotivated movements (tapping feet, fingers, hair-twirling, etc.)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Facial expressiveness (neither blank nor exaggerated)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Nodding of head in response to partner statements
- 1 2 3 4 5 Use of gestures to emphasize what is being said
- 1 2 3 4 5 Use of humor and/or stories
- 1 2 3 4 5 Smiling and/or laughing
- 1 2 3 4 5 Use of eye contact
- 1 2 3 4 5 Asking of questions
- 1 2 3 4 5 Speaking about partner (involvement of partner as a topic of conversation)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Speaking about self (neither too much nor too little)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Encouragements or agreements (encouragement of partner to talk)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Personal opinion expression (neither too passive nor aggressive)
- 1 2 3 4 5 Initiation of new topics
- 1 2 3 4 5 Maintenance of topics and follow-up comments
- 1 2 3 4 5 Interruption of partner speaking turns
- 1 2 3 4 5 Use of time speaking relative to partner

For the next five items, rate your overall performance. I was a(n) . . .

- Poor conversationalist      1 2 3 4 5 6 7      Good conversationalist
- Socially unskilled          1 2 3 4 5 6 7      Socially skilled
- Incompetent communicator    1 2 3 4 5 6 7      Competent communicator
- Inappropriate communicator   1 2 3 4 5 6 7      Appropriate communicator
- Ineffective communicator      1 2 3 4 5 6 7      Effective communicator

Note: Add up the numbers you circled. The maximum score is 160. The lowest possible score is 30.

Throughout the generation of this process, Spitzberg (2002) found that these behaviors boiled down to an even more concentrated form of categorization, being separated into four categories of measurement: coordination, which concerns the management and conversational flow of verbal speaking, attentiveness, which encompasses expression of interest towards others in conversation, such as nodding or intentional eye contact, indicating engagement when communicating with another individual. The next is composure, which pertains to vocal confidence, assertiveness, and expressiveness. Poor examples of composure may include fidgeting, nervous twitching, and other demonstrated actions of discomfort in a given setting. Finally, is expressiveness, which is the level of dynamic engagement and animation offered in an interaction, often seen through facial expressions, gestures, smiles or laughter, and voice inflection.

The significance of these factors of these highlighted interpersonal and social skills is similar to the original finding from Spitzberg (2002), in regard to the fact that interpersonal communication skills carry a direct correlation to mental health, being a positive reflection when socially and interpersonally competent, and being detrimentally concerning when one operates at a poor level of interpersonal communication. Thus, there is significant value and strength in prioritizing the development of these skills and learning how to identify different ways to strengthen them, which in relation to this particular study, may likely be achieved through expansion of cultural intelligence and intercultural immersive travel experiences. As gathered from various pieces of literature, it appears trustworthy that exposure to intercultural environments sharpens and enhances the cultural intelligence of an individual, daily communicative distinctives, and is a massive reducer of stress (Guerrero et al., 2008), which may

serve as a benefit and incentive to individuals to become immersively engaged in intercultural settings.

In Thomas Warren's (2006) book, "Cross-cultural Communication: Perspectives in Theory and Practice," the author discusses the various ways that practitioners may craft their communication when in a foreign setting. One area in particular that Warren mentions is the art of written communication skills, and ensuring that documentation is properly worded and formatted, to effectively reach the receiving end in another culture. Warren comments on how writers of documents that into cross international work environments ought to be strategically written, stating "The problem lies in the relationship between language and the scheme used to understand the language" (p. 42). Warren continues to share that oftentimes, the way that a document was originally written may not transfer well when sent to a recipient in another culture, due to loops and holes that may appear in translation, or simply due to interpretation of the content. Warren mentions the need to write with clarity and adaptation to whatever the cultural parameters may be of those on the receiving end.

Another element to consider in this research is the motive or incentive that people may have to engage cross-culturally, and how economic factors may play a role in this. Author Anastacia Kurylo (2013) comments on this, sharing about the "economic imperative," which, "suggests that people may be motivated to be more culturally aware in order to benefit from and be responsive to political, social, economic, and environmental events around the world that shape global economies" (p. 9). Kurylo draws research that supports the claim that having intercultural awareness and polished skills becomes an asset within the workplace. The author shares that intercultural communication contributes towards increased levels of awareness, stating,

In addition to the way in which your personal experiences may motivate you to learn more about inter/cultural communication, six intercultural imperatives articulated by Martin and Nakayama (2007) urge people toward greater awareness about intercultural communication. These imperatives represent societal level reasons for why people benefit from broader cultural awareness. (p. 9)

Kurylo (2013) mentions a specific example of a 2010 oil spill from BP, which caused a three-month ongoing cycle of damage specifically for fishing and tourism within the Gulf of Mexico. This had a detrimental impact on businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, residents, and more; however, the individuals who were on the problem-solving team had a significant advantage in being able to apply intercultural skills with the cross-cultural individuals who were helping resolve the situation. This is only one example of ways that intercultural skills prove to be impactful within the workplace, however, having cultural intelligence, gained from cross-cultural travel, can be a determining factor for potential to climb the ladder to economic success.

### **Psychological Development**

The topic of cross-cultural travel and cultural intelligence is intertwined with elements of psychological development. Previously, the idea of knowledge, metacognition, and behavior was mentioned, in the way that it plays a role in development of cultural intelligence. Taking this a step further, Crowne (2013) states that “Researchers have acknowledged that intercultural contact can result in psychological changes in an individual's daily behaviors. Individuals experience these changes to varying degrees and may be influenced by the cultures in contact, the individual's background, and other personal characteristics” (p.7). This plays into the theory that is to be evaluated later, the social learning theory, which centralizes around the idea that humans learn and adapt towards the social surroundings.

Regarding psychological development, the notion arises in terms of how childhood experiences impact adulthood, specifically in terms of cross-cultural engagement for this study. While culture, background, and personal characteristics are key components which influence people, and shape them into who they are (Crowne, 2013), Hermann et al. (2007) goes a step further and focuses on how intercultural immersion plays a role in human growth and development, stating,

Humans must (i) learn their native language in social interactions with others, (ii) acquire necessary subsistence skills by participating with experts in established cultural practices and (iii) (in many cultures) acquire skills with written language and... formal schooling. In the end, human adults will have all kinds of cognitive skills not possessed by others, but this outcome will be due largely to children's early merging, specialized skills for absorbing the accumulated skillful practices and knowledge of their social group (so that a child growing up outside of any human culture would develop few distinctively human cognitive skills). Humans' especially powerful skills of social-cultural cognition early in ontogeny thus serve as a kind of "bootstrap" for the distinctively complex development of human cognition in general. (p. 8)

Hermann et al. (2007) raises many strong points here, stating that humans inherently learn from their surroundings, which includes learning language, cultural norms and rituals, and the ability to develop cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and social skills. However, a key point that Hermann makes is the observation that outcomes of well-rounded cognitive skills derive from the upbringing as a child, and the exposure experiences since childhood. Applying this concept towards the sense of cross-cultural travel, it can be stated that conditioning a child to grow familiar to being exposed to foreign cultures results in the development of cognitive

learning skills. These experiences leave marks and impact upon the child into adulthood, allowing them to sharpen everyday life skills, specifically in areas pertaining to communication.

From a very young age, children learn, mimic, and practice based upon what is demonstrated in front of them. This is true in many facets of life, but especially so in communicative tendencies. For example, in terms of adoption of nonverbal communication skills, Almaney & Alwan (1982) state,

Culture has its own distinct nonverbal communication system. Children learn this system before they master verbal skills and rely on it as their major vehicle of communication.

As they grow up, nonverbal behavior becomes so deeply rooted in their psyche that they engage in it rather unconsciously. (p. 16)

As the authors highlight, habits and skills, such as nonverbal communication norms in this case, practiced by children from a young age often tend to become “ingrained” into daily routine or practice over time. From a very young age, children develop the skill of “metacognition: the awareness and understanding of various aspects of thought” (Berk, 2006, p. 303), which grows especially throughout early and middle childhood, as children gradually cultivate “a coherent understanding of people as mental beings, which they revise as they encounter new evidence” (p. 303). Throughout this developmental stage of children, they recognize their minds as an “active, constructive agent, rather than a passive container of information. As older children consider interactions among variables, metacognitive knowledge becomes more complex and integrated” (p. 303).

As Berk (2006) states, as children continuously grow, they begin to recognize the active power of their mind, and their innate ability to process, analyze, interpret meanings of their surroundings. This may apply towards cultural sensitivity and exposure, in the sense that as

children grow older, they are able to recognize certain differences of culture around the world yet are able to grow accustomed to the variety therein, sharpening their personal skills such as cultural sensitivity and adaptability.

Another phase relevant in terms of information processing is that of “reconstruction,” which is also seen in children at a young age. Berk (2006) states,

When we must remember complex, meaningful material, we do not merely copy material into the system at storage and faithfully reproduce it at retrieval. Instead, we select and interpret information we encounter in our everyday lives in terms of our existing knowledge. Once we have transformed the material, we often have difficulty distinguishing it from the original, [known as] reconstruction of information, or recoding it while it is in the system. (p. 304)

Both metacognition and reconstruction carry significant weight towards psychological development within children, as it denotes the process of how children interpret and understand information and their immediate surroundings, as well as how this process unfolds over time. Cognitive reconstruction, especially, carries significance in terms of how it recognizes that humans are constantly reshaping thought processes, particularly based upon experiences that serve as influencers of thought.

In another study of how children develop and process their surroundings, Hyowon Gweon (2021) mentions the way that children take in information, stating, “Children interpret and evaluate the meaning of evidence based on how it was generated, and even generate helpful evidence by considering others’ mental states and utilities; far from passive and credulous, children are active social learner and teachers... Social learning paints an integrated picture of



how human cognition gives rise to a form of learning and communication that is powerful, smart, and distinctively human (para 3).

Overall, if children are learning, even from a very young age, how to reconstruct their understanding of intercultural observations, practices, and norms, and being immersed in the environments which expose their minds to different cultural contexts, then it is quite likely that their levels of cultural intelligence and familiarity will be strengthened and matured greatly as they eventually enter into adulthood. Moreover, through continuous exposure and practice of certain thought patterns or cultural norms, elements of social learning and integration of values or practices may be implemented into daily life. This applies to the next section of this study, covering the applied theory of communication.

## **Theory**

The theory incorporated into this research study is the social learning theory, due to its relevance in focusing on how people adapt to new cultural environments, and the influence it has in cultivating communication skills as a result of exposure to certain people groups and surroundings. According to Mark A. Smith (2021), this theory was crafted by Albert Bandura, as he studied the intricacies that compose human behaviors, and how they are influenced by one's surroundings. A primary component of Bandura's theory is reciprocal determinism, proposing that, "human behavior is determined by functional relationships between (1) personal factors, (2) the external environment, and (3) the behavior itself" (p. 1). Essentially, this definition implies that humans gain and develop individual characteristics based upon the relationships and influence of their social surroundings, which is a habit that develops in humans from childhood in their growing and imitation of adult figures around them (Kendal et al., 2018). This theory also focuses on the element of reinforcement, and the idea that actions that are reinforced,

whether through simple observation or through adoption of action, generate newly formed habits for individuals newly exposed to such things (Pratt et al., 2010).

In correlation to the communicative tendencies and behaviors of individuals traveling to new foreign environments, it may be observed that many of their everyday learned habits that they adopt, especially if they are in this foreign setting for an extensive period of time, may be attributed as results of implementation of social learning theory, whether this is a process that is consciously or subconsciously taking place.

In his book titled “Social Learning Theory,” Albert Bandura (1971) proposes his ideology of the theory in the following,

Traditional theories of learning generally depict behavior as the product of directly experienced response consequences. In actuality, virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people’s behavior and its consequences for them. Man’s capacity to learn by observation enables him to acquire large, integrated units of behavior by example without having to build up the patterns gradually by tedious trial and error. Similarly, emotional responses can be developed observationally by witnessing the affective reactions of others undergoing painful or pleasurable experiences. Fearful and defensive behavior can be extinguished vicariously by observing others engage in the feared activities without any adverse consequences. And behavioral inhibitions can be induced by seeing others punished for their actions. (p. 2)

Essentially, Bandura draws the connection that man’s capacity for observation towards external surroundings paves the way for adopting new behaviors that eventually, whether quickly or gradually, become ingrained subsets of everyday habits or behavior. These learned tendencies

grow over time, contributing towards an individual's deemed identity, in terms of their interests, hobbies, social norms, and frequently used phrases.

Social learning theory assesses the different ways in which social cues are learned, impacting the way that individuals gradually adjust or morph into a new culture around them. Piet Van den Bossche (2006) states, "In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted toward the social bases of cognition, taking into consideration how social processes in groups and teams affect performance" (p. 1). This statement shows the implication that social processes contribute towards how humans function, whether that is within a group-working environment, or on an individual basis, which may easily be applied in the case of a fresh traveler who is removed from the comfortable familiarity of his or her country of origin, and who is now exploring new surroundings and assessing interests and norms that spark further curiosity. These behaviors, once again, are only amplified based on the elongated duration spent in a new environment, as opposed to a brief weekend trip.

Social learning theory is often seen in applied settings through observational learning. Bandura (1971) emphasizes that "most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (p. 6). However, simple observation does not constitute immediate adoption. Bandura continues to highlight that adoption of actions or norms must be paired with initial interest. He uses the example of a social group and the varying members playing a role in a social setting. Some roles require or demand more attention than others, while some are content to remain on the sidelines. Bandura writes,

The functional value of the behaviors displayed by different models is highly influential in determining which models will be closely observed and which will be ignored.

Attention to models is also channeled by their interpersonal attraction. Models who

possess interesting and winsome qualities are sought out, whereas those who lack pleasing characteristics tend to be ignored or rejected, even though they may excel in other ways. (p. 7)

Bandura (1971) emphasizes the idea that for an individual to learn and apply social cues or norms, there must not only be observation taking place, but an initial attraction or draw towards the particular item, creating interest which leads to observing, retaining, and then applying the act or norm. This may be identified in the realm of a traveler, especially for those who are still youthful and, in this case, not yet 18 years of age, as they are suddenly being exposed to varying ideas and new phenomenon, some of which may be familiar, while others are foreign and fully new experiences. Nonetheless, in order to graft these aspects into practices of their daily lifestyle, there must be curiosity and desire to pursue further exposure and learn more about the social or communicative phenomenon.

Overall, as social learning theory emphasizes the ways in which humans observe, retain, and adopt social cues, norms, and other communicative practices, this idea proves to be a theoretical framework that largely corresponds to the adoption of travelers immersed in a new environment. Practice or mimicry of certain cultural norms or rituals can easily transform into a lifestyle that is a second-nature, identity-shaping, developmental chapter of their existence, especially when the duration overseas is a long period of time. This is all due to the new foreign experiences to which they are exposed, impacting them as they intake their surroundings and adopt actions and practices by way of social learning theory.

Additionally, in an article by Kelly Crowne (2013), she states that “during long term foreign stays, such as an organization-initiated expatriate work assignment, one should gain a

fairly complex cultural understanding because of the multiple cues provided by observing others and their reactions to oneself” (p. 4).

Thomas (2008) continues on to indicate that gaining skills from international cultures consists of “continuous learning from social interactions. Development of cultural intelligence by learning from social experience means paying attention to and appreciating critical differences in culture and background between oneself and others” (p. 10). Thomas (2008) does observe, however, the importance of separating adaptation from mimicry. Thomas shares that in certain scenarios, the best decision may be to not adapt or conform to a certain behavior, and rather than adopt a facade of being an authentic version of self, to remain sincere and genuine to who the individual truly is. The author continues forward, sharing, “High levels of mimicry are very likely to be attributed to something other than the actor’s character and perceived as insincere or even devious. Therefore, as opposed to chameleon-like mimicry, cultural intelligence requires skill in adapting one’s behavior” (p. 10). Thomas emphasizes the power and control that the individual still inherently possesses, while still being mindful of cultural differences.

In Clear’s (2018) book analyzing the development of human habits and daily behavior growth patterns, the author highlights the idea of “The seductive pull of social norms” (p. 117), stating,

We don’t choose our earliest habits, we imitate them. We follow the script handed down by our friends and family, our church or school, our local community and society at large. Each of these cultures and groups comes with its own set of expectations and standards... In many ways, these social norms are the invisible rules that guide your behavior each day. You’re always keeping them in mind, even if they are not at the top of your mind.

Often, you follow the habits of your culture without thinking, without questioning, and sometimes without remembering.” (p. 117)

Clear (2018) continues on to quote the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne, stating “The customs and practices of life in society sweep us along (p. 117). Following this section, Clear focuses on three components regarding this pull of social norms, stating that human beings imitate especially based on physical proximity, whether this is a conscious or subconscious action taking place. Uncertainty in how to act in a situation leads to imitation of the surrounding individuals. Although it is not explicitly framed as the social learning theory in this specific book, the principle to which Clear alludes is in perfect correlation with the social learning theory.

Humans are creatures of imitation and mimicry, learning and adopting the daily behaviors of the individuals nearby. Naturally, when separated from the familiarity of a culture of origin, after a certain period of time, a traveler who has grown adjusted to a new cultural environment will more than likely begin to gradually adopt and practice the daily cultural norms and tendencies. Over time, this (not always, but possibly), can progress and develop into adoption of less external norms, but rather, the intrinsic factors, such as the value systems and belief in which a specific culture is fully anchored. Such actions are further tangible examples of how the social learning theory carries a daily impact on individuals and the adopted habits form the humans surrounding them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Purpose

The primary goal of this research focused upon being able to identify the outcomes and experiences of those who have traveled abroad during their developmental years, and to evaluate how it has contributed to their communication skills in the present day. Much of the research assessed thus far has consisted of authors who have experience in elements of cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, and psychology, and have seen trends in their profession of individuals who have gained valuable life-long skills as a result of their cross-cultural experiences. This research will continue to further dissect these themes by assessing documented experiences of individuals on a first-hand, very personal basis, specifically through interviews with questions which were tailored towards the interviewees, in order to reveal information pertaining to specific aspects of communication.

As this study focuses on the intercultural impacts taking place throughout childhood, it is important to once again revisit the parameters instilled for defining “childhood.” For the sake of this study, “childhood” consists of birth until 18 years of age, as this includes all years prior to entering official adulthood. This age frame also includes all primary and secondary education, allowing the research to assess individuals before beginning college, and assessing how their experiences contributed towards preparation in heading into education at a university level, if applicable. However, there may also be some individuals who serve as participants who did pursue higher education following high school; nonetheless, records of their experiences offer a variety of responses and insights in terms of how intercultural settings still contributed towards the development of their communication skills over time.

### **Selected Methodology**

The selected methodology used to assess the findings of this study is a qualitative research method. This methodology was selected due to its fitting nature of being able to filter and collect first-hand accounts and experiences through conducting direct interviews with the specific research audience. Utilizing this methodology helped in collecting the rawest data in terms of how these experiences have personally impacted individuals. A qualitative approach also offers the freedom of crafting specific questions in order to gain the most effective and applicable possible information from interviewees, as compared to the expected outcome that would derive from employing rhetorical or quantitative methods.

Following interviews was the process of coding, which is a dissecting process to analyze the data collected from the interviews. Records of interviews from participants were carefully organized and assessed one interview at a time. After reviewing each set of data from the gathered responses, key themes and code words were identified and recorded in the final results of the study.

### **Participants**

As previously mentioned, the techniques used to collect information and data for this research study included a series of interviews with individuals who matched a specific criterion, fitting the needs and parameters of this research study. The target audience for this research was comprised of individuals who were above 18 years of age. While it is not necessarily a requirement to participate in this study, the majority of the participants are individuals who are either currently in college or have already graduated college. In order to effectively attempt to gain a measurement of the level of impact of cross-cultural experiences, the questions conducted



in this interview were be strategically tailored towards the present-day results of the interviewee's international experiences.

The pool of interviewees included both male and female individuals who shared their experiences. Selection of participants derived by means of previous friendships and acquaintances with individuals who have spent at least a month over time living abroad in a foreign country before the age of 18. Individuals were contacted via email or text asking for initial interest in participation in the study. After receiving their response, they gave their approval to the content within the consent form (see Appendix B) with all explanation and rationale for the study, as well as all information regarding what will be done with their information and responses, including how data will be collected, stored, and utilized within this research study. Following this step, a time was arranged to meet together for an interview, either virtually or in-person.

### **Research Techniques**

The interview questions were prepared with precision, intentionally crafted as open-ended questions, so as to ensure that the interviewee is able to freely and openly share their experiences. The selected pool of participants consisted of a mixture of individuals who are local, as well as those who live at a distance; thus, interviews were conducted in a mixture of in-person and virtual interactions. Regardless of whether the interview took place in a physical or virtual environment, all interviews were recorded over Microsoft Teams, so as to have a backup of responses on file, to ensure accuracy and precision throughout the process. Microsoft Teams also ensured that not only video documentation was provided, but also verbal transcription of answers, so as to accurately reference responses and gather verbal responses in the most

authentic and effective way possible. Copies of recorded interview transcriptions were saved onto a computer drive for safety and reference and will be stored no longer than three years.

### **Coding & Sampling**

Following the interview process, the coding process began, so as to carefully analyze and dissect the themes that derive from the interview responses to reveal results and findings which could provide a proficient response to the research question of, “How do international travel and intercultural experiences at a young age impact communication skills as an adult?”

Per the consent for participants (see Appendix C), all records of this study will be kept private. Additionally, participants were promised that their identities will be kept confidential by use of a numerical coding system to serve as a reference for each individual throughout the research study and data review process. Participants were assigned a number that corresponds to their name, and thus will be referenced as such throughout the study, so as to maintain concealment of identity, should any individual feel uncomfortable about revealing their identity in a published manner.

The table in Chapter 4 reflects the organization of numerical values for each individual, as well as the country/countries to which they traveled, and the total length of time they have spent overseas before the age of 18. Participants will only be referenced by their number throughout the study when referring to their responses, experiences, and gathered results obtained from them.

### **Interview Questions**

The selected interview questions (see Appendix A) for this study have been curated to reveal the most relevant information that participants were willing to offer concerning their time overseas, and their awareness or epiphanies of cultural tendencies, as well as how these events or

characteristics prove to be impactful to their daily living in their current location of dwelling, whether that is their country of origin, or a foreign country. The specific questions presented to individuals also varied or fluctuated based on their specific backgrounds, experiences, and extent of exposure spent overseas (or their lack thereof).

As the interviews flowed, certain questions were formulated and asked within the moment, so as to inquire about the most relevant details that the interviewee shared; the hope for this study was that the interviewee would feel comfortable in the interview environment so as to share as openly and freely as they desire, contributing the maximum amount of beneficial information and experience towards this study. Thus, there was flexibility in spontaneity and freedom with the interview questions as far as digging deeper into certain topics as the interviewer feels comfortable to do so; otherwise, the majority of the questions were anticipated and documented prior to the official interview meeting.

As mentioned in previous chapters, selected pieces of literature have proposed that the term “communication skills” may encompass a wide variety of competencies. However, for the purpose of this research, the questions correlated to the selected components of communication skills, including capabilities such as interpersonal skills, proxemics, kinesics, chronemics, and social cues in holding conversations, all of which were skills of importance, as referenced from literature in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### Presentation of Collective Findings

As this study focuses on the primary goal of revealing ways that travel through childhood impacts human communication throughout adulthood, this chapter will now focus on a review and assortment of the findings that derived from the executed qualitative means of research. Following interviews, responses were carefully assessed and compared to reveal accurate results. Findings include valuable data that are able to provide a sound answer to the original following research question:

**Research question 1:** How do international travel and intercultural experiences at a young age impact communication skills as an adult?

After organizing research results, recurring themes present in this study revealed that international travel has unanimously carried a positive impact upon human communication throughout adulthood, as manifested in various ways. Key themes and sub-themes of such positive impacts include the following: a) Cultivating skills as a result of travel (with sub-themes of most commonly gained skills), b) Adoption and increased awareness of cross-cultural forms of nonverbal communication (with sub-themes of most commonly applied elements), and c) Increased confidence through uncomfortable new circumstances (with sub-themes of the most common growing circumstances).

This chapter will focus on providing an overview of the relevant responses of participants, as it pertains to directly answering this study's research question, as it assesses each of the previously stated themes and sub-themes in depth. Additionally, results will be compared and supported by credible scholarly literature that is relevant to this field of study, so as to

increase the validity of these findings. Following the breakdown of this data will be a discussion of the implications of this study and the opportunity for further research, which will be analyzed in Chapter 5.

### **Participants**

Organization of the research process entailed the following careful documentation of participating interviewees. Interview subjects consisted of a mixed assortment of life backgrounds that contributed to their travel experiences; such backgrounds include travel throughout childhood with family and friends for leisure enjoyment that totaled up to at least one month of travel over time before the age of 18, moving to foreign countries before the age of 18 to attend academic institutes, growing up as missionary kids and therefore living in different environments throughout childhood, and finally, moving overseas for anywhere from one to four years because of parents' shifting job assignments.

The compilation of participant information is delineated as follows, with a number assignment for each participant (numbers 1-14), as well as the list of countries visited, the age during their corresponding travels, and the duration of time spent in each country.

A STUDY OF HOW INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AT A YOUNG AGE IMPACTS  
COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS AN ADULT

Participant #		Countries Visited		Age Visited	Duration
1		Jamaica		12	1 week
		Mexico		14	1 week
		Dominican Republic		16	1 week
		Spain & Morocco		17	1 week
2		France		17	
		Italy		17	
				17	
3		Brazil		14	
		Venezuela		15	
		U.S.: FL & VA		16	
4		U.S.:			
		L.A., California		5	
		L.A., California		10	
		Colombia		12	
		Panama		12	
		Aruba		12	
		U.S.: Indiana		14	

		California		15	
		Florida		16	
<b>5</b>		Canada		3	
		Ireland		5	
		U.K.		5	
		Bahamas		10	
		France		16	
		Serbia		16	
		Egypt		16	
		Aruba		18	
		Canada		18	
<b>6</b>		Honduras		12, 15-16	
<b>7</b>		England		14	
		France		14	
		Singapore		14	
		Haiti		16	
		Cayman Islands		17	
<b>8</b>		Costa Rica		12-13, 14-17	

<b>9</b>		U.S.		4	
		Denmark		9	
		Germany		9	
		Holland		9	
		Japan		16	
		Spain		17	
		Canada		17	
<b>10</b>		Ecuador		9,13	
<b>11</b>		Philippines		2, 10	
		France		8	
		UK		8	
		St. Thomas		17	
<b>12</b>		Honduras		17	
<b>13</b>		Austria		Birth-11	
		Germany		In between	
		States		In between: summers	
		France		11 thru 18	



**Themes & Sub-themes**

Resulting themes identified in this study include:

- a.) Cultivating skills as a result of travel (with sub-themes of specific gained skills)
- b.) Adoption and increased awareness of cross-cultural forms of nonverbal

communication (with sub-themes of most commonly applied elements)

c.) Increased confidence through uncomfortable new circumstances (with sub-themes of the most common growing circumstances).

This chapter will focus on delineating each of these resulting themes, as well as commentary other notable significant findings that emerged from this study.

**THEME 1 / CHART 1**

Chart 1: Cultivating Skills of Open-mindedness to Various Lifestyles & People Groups / Sub-

Themes

<b>THEME</b>	
Cultivating Skills of Open-mindedness to Various Lifestyles	Participants repeatedly expressed moments of feeling that their perspective of the world changed, creating a more “open-minded” outlook on life and the way they view other individuals on a daily basis, including the following specific sub-themes.
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>	
Curiosity to Learn	Some interviewees specifically mentioned how this created increased desire and sparked curiosity to continue learning about cultures around the world, and how to positively interact with cultural others.
Less Judgmental, More Patient	Falling under the gained skill of becoming more open-minded, many participants noted that being exposed to other cultures created increased understanding and less judgmental assumptions. It also cultivated a sense of patience when interacting with other individuals on a daily basis, with both foreign and non-foreign individuals.

Listening & Empathizing	All participants noted that open-mindedness extended specifically to learning how to intentionally listen and devote attention to others, as well as carry a renewed sense of empathy and compassion towards other human beings and learning to see from others' perspectives.
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A prominent theme that emerged throughout interviews in this study was that of mindset and outlook, as participants cultivated the skill of becoming more open-minded towards various lifestyles and people groups. Crowne (2013) mentions that open-mindedness and empathy derive as a result of gaining increased cultural intelligence and becoming progressively “multicultural.” Some participants traveled as early as infants, while others didn’t leave the country until age 17, and thus, the way in which this skill of open-mindedness developed varied across the board, as those who grew up with an innate familiarity to cross-cultural people groups developed this since early childhood, while others did in a different way, more into their developmental teenage years. Nonetheless, every individual commented on their broadened perspective and ability to therefore communicate with others as a result of an expanded mindset to view other cultures and humans with value and significance.

Identification of the overarching theme of “open-mindedness” manifested in many different ways, but most frequently was expressed by a large majority of participants in expressions such as, “[the first time I left my country], I felt like I was in a whole new world” (Participant 4, personal communication, February 2023), that it was an entirely new “eye-opening experience” (Participants 2, 3, 7, 11, 12, personal communication, February 2023), offering a new perspective to their outlook on life (Participants 1, 7, 12, personal communication, February 2023). Participant 2 comments on this eye-opening experience specifically when traveling to Paris, stating “being in another culture makes you reflect on how

you view other people, their lifestyles, and the way we do things versus how they do things. Especially when I was in Paris; it felt like I opened my eyes for the first time to the depth of culture, giving me a deeper appreciation for culture in general (personal communication, February 2023). Participants 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, and 12 commented on experiencing third-world poverty for the first time in person, with Participant 11 stating “It was really eye-opening and really impacted how I treat people in general” (personal communication, February 2023).

Participants made frequent comments such as “seeing how people do things differently just opened my eyes in a new way... there’s so much more to the world besides [the American way of] how we do things. It was a complete contrast to what I knew” (Participant 1, personal communication, February 2023).

Many participants also commented on general awareness and shifts in perspective, as Participant 7 shared of the value and benefit found in partaking in cultural practices, especially after traveling to Singapore, stating

Going to Singapore changed my mindset because they were very positive people. They focused on the positive, and as a 14-year-old, that really put my life into perspective. I learned a lot about being grateful, more generous and seeing the positive things. (personal communication, February 2023)

Additionally, various participants (Participant 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) commented on aspects of culture shock as Participant 3 stated “there was a lot of culture shock and just so much that I was unfamiliar with,” commenting on the way it led to growth and adaptation over time, eventually thriving in the foreign setting (personal communication, February 2023).

**Sub theme: Curiosity to Learn**

While many participants experienced initial culture shock depending on the age at which they were first immersed in cross-cultural settings, all participants unanimously commented on the enjoyment and appreciation they gained for other cultures, and many shared their eagerness to continue learning about and exploring other cultures more deeply (Participants 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). These ideas of open-mindedness and learning from other cultures are beneficial aspects that intercultural travel develops within daily communication, as Ting-Toomey (2012) states in research referenced in Chapter 2. Participant 13 commented on the increased awareness of other cultures from intercultural travels, stating, “It’s made me aware of the idea of ‘Okay, there are other aspects of life to consider and learn about. So, I need to be curious about that and hear others out on that” (personal communication, February 2023). Similarly, Participant 1 stated the following,

It [traveling] makes you want to have more understanding of people who are different from you, and being open to trying different things, even like new foods and showing respect in those little ways... I think it’s just made me more open and more curious. It’s opened my perspective in a lot of ways. It makes me want to learn more, since I’ve seen that there’s so many different ways people live their lives, and now I’m much more aware that there isn’t only one way to do things. Overall, it’s just made me more open and curious about the world. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 5 continued this theme by stating

I think travel is just so important. It helps you see new things and meet new people every time. Travel has really opened my eyes to wanting to go and meet new people, experience new cultures in a new way of communicating, and explore all that the world has to offer. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 9 commented on the value of asking questions and observing to become more educated and immersed within cultures, by stating

Now, whenever I go to a new culture, all I want to do is learn. I ask a lot of questions. I listen to others. I don't talk as much because I just want to learn things. It's always so interesting just seeing how people live their life and what the differences are between my culture and theirs. (personal communication, February 2023)

### **Sub-theme: Less Judgmental, More Patient**

Another recognized sub-theme of open-mindedness is the cultivated skill of becoming less judgmental and more patient, as a result of being immersed within foreign contexts. Participants commented on how intercultural experiences conditioned a sense of awareness toward cultural distinctiveness, and an increased assertiveness and sensitivity toward respecting norms and practices of other cultures. As a result, many interviewees commented on the removal of any harsh pre-existing judgments or assumptions regarding cultural stereotypes and replaced them with feelings of patience and open-minded curiosity to learn, as previously mentioned. This result of presumptuous thought is a key point that Niendorf (2015) warns against, encouraging us to consider the culture at hand before creating assumptions, as analyzed in Chapter 2, which is also what the participants in this study found to be true.

Participants 2, 3, 7, 8 and 9 especially made comments regarding their shift in mindset and removal of any prejudice or assumptive feelings, as Participant 3 states,

Learning to adapt to this culture and being able to meet people from so many other cultures has expanded my mentality a lot. I've learned not to immediately be judgmental or make assumptions or set expectations about someone and their culture. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participants 7 and 9 also share how intercultural immersion helped them become significantly less judgmental and more understanding, and Participant 9 states, “I think I’ve become more understanding of others now, and I try to give people the benefit of the doubt, especially when it comes to cultural specific things” (personal communication, February 2023). Finally, Participant 2, states an item of arguably the utmost importance and value pertaining to travel, stating, “It [traveling] has made me see others as more humanized with autonomy” (personal communication, February 2023).

### **Sub-theme: Listening & Empathizing**

When asked if intercultural travel has seemed to help participants’ listening and empathizing skills, all respondents replied unanimously “yes” to both questions. However, the ways in which it impacted them varied according to differing experiences. As Participant 1 explained instances of practicing patience with trying to overcome language barriers and difficult moments of decoding accents, the realization dawned during the interview question that “maybe it [intercultural travel] has helped my listening more than I even thought or realized” (personal communication, February 2023).

Several participants touch on the nonverbal communicative practice of chronemics, which will be covered more in the next theme, and the impact that the slow-natured paces of various cultures encouraged time and space for intentional relationships (Participant 7, personal communication, February 2023), and devoted attention towards others. Participant 2 comments on this, stating,

Being in other cultures [France] and especially seeing different paces of life has shown me to take more time to listen to one another and empathize. I think I learned it’s worth it

to slow down and take the time to pause and listen to others. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participants 8 and 11 individually both spent extensive time in Costa Rica, and comment on the slow relational-oriented pace of the day. When asked if intercultural exposure impacted listening, Participant 8 stated,

Absolutely. Because of how intentional the culture in Latin America is, if you're sitting down for a meal with someone, expect it to be at least an hour, because if you know someone, then you genuinely want to know how they're doing, and that'll seep into so much more. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 11 also commented,

When interacting with the people in Costa Rica, one thing that I noticed is that they're very good listeners and conversationalists. A lot of the communication was through meals and over coffee and you can get lost in a conversation so easily, and it really goes back to the cultural differences in valuing time. [In Costa Rica,] If you're having a meaningful conversation then that's the most important thing at that moment, not catching the bus or finishing tasks and stuff. (personal communication, February 2023)

Other participants comment on the way that intercultural exposure made them rethink the practice of the art of listening as a whole, differentiating between the actions of hearing and truly listening to others. Participant 12 elaborates on this, stating,

I think about even the concept of hearing versus listening and how you can always hear things happening, but not actually be listening most of the time. And I just think that when you go overseas, you can learn a lot about this concept. You can hear, but you can really start to practice what it truly means to listen. Listening can involve your ears, your

eyes, and observing other actions... Especially when there is a language barrier, it becomes even more important to listen to body language and gestures because it would give me a glimpse into whether they were excited or frustrated or something. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 3 also comments on the aspect of nonverbal communication in reading body language as it contributes to listening, stating

In order to adapt [to a new culture], you have to be a really attentive listener. I remember at first, with the language barrier, I would even try to read peoples' lips if they had a strong accent, and I feel like now, I'm more prone to trying to listen to others, so maybe that's because I had to learn how to adapt, and why I try to give a lot of space to people now, because I want to fully understand them. (personal communication, February 2023)

Additionally, Participant 6 notes the creativity that intercultural immersion requires individuals to have when communicating and listening, serving as a strengthening tool for developing the practice of effective listening, commenting that,

[Listening to others] means putting in the effort to care about and understand what they are saying. And I think listening to another language and learning it requires a lot of patience. I would interact with people and think, 'My Spanish isn't great. Your English isn't great; but how can we communicate?' It took a lot of patience and creativity to find different ways to communicate and listen to each other. (personal communication, February 2023)

Lastly, many of the participants (Participants 4 and 5, personal communication, February 2023) commented on the sheer intrigue and devotion towards other human individuals that



immersive travel has offered regarding eagerness to listen well to others and hear their backgrounds and stories. Participant 4 highlighted this, stating,

I have this appreciation and realization now for so many things that have impacted us culturally in our lives. We all have so many different stories. When I first meet someone, I want to try my best to give all my attention and learn from them. Because this world has so many people and stories that are now so intriguing to me. (personal communication, February 2023)

### **Empathizing**

In a similar manner, interviewees unanimously agreed that intercultural travel has carried a significant impact in helping cultivate their ability to empathize with others on a daily basis, again, stemming from the renewed idea that every person has a story and carries inherent value, (Participant 1, 4, 6, 12, personal communication, February 2023), and a broadened view of the struggles that people can carry around the world. Participant 6 commented on this, stating,

[Intercultural travel] allowed me to really care about and learn about the people I was meeting overseas. Even if I didn't completely understand the situations that they were coming from, I would still try to understand whatever pain or really good things that they were experiencing. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 5 also noted the importance of being attentive to the needs and struggles that others may be experiencing, as a result of traveling to Serbia, mentioning their more stoic-natured tendencies, yet recognizing that regardless of expression, or lack thereof, of emotion, humans around the world still carry daily struggles, and it is important to identify with them in their emotional needs.

Moreover, Participant 7 noted the value that accompanied travel at a young age, during developmental teenage years, stating,

I don't think I was a very empathetic person before and traveling at such a young developmental age definitely made me feel for people a lot more, especially when being immersed in third-world countries. It brings on a whole other level of empathy. (personal communication, February 2023)

Similarly, participant 11 comments on the impact of seeing less-fortunate communities contribute to increased levels of empathy, responding to the question of experiencing an increase in developed empathy with the following,

Yes. And the reason comes from growing up in a [American-Filipino] culture that emphasizes generosity and family and being able to see my family overseas care for the less fortunate and show genuine concern. I think that does inform the way I communicate and treat people and empathize with other people. (personal communication, February 2023)

Finally, several participants (Participants 3, 4, 8, 10, 13) who experienced extensive periods of time living in a foreign country, rather than a short tourism or mission trip, commented on the years of adaptation that accompanies intercultural moving, and the development which therefore follows. Participant 3 stated that "The way I see people has absolutely changed... I'm 100% more open and empathetic towards people, especially people who are enduring adaptation. Overall, I've learned to find common ground with people, no matter what their culture is" (personal communication, February 2023).

Similarly, participant 4 mentioned the special place of empathy reserved for those moving long-term to a foreign culture who have to struggle and adapt to new lifestyles. The interviewee stated,

Every single person on this planet has a story. So, be empathetic. Learn about their background... I also feel a special empathy for international students. I know how hard it is to adapt to a new culture. So, I have an extra sensitivity or care for them. (personal communication, February 2023)

Overall, it is evident that interviewees unanimously gained a variety of skills in cultivating an open-minded perspective towards others in life, including curiosity to learn about other cultures, a less judgmental approach towards others than the average monocultural individual, and sharpened skills in listening and empathizing. All of these themes and sub-theme skills were manifested in different ways, depending on the given cultural experiences of each research participant; nonetheless, the results are evident in revealing a significant impact in these areas of communication.

**THEME 2 / CHART 2**

Adoption and Increased Awareness of Cross-Cultural Forms of Nonverbal Communication / Sub-Themes

<b>THEME</b>	
Adoption and Increased Awareness of Cross-Cultural Forms of Nonverbal Communication	Immersion in various different everyday styles of communication, much of which proved to be nonverbal communication, left participants with a strengthened awareness and adoption of observed practices.
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>	

<p>Applying Nonverbal Behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chronemics</li> <li>● Haptics</li> </ul>	<p>The most common forms of nonverbal communicative distinctives that participants commented on included chronemic and haptic behavior, which was identified early on by individuals during their intercultural experiences, and largely adopted by individuals, depending on their duration of stay in a specific geographic region.</p>
<p>Learning Methods of Nonverbal Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observation &amp; Receiving Assistance</li> <li>● Trial &amp; Error</li> </ul>	<p>When asked how nonverbal behaviors were most commonly identified, participants replied that it was largely a combination of pure observation, as well as receipt of training or advice from natives of the given culture, as well as trial and error in some situations.</p> <p>All participants replied that their cultural exposure resulted in some form of adoption of a cultural habit or form of nonverbal communication, with unconscious tendencies and/or conscious effort to integrate the practice into their culture of origin upon return.</p>

Immersion in various everyday styles of communication, much of which proved to be nonverbal communication, left participants with a strengthened awareness and adoption of observed practices. When asked if individuals felt like they carried a confident ability in being able to “read a room” and notice apparent nonverbal messages being transmitted, 92% of participants answered “yes.” The general consensus was confirmed that all interviewees walked away with a keener eye of observation to notice distinct communicative traits, due to their exposure and experiences in relying heavily upon body language to communicate in foreign cultures, especially when a language barrier was present. The aspect of adopting traits overseas also correlates to social learning theory, as discussed extensively in Chapter 2 by scholars Kendall et al. (2018) and Pratt et al. (2010).

This ability to adapt and read nonverbal communication is consistent with the additional research analyzed in Chapter 2, as Livermore (2011) mentioned that strong cultural intelligence entails “the capability to function effectively across a variety of cultural contexts, such as ethnic, generational and organizational cultures” (pg. 15).

Participant 13 comments on this, stating,

I have been told that, yes, I am [observant in reading nonverbal communication]. And I think that yeah, it's probably contributed to it. It's probably been an important element of learning; to pay attention. Especially because when you move to a place and you don't speak the language, the nonverbal cues are all you have to go on. So, it's natural I think, especially at a young age. If you move somewhere before you know the age of 18 and you live there, you're learning and you're developing a sense of, 'oh, well, if I can't speak with my words, how else can I speak if I only have a limited amount of words? What else can I do to make myself understood? Nonverbally. And how can I look at people and pick up on their cues to understand what they're talking about?' So. Yeah, you're right. That has impacted it. I think that's been a huge element of picking up on stuff. (personal communication, February 2023)

However, despite their ability to be able to initially notice these actions, many commented (Participants 4, 9, 11, 13, personal communication, February 2023) that while they had the sharpened skill to recognize messages being sent, they did not necessarily feel that travel gave them automatic possession of appropriate tools and relevant knowledge to decode every situation of nonverbal expression, especially if it concerns an interaction in a culturally foreign setting.

Participant 13 again comments on this specifically, stating,

I think that living internationally does make you aware, but it doesn't necessarily give you the tools to deal with that awareness. That's something that you have to consciously work on. It won't be given to you just by the nature of being overseas, I think (personal communication, February 2023).

Similar reflections were offered by the previously mentioned participants (4, 9, 11), as well, regarding the nature of being able to recognize elements of nonverbal communication, but perhaps lacking the depth of knowledge to properly decode them.

### **Sub-theme: Applying Nonverbal Behavior**

The most common forms of nonverbal communicative distinctives that participants commented on included chronemic, haptic, proxemic, and haptic behavior, which was identified early on by individuals during their intercultural experiences, and largely adopted by individuals, depending on their duration of stay in a specific geographic region.

### **Chronemics**

When asked about any cultural distinctives noticed regarding chronemic behavior, that is the use and construct of time established in the given culture, all participants offered significant insight of observations gathered from their time in foreign cultures. Interestingly enough, this study consisted of participants who entered foreign cultural settings in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, and all had similar perspectives and takeaways regarding chronemics in various locations.

For example, Participants 1, 2, 5, 7, and 13, who all visited Europe, had similar feelings regarding the structure and pace of time in the day as Participants 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 did, all of whom were immersed in Latin American surroundings. Participants 1 and 5 both made the same observation about time in Europe as opposed to America, stating, [Here in America,] we live to work, but [in Europe] they work to live” (personal communication, February 2023). This is very similar to the comments made by Kim (2001) and Samovar (2016) in Chapter 2. Participant 1 continued on to express,

In America, the busier you are, the more important you are. It's so go, go, go. And I think it was so refreshing to just leisurely enjoy life [in Europe], or see how people spend hours together as a family, and especially during meals. That is very emphasized, and nothing's a rush. They really just enjoy life, and that's something that I definitely took away and tried to apply. Just being present in the moment and enjoying it. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participants 2 and 5 also echoed this delight of gaining a new perspective on the pace of time and "just sitting and enjoying the moment, and not having to keep to a schedule" (personal communication, February 2023).

Participant 5 commented on the specific way in which instillment of this principle has been attempted in their personal life since returning home,

I've tried to put this [new] view of time into my own life, not putting such an emphasis on being so fast-paced, and taking the slower route in life because I think there's so much work we have to do that we don't even realize we need to slow down, whereas in other cultures, that's so important to them... Even the ideas of people, family, and hospitality... Those are huge things in Serbia. When it comes to family, they want to include everyone and invite all their extended family. That honestly made me want to be closer with my family back home. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 13, who was born in Europe and raised in Austria and France with frequent visits to the United States, commented,

I think Americans are very focused on how much can I fit into this amount of time and how packed can I get my schedule to be? That's very different in France. In France, you're not going to have that crazy level of a schedule... But yes, Americans tend to just

pack their schedules full of stuff and I'm guilty of doing that now too. (personal communication, February 2023)

As this individual experienced a very hybrid-culture childhood in two different regions, the participant comments not only on the observations gathered over time, yet also on the implementation that has now followed due to extensive exposure to American culture over time.

Participants who spent a great deal of time in Latin American regions of the world also made distinct comments regarding chronemic behavior, consisting of participants who were native to the United States and traveled or lived in Latin American countries, as well as participants who grew up in Latin America and traveled to and/or moved to the United States throughout childhood. 100% of these participants (3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12), regardless of their respective culture of origin, attested to the fact that their travels impacted the way that time was seen and used in their personal life as a result of adopting cultural norms of chronemic communication overseas. Participant 3, who was born and raised in Colombia, stated,

In the Latino community, we're late everywhere. But obviously, [living in the United States], my perception of what 'being punctual' is, and how important it is, has changed. Now I find myself to be very controlled and enjoy being controlled. But when I get back to Colombia, I have to readjust again... I definitely feel the mix of cultures in terms of "wasting time" and being "community-oriented. (personal communication, February 2023)

As discussed in Chapter 2's literature review, Hecht & Allen (2005) commented on the notion that both monochronic time (fast-paced cultures) and polychronic time (slower-paced cultures) carry significant benefits, and neither is necessarily "better" than the other. However, the scholars do note the opportunity costs that follow these paces of life, regarding achieving



productivity at the cost of mental, physical, and relational health, and vice versa. Participant 4, who was born and raised in Guatemala, provided commentary that is linked quite closely to this research, as stated in the following,

Guatemala does not have as much of a sense of urgency towards time... while in America, time is money. You can't waste it. Efficiency matters more than relationships sometimes... Our sense of time is not exactly a schedule. Moreso on eventually completing our tasks, but not in any fast time-constrained order... in the [United] States, it's all scheduled. It's a very fast-paced lifestyle. It's like you don't even get a chance to breathe. Rest days? What are those? I feel like the culture is 'the more stuff you have to do, the better or more impressive.' People here love to have a full schedule. So, they don't look at it as a bad thing, which relates to productivity, but that also leads to burnout and not appreciating the moment you're in or the people in front of you... I definitely had to adapt to the time here. I had to be more strict with deadlines, times, and dates.

(personal communication, February 2023)

This segment carries many suggestions and implications. As echoed by previous participants, there appears to be a continuous theme of identified contrasts between M-time cultures and P-time cultures in regard to chronemics. This is true for Americans, M-time natives, who travel to P-time regions throughout Latin America and Europe. Multiple participants (1, 2, 5, 13) who traveled or grew up in France noted the leisure pace of life that promoted individual mental and physical health, while maintaining a balance when it came to work-life. Similarly, those who grew up, traveled to, or lived in Latin America for a duration of time note the slow-paced tendencies that allowed for deep relationships to form, and eliminated stress, as Participant 4 noted above. Consistent with research, the stressors that can arise from overworking and little

balance of personal life appear to be validated by the experiences of the culturally seasoned travelers in this study.

Many participants (3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13), upon shifting cultures ranging from a period of anywhere from eight months to eight years, commented on the battles of initial culture shock, which are typical (Niendorf, 2015) in lifestyle which they had to overcome during adaptation to be able to eventually thrive in the culture, which is a success of overcoming the hardest parts of culture shock (Lysgaard, 1955) and eventually feeling settled (Ting Toomey, 2019). Participant 6 specifically noted this by stating,

[In Honduras], Time is relative... People were a lot more relational than they were time oriented. The things you're doing at the moment definitely matter a lot... I had to work on being less frustrated when we didn't leave on time, or just allowing myself to take more time getting ready instead of being on a time crunch... Over time, I have become more go-with-the-flow about time. (personal communication, February 2023)

Similar comments to this were made throughout interviews, regarding expressions of frustration, mental battles, and difficulties endured when shifting cultures, learning from their surroundings, and fully feeling settled in. Frustrations appeared to be more evidently expressed by participants who lived overseas in a new culture for a significant duration of time, as opposed to travelers who spent a few weeks or a couple of months abroad. However, for both the former and the latter, both parties experienced the gradual effects of the adoption of cultural norms and behaviors into their personal life, which will be covered more extensively in the upcoming sub-theme.

As previously mentioned, many participants comment on the inspiration gathered from traveling overseas to incorporate newly learned and gained values and communicative practices

into their daily life within the culture of origin. While some participants were conscientious of the effort exerted to integrate this new practice, some participants realized after the fact that these cultural norms had been implemented into their routine as a result of having grown accustomed to their culture. Participant 8 commented on this, stating,

[In Costa Rica,] Let's just say time is a suggestion, and never enforced. Which, of course, then translates to my family. We do sadly tend to run a little bit late, but especially after we moved back from Costa Rica, we really ran late, because it was a part of our culture now. So we definitely had to readjust to that after coming back. (personal communication, February 2023)

Similarly, Participant 12 notes the unconscious habit developed over time after spending significant periods of time in Latin America, stating,

I'm always late in the US now... And people know that I travel all the time and have kind of learned that this has become a normal thing for me to do, but I'm working on it because I don't want my tardiness to be viewed as disrespectful or dishonoring of a certain person or group. But I definitely think that that is something that I have taken from a lot of the cultures that I've traveled to. (personal communication, February 2023)

This participant in particular seems to carry a healthy awareness of how to balance the side effects of intercultural travel, recognizing that the cause for this newer habit stems from immersive intercultural experiences. Yet, this individual also holds the cognitive awareness in realizing the need for assertiveness in knowing the appropriate times to let this habit be exercised freely, as well when it may be necessary to prevent such behavior so as to maintain respect in the given culture.

### **Haptics, Proxemics, & Kinesics**

In addition to chronemic communication, many participants commented on the noticeable distinctives and applied behaviors regarding haptics, proxemics, and kinesics within various cultures. Participants who grew up in or spent time in Latin America noted the closeness and intimacy seen amongst individuals as expressed through close proximities, frequent touch, and even through facial expressions and animated ways of talking or storytelling. Close proxemics were also distinctly noticed by those who spent time in certain European regions, such as France and England. All of these practices were less seen in countries such as the United States, Japan, Germany, and Switzerland, which operate on a lower context form of communication, as opposed to higher context countries.

100% of Participants who grew up in Latin America frequently commented on the adjustment that traveling to or moving to low-context countries entailed, with remarks such as “I had to adapt to less touch” (Participant 4, personal communication, February 2023), or “When I first got here, I had to learn what personal space meant and learn to respect boundaries, because physical touch is so normal in the Dominican Republic” (Participant 9, personal communication, February 2023), and

The way you reach closeness with Americans is different from the way you would do it with Colombians... I think I'm way more aware of how much space I give a person, and respecting people's personal space [here in the United States] ... because, in Colombia, you don't have that much personal space. (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 13, who grew up in a higher context living environment in Europe with frequent visits to the United States, commented on this as well, stating,

In Europe, people are more comfortable with being in a public space; they're far more comfortable with being close than [people] in the [United] states. I remember I was in Chicago on the metro one time, and I saw people get upset about their personal space. And so that's different... How very conscious people are of 'you're invading my personal space.' It's less of a thing in Europe. I mean, you even see that in restaurants; people end up eating and they're seated at the same table as a different party. It's common if you're in a restaurant, you're gonna have some tables where it's just a single table and other tables that are bigger, if there's space, you sit down next to them. (personal communication, February 2023)

As gathered from these responses, it is evident that all of these participants experienced some form of cultural shock and adjustment in learning how to navigate different perceptions of haptic, proxemic, and kinesic behavior from culture to culture. In a similar way, participants who grew up in low context cultures and then shifted into higher context cultures noted the different ways in which they had to adapt. Participants 6 and 9 both made comments regarding their little care for physical touch growing up in the United States, until moving to Latin America for a duration of time in middle and high school and experiencing a distinct shift in the cultural practice and their liking for it (personal communication, February 2023). Participant 6, who lived in Honduras at age 16 for 8 months stated,

I definitely wasn't a super physical touch person [when I first went to Honduras], so that kind of opened me up a lot in that regard... [but] I'm a lot more physically-touch oriented now. I would say that's definitely moved up in the love language category since living in Honduras. And I still use certain body gestures and aspects of nonverbal communication. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 8, who is native to the United States, but moved to Costa Rica for 4 years in high school, also commented on the high-context culture within Latin America, emphasizing the importance of taking into account all aspects of nonverbal communication to fully read and understand the messages being sent, similar to previously analyzed research by Ting-Toomey (2019). The interviewee also noted the ways in which these practices have been integrated into personal life upon returning back to the United States, by stating the following,

Costa Rica has a lot of nonverbal communication norms that I still do to this day.

Definitely a lot of body language. You have to pick up on cues whether it's Spanish phrases that go with expressions worn on their face, lips, and eyes. You've gotta pay attention to their face. And when they speak, they do very much speak with their hands...

At the start of coming back [to the United States,] I would still greet people with a kiss on the cheek, and I would see people kind of back up like 'what are you doing?' And I was like 'I'm so sorry, cultural thing...'. (personal communication, February 2023)

Lastly, Participant 12 commented on the subconscious integrations of nonverbal communicative practice regarding proxemics and haptics, stating "I remember times I came back [from Latin America] to the United States thinking 'Ohh, I've adopted some of the culture without me even realizing it!' with touching, giving people hugs, high fives, and adapting to the time orientation" (personal communication, February 2023).

As can be gathered from the various responses regarding nonverbal communication, it can be confirmed that immersion within intercultural surroundings contributes towards eventual adoption of communicative practices to some extent, whether this is a conscious occurrence or not. While certain norms may have come as a culture shock to some individuals at first, it came naturally for others as a result of being immersed in and familiarized with the given cultural

surroundings at such a young age. Those experiencing culture shock, specifically for long periods of time within a country, endured challenges while settling into the respective culture, but eventually found themselves modifying their behavior and adopting the communicative practices with ease and habit over time.

### **Subtheme: Learning Methods of Nonverbal Communication**

#### **Observation & Receiving Assistance**

When asked if modification of behavior and communication was necessary entering a foreign culture, even at a very young age, 100% of participants replied “yes,” mentioning that adaptation was a way to demonstrate respect. A follow-up question to this idea was asked, regarding how participants felt that they best learned how to act in a new cultural setting, whether that was through observation, external learning, or other possible forms. The general consensus for this proved to be largely a mixture of pure observation, asking questions and receiving coaching from cultured individuals, and learning from moments of trial and error. These actions once again reiterate the theory attached to this study, social learning theory, as these results confirm the notions offered by scholars Kendal et al. (2018), Pratt et al. (2010), and Clear (2018).

Participants frequently made comments such as “I just tried to be observant. As a result, I think I became more attentive to what people did and how they did it” (Participant 3, personal communication, February 2023), “There were a lot of observations of me asking myself ‘how should I act in this setting?’” (Participant 7, personal communication, February 2023), and “I think the number one way I learned was definitely mimicking and following what other people did through observation” (Participant 8, personal communication, February 2023). Participant 3

again commented on the process of shifting cultures for long periods of time and enduring moments of adaptation, stating,

At first, it can be survival mode, where you mimic to adapt, but then the self-actualization part plays in where you want to know the reasoning behind actions and norms, and you become more aware of the changes that you're actually making in your daily behavior. (personal communication, February 2023)

This aspect of feeling placed in a position of survival mode is consistent with previous research identified with adaptation in a new culture, as discussed in Chapter 2 by Kohls (2008).

In addition to observation, many participants noted that learning cultural communicative norms also came about through asking questions to helpful locals who were sometimes even strangers (Participant 1, 2, 5, 7, 9), friends or family (Participant 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), or receiving assistance through official training sessions for those going on mission trips (Participant 8, 10, 12), or moving out of the country for work.

Many participants also made specific comments regarding approaching new countries with the highest level of respect possible. This aligns closely with the first theme of this study of open-mindedness, as previously discussed in this chapter. This also aligns with previously referenced research, in which Thomas (2008) mentions how culturally seasoned individuals become increasingly aware of the importance of demonstrating respect to other cultures by gaining as much knowledge of the respective culture as possible. The seasoned travelers from this study commented on the developed skill of wanting to learn with a fresh perspective rather than jumping to presumptuous conclusions about the culture at hand. Such comments include,

Whenever I go to a new country, every time, I try to scan because you always wanna be respectful. And that's something I didn't know before. I want to respect the other person



or culture as much as possible because when I'm traveling to a place, I'm going to their home. So I wanna be as respectful of a visitor as I can. So I scan to see "Oh are they more touchy? Less touchy? Etc... But then you also ask questions and people can help tell you what's right and wrong. (Participant 9, personal communication, February 2023)

As stated, this culturally seasoned participant has cultivated a habit of beginning each new foreign endeavor with a keen interest in observing to learn as much as possible, as well as asking questions along the way. This participant demonstrates what it means to be a "sensitive observer," as defined by Eaves & Leathers (2017) back in Chapter 2. Participant 6 also comments on the desire to adopt certain cultural traits, stating, "[When I travel], I am choosing to be in their culture and wanting to learn about it. So, I'm gonna try to adopt what they do as much as I can" (personal communication, February 2023).

Participant 11, who grew up in the United States but traveled to the Philippines often from infancy all throughout childhood, mentioned how certain cultural elements were ingrained from a very young age, so as to exercise appropriate cultural respect when immersed in a Filipino environment. The interviewee stated,

[My mom] made it a point to teach me those respectable things to do; even phrases that you say to address elders. Those are things that she taught me to do that are embedded in the culture... things I should be aware of and do whenever I go back to the Philippines to show respect. (personal communication, February 2023)

Similar to other participants, Participant 11's early conditioning to cultural norms throughout childhood, as ingrained through parental teaching and guidance, assisted in cultivating lifelong habits that demonstrate respect within the Filipino environment.

### **Learning through trial and error**

A final comment made by participants (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13) regarding effective learning and adoption of communicative behavior within intercultural settings is that of learning through simple trial and error. Participants noted the difficulty and inability to know absolutely everything about a culture when stepping foot into a foreign country, and that, at a certain point, mistakes are bound to happen, yet they contribute to ultimate growth and learning. Participant 13 noted this, commenting on ways in which the adoption of communicative norms was exercised,

It came through observations. And also it came through messing up. I would think that, most likely, this is a common thread in all of the people that you have talked to; when you learn about [a new] culture, you're most likely going to learn because you had it wrong at first or you messed up. You may offend someone. Or you showed up late to something, not realizing that it was really important to be on time. And it's not just 'Ohh you're lazy,' but it's that, genuinely, you didn't know that this was culturally significant. And so, for me, I've learned those things by observing and hearing people say, 'This person showed up really late, and it was just so horrible.' And then I think, 'Okay, well, I guess that's important.' (personal communication, February 2023)

Additionally, participants (3, 4, 8, 9, 10) made comments regarding mistakes from instances of being unprepared for proper greetings within a new culture, and thus doing the wrong greeting and. As a result, however, these participants were able to grasp these moments as learning opportunities, by being informed of the correct ways of greeting someone in the future. Other instances included incorrect usage of language (Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9), which again produced moments of correction and long-term improvement for the future.

**THEME 3 / CHART 3**

Increased Confidence Through Uncomfortable New Circumstances / Sub-Themes

<b>THEME</b>	
Increased Confidence Through Uncomfortable New Circumstances	Many participants emphasized an increase in individual confidence and growth as a result of being immersed in new unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable surroundings, which apply to a number of scenarios.
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>	
Oral communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Foreign Language</li> <li>● Public Speaking</li> <li>● Articulation</li> </ul>	Many interviewees commented on how intercultural experiences impacted their ability in public speaking in their native language, as a result of being pushed to engage in foreign language settings, as well as a subconscious improvement in speech articulation, from the gained skill of practicing pronunciation to be understood in foreign settings.
Engaging with Foreign Individuals	All interviewees commented on their comfortability and eagerness to now engage with foreign individuals as opportunities arise, noting the difference of their enthusiasm level to do so now as opposed to prior to their intercultural experiences. Some participants commented on their comfortability to do so in contrast to their culturally unseasoned friends or acquaintances who may find intercultural communication uncomfortable and difficult.

The third and final theme identified from the results of this study is that of increased confidence through uncomfortable new circumstances. Throughout the interview process, participants commented on how foreign immersion at a young and developing age contributed to self-discovery, increased confidence, and overall formation of identity. When asked if intercultural travel contributed towards the individual being removed from their comfort zone, 92% of participants answered, “yes” (the 8% replied “no” due to frequent traveling around the globe since infancy and finding absolute fascination and delight within intercultural contexts

rather than fear or discomfort). These moments of discomfort served as learning opportunities to grow in a number of ways.

As pertaining to communication, participants repeatedly commented on how experiences sharpened their ability to communicate verbally, largely through exposure to foreign languages, and consequently developing skills such as public speaking, bilingualism, and speech articulation that apply to their daily speech in their culture of origin. Additionally, participants mentioned that exposure throughout childhood contributed towards identity formation and overall individual confidence, especially as these experiences took place during prime developmental young years. Finally, interviewees share their comfortability, eagerness, and confidence to engage with foreign individuals as a result of familiarity to foreign cultures all throughout childhood. Each of these sub-themes contributes to the overarching theme of increased confidence for those who have had intercultural experiences at early ages.

Participants named a number of different situations and factors that contributed to being placed in uncomfortable, unfamiliar circumstances, all of which proved to serve as catalysts for learning opportunities and growth. Participant 2 commented on the daily unfamiliar challenges associated with navigating daily life in a new foreign city, such as learning the modes of transportation (personal communication, February 2023).

Participant 7 elaborated on this idea of growth in confidence as a result of being removed from comfort zones throughout youth years, stating,

When I was in Europe (age 14), I was so young and I was still trying to figure out who I was... But then when I went to Asia (age 14), going to Singapore really changed who I was as a person. That was the beginning of a lot of growth for me. And I think it was because it brought me out of my comfort zone so much because I felt welcomed by the

people there. And I felt comfortable with the people we were traveling with. (personal communication, February 2023)

As stated by the interviewee, there was a distinct amount of value in gaining intercultural experiences at such a young age, as they offered a broadened perspective of open-mindedness during pivotal, developmental years. This is consistent with scholarly research from Crowne (2013) and Hermann et al. (2007), regarding gained skills from intercultural travel, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Participant 3 also commented on the impact that intercultural experiences carried on levels of confidence at such an early age, stating,

I think it [intercultural travel] has 100% made me more confident just because I feel like it's a challenge that I've overcome in the past. So, that in and of itself is like confidence inducing. But also, in order to present yourself in a context where you're not always the most understood, or where people are not like you, always challenges you to be a little bit more outspoken. Whenever I'm in a room full of only Americans, I feel like I'm kind of an ambassador. So it's kind of like I have to be confident in that, even though I may come from a different background. I still have a lot to offer, and there's still a lot to be learned from my culture as well. (personal communication, February 2023)

This statement from Participant 3 highlights the ways in which confidence was grown during such formative years, as well as serves as a model of how to adapt and grow in a foreign culture, while still resting in confidence of the cultural roots from which the individual derived. Moreover, Participants 1 and 13 both commented on the effects that intercultural travel has had on them in regard to being able to try new things with a fresh sense of confidence, as Participant 1 stated,

I'm not so nervous about embarrassing myself. I'm willing to try things. It has helped me not to take myself that seriously cause I'm like, 'Okay, I'm probably gonna mess up at some point.' And when it does come, it's not as earth-shattering or embarrassing because now, I'm more used to being put in uncomfortable situations, I guess. (personal communication, February 2023)

Similar to the previous discussion on learning from trial and error, Participant 13 expressed how intercultural experiences have introduced uncomfortable, shaping circumstances, stating,

It has put me in unique situations. And it has forced me to make a fool of myself when I don't know what to say or I don't know what the word is... You definitely learn how to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, which I think teaches you how to just be cool with, "Okay, well, I'm gonna get up in front of people and say whatever I say. And if I make a fool out of myself, that's what it is, that's what happens. (personal communication, February 2023)

In a different sense, many participants (3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13) commented on the feeling of discomfort due to a lack of familiarity accompanied by homesickness in being far away, particularly when moving out of the country for a long period of time. Participant 6 commented on this difficulty and having to experience it at such a young age (personal communication, February 2023). Yet simultaneously, this temporary uncomfortable experience early-on led to growth in adaptability down the road. Participant 8 also commented on the unfamiliarity of entering a new culture, stating,

I think it was just so many new norms that I had to learn, and it was almost like you have to learn how to be accepted by the culture. You have to figure out how to have these

people accept you into their lives, into their culture, and that means by being aware of things... the way you speak, your timing, your actions, your preferences, all just kind of change. So that pushes and stretches you a lot. (personal communication, February 2023)

### **Oral Communication**

All participants mentioned that intercultural exposure resulted in some form of challenge and adoption of a foreign language, whether it was learning how to engage in the culture with basic vocabulary words or gaining fluency in the language (as certain participants were immersed from very young ages and walked away from the experience completely bilingual over time). Participants experienced moments of discomfort, yet ones which ultimately led to their personal growth, through a number of ways, including public speaking, bilingualism, and articulation.

### **Foreign Language**

The most prominent theme in terms of being placed in growing situations of discomfort was the challenge of navigating a foreign language. Participants expressed their intimidation and frustration in this, noting how language was the tool by which the rest of the culture operated, and failure to quickly adapt to it resulted in difficulties and struggles. Participant 2 expressed the way in which not knowing the language impacted the basic daily parts of a day, such as asking where the bathroom is, or navigating public transportation (personal communication, February 2023). Participant 4, who moved to the United States from Guatemala at age 16, stated,

Also language. I had to literally adapt to a whole new language to survive, which got me out of my comfort zone, but it's still obviously hard because it's not my first language. I still mess up. I still miswrite things. But what's changed since I first came here is that I'm more open to receiving feedback; as a matter of fact, I ask for feedback because I want to

grow. But at first, it was kind of hard to do that because I thought people were judging me. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 3, who grew up in Colombia but eventually moved to the United States, discusses the discouraging difficulties that accompany learning a second language, stating

Coming here was really, really hard and sometimes, I didn't even want to speak English and would just want to leave the room. But obviously, those past challenges are where my confidence has grown. By staying here, passing those challenges, and allowing myself to flourish in this environment, I feel like there's nothing else that could have built my confidence like that. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 5, who is now an avid traveler and desires to pursue a career within the international travel industry, expressed initial feelings towards travel as a child, stating

When I was really little, I literally did not want to travel. Even when my dad invited me to go on this trip to Serbia, I wasn't really looking forward to it because... I was gonna be in a community where I didn't speak their language and it would be hard to communicate with them. I was just nervous that no one was gonna understand me. But going out of my comfort zone at such a young age gave me such a better appreciation for cultures and other languages. I think it's so fascinating now. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participants 3 and 12 both explicitly discussed the initial sense of immediate comfort that knowing a language provides to a human, as opposed to being placed in an environment with a language barrier. Participant 12 stated,

I think that especially when it comes to language, people are so stretched because humans are usually dependent on their native language. But that's not always possible when



overseas. There's often that language barrier. And so, I think that it's very important that you're able to use verbal communication to communicate with people and also nonverbal communication. (personal communication, February 2023)

### **Public Speaking**

Another area in which moments of discomfort impacted or sharpened confidence and growth was that of public speaking, as 77% of participants expressed that intercultural experiences contributed toward enhanced public speaking skills. Participants reiterated that this was largely due to being stretched in a foreign language, oftentimes in capacities that entailed public speaking, which resulted in increasing overall confidence.

Participants 3 and 4, who moved from Colombia and Guatemala several years ago, and now work as full-time instructors at an English-speaking university in the United States, discussed this, as Participant 3 stated, "As a public speaker 100%, it has made me a lot more confident... even as an instructor now. These things have contributed to my ability to publicly speak confidently to a classroom of students. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 4 also commented on this, stating,

Especially coming from a person who would avoid all classes with public speaking to now? And Spanish is my first language. So the fact that I'm doing it in English as a teacher is huge. But the cool thing is I know and I recognize that I'm still not perfect at speaking English. So now I just admit it. And I literally tell the people that I'm talking to, 'hey, I'm sorry if I mispronounce things sometimes because of my accent, but I didn't grow up here. So you just gotta bear with me.' I feel like it has helped me a lot. And I recognize I won't ever be like them because it's their first language English. But I can still confidently do the things in front of me. (personal communication, February 2023)

Though it wasn't an effortless transition, both of these participants were able to shift from their cultures of origin, and eventually rise to a professional occupation in teaching university course material in a language different from their native one. These accomplishments serve as testaments of the effects that intercultural exposure can have on human cognitive development in regard to mastering a foreign language to be able to fluently teach in it, even providing career alternatives in a different culture than that of their native origin.

Participants 5, 8, 9, 10, and 12 mention the instances in which they were immersed in public speaking within foreign cultures and the positive effects it carried on their confidence in public speaking. Participant 5 commented on traveling to Serbia for a mission trip and having to speak in front of a Serbian crowd with a translator, mentioning that this initially intimidating experience resulted in "sparked confidence through realizing that I was able to speak to a crowd of non-English speakers" (personal communication, February 2023), and commenting on the growth in English public speaking since then. Participants 8, 9, and 10 also mentioned the shift in attending middle, high school, and college in a different language than their native one, and the challenges with which it was accompanied.

Participant 9, who is a native Spanish speaker, but also fluent in English, commented on coming to college in the United States at age 17, stating,

I used to get so nervous about public speaking in English. But I will say, it's definitely gotten easier. When I got here freshman year, if you told me I had to speak in front of a class, I would die, like I was not doing that. Now I can do it. No problem. (personal communication, February 2023).

Similarly, Participant 8, who moved from the United States to Costa Rica for four years during high school, discussed the induced confidence that attending a new school in a different language offered, stating,

It built a lot of confidence in me when I was able to speak in front of my school in Spanish. That was really big for me. Another one is praying in another language; I think it is the hardest thing to do. The minute I was actually able to pray in Spanish was a big deal for me, and at my school, they would ask people to pray in the classroom. So being able to do that definitely instilled confidence in me, and now I think, ‘Okay, if I can do this in two languages, I think I'm okay [with public speaking] in my native language of English.’ (personal communication, February 2023)

### **Articulation**

A final note in regard to oral communication and the cultivation of confidence that moments of uncomfortable intercultural exposure provide extends to polished communication skills in regard to speech articulation. Participants (4, 8, and 12) commented on this in regard to their increased levels of awareness in articulating words when orally communicating. Participant 8, a bilingual English and Spanish speaker, discussed this specifically in regard to shifting between two languages, stating,

It has made me, when I'm speaking in public, have to be more articulate. Because I am so used to speaking in both languages mixed just in general conversation that when I'm public speaking, I have to be very clear and remember, “Okay, I'm in English right now” and being very articulate in that sense. (personal communication, February 2023)

Additionally, Participant 12 expounded upon this idea, stating that intercultural immersion and shifting between two languages “helped me enunciate what I was trying to say”

(personal communication, February 2023). Moreover, Participant 12 continued to comment on the impact that learning a new language had regarding conciseness and clarity in speech, which is consistent with the research ideas of Hamilton & Creel (2019), Ferrara (2015), and Warren (2006), all of whom deem polished communication skills to encapsulate the ability to effectively communicate a message with ease and clarity. Participant 12 stated,

I think especially about how sometimes we can talk about a very big idea and use very big words to describe something. But I think that being overseas has definitely helped my public speaking in general with different people knowing that if I'm trying to talk about a complex thing, I can still use simple terminology and learn how to make a message concise and simple. I think sometimes we tend to over complicate the way that we communicate with certain people. (personal communication, February 2023)

**Sub-theme: Engaging with others**

Another obvious sub-theme that emerged throughout this study was that of participants noticing an improved ability to engage with individuals of foreign cultures with both ease and eagerness. This observation by interviewees was noted in multiple ways, as several participants carry memories of their first experiences traveling abroad, and were able to self-identify their improved shift in mentality and comfortability in engaging with individuals of foreign cultures. Meanwhile, however, some participants grew up traveling as early as infancy and had no way to measure this other than contrasting their comfortability in this as compared to that of other individuals. Nonetheless, 100% of participants expressed that they felt comfortable engaging with and building connections with cultural others. This comfortability of engaging with others in different cultures is consistent with research regarding the ability of multicultural individuals who are capable of feeling comfortable to partake in other foreign cultures (Crowne, 2013). This

ability also confirms development of interpersonal communicative skills of social engagement with others, as noted by Spitzberg (2008) in Chapter 2.

When discussing their experiences abroad, participants expressed their newfound eagerness and curiosity to learn more about cultures and meet new individuals from foreign cultures (as was also thoroughly examined in theme 1). Participant 1 emphasized this point, stating, “I think seeing all [cultural] differences has given me new ways to talk to people, for example, asking them about things that are just very different about their routine or they're like daily life” (personal communication, February 2023). Similarly, Participant 3 expressed the enjoyment that has derived in simply learning more about cultures, stating

Being able to meet people from so many other cultures has expanded my mentality a lot... It has made me really passionate about learning about other cultures as well. It's just so interesting because you never fully finished learning about someone's culture. So in that aspect, coming to America has taught me to value and appreciate other cultures. And also, Americans surprise me every day too, which I also find interesting. In good and bad ways. I'm always learning. So I can learn and apply these things in regard to how I relate to other people as well. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participants also commented on the slight feeling of fear of conversational complications that can sometimes sneak in when conversing with a foreign individual but counterbalanced that notion with eagerness and curiosity to still engage. Similarly, Participant 11 commented on how sometimes a language barrier can arise, but how that doesn't hold back from still wanting to engage, stating, “I'm not afraid to strike up a conversation with somebody that has a different culture than me. I try to meet them where they are, and I hope that they can meet me where I am” (personal communication, February 2023).

Participant 4 spoke to this, as well, commenting,

I do feel more comfortable. But, if I meet someone that I don't really know their language, I will feel like communication will be a little bit more complicated; nonetheless, I just think it's fun to learn from them...At an airport once, I met a Brazilian woman, and she didn't speak an ounce of English or Spanish. But our languages are very similar. So we basically had a full conversation without even knowing each other's languages, but still trying to communicate. And then my coworker is from Taiwan, and I told her, 'please teach me Mandarin! It's such a beautiful language!'. And we bonded over the fact that both of our cultures were so different, yet we were both so interested in trying to learn, and now she's a very good friend of mine. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 6 seemed to share the same mentality as Participant 4 in regard to finding common ground and bonding over relatable things, as stated in the following,

I would definitely say my cross-cultural experience has impacted us just being able to relate to and even just the desire to meet people who are different than I am. Whether it's like international students or just people who have immigrated and they still have, like, cultural ties to their home countries, stuff like that. It's definitely impacted that and just made me a lot more confident and comfortable. (personal communication, February 2023)

Additionally, Participant 12 shared the newfound realization as a result of traveling overseas, in regard to a shifted perspective on how to connect and relate well with friends from foreign cultures, stating,

Yes, and I actually have examples of that too, because in my high school we would have transfer students from Asia. And a lot of times in my head I would think, ‘ohh, it’s, they’re from that place over there.’ But I never really realized that, “wow, their country is on the other side of the world. And what is happening over there actually does matter.” And so I think that [intercultural travel] helped me just put into perspective a little bit more of where my friends were coming from and ask some more specific questions like, ‘Hey, how are you? How are you handling being homesick?’ because a lot of times I would interact with the transfer students at my school and I really didn’t know some of the things that they were going through. But I think that when I went on my first mission trip, I, like, was able to relate a lot more with these students and ask, “Tell me about your family. Tell me about, like, your culture.” So I think that my exposure to different cultures allowed me to ask more specific and caring questions to my friends of different cultures, and so that was really, really helpful.’ (personal communication, February 2023)

Participants 9 and 10 also commented on the asset that travel offers in regard to learning how to engage with relatability, stating that when interacting with people of foreign cultures “There’s more to talk about... more topics you can discuss. So, the conversation is way more interesting, way more engaging, and less boring” (Participant 9, personal communication, February 2023). Participant 10 also noted the idea of building deep relationships, commenting

I very much enjoy meeting new people and hearing about where they’re from and their cultures. Also, it becomes a lot more relatable; now that I’ve been outside of the country, having conversations with people where you can relate to them helps you build better relationships. I think you build relationships faster if you have things in common, and if you have things to relate to with each other. So, talking to people from other places, even

if it's somewhere I've never been, it's a lot more comfortable because we have similar experiences. (personal communication, February 2023)

Two of the following participants comment on their level of comfortability and enjoyment in meeting people from other cultures, and contrast it with how they felt, or would have felt, having never left the country as a child. Participant 5 stated,

I think if I had never left the country, I would probably not want to speak to someone who's from a different country because there's this whole idea of foreign unknowns... and the conversation can quickly die out. But now that I have left the country at such a young age it just gave me a better appreciation for asking the important questions of like tell me what's unique about your culture, tell me what it's like in your country. (personal communication, February 2023)

Participant 7 also noted this enjoyment as a result of immersive travel, stating,

During my time at [college], I would meet a lot of people from different countries, and I wasn't as thrown off by that as I think I would have been had I not gone overseas a couple of times. When I would meet new people from other countries, I was like, 'I love this.' I'm not thrown off by this compared to say, one of my other friends who shall not be named, who would probably meet someone like that and be like, "I can't even understand what he's saying." So yeah, it definitely changed that for sure. (personal communication, February 2023)



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

As stated from the very beginning of Chapter 1, the purpose of this study has been to accomplish the goal of answering the following,

RQ: How do international travel and intercultural experiences at a young age impact communication skills as an adult?

This process entailed extensive research in existing literature published by professional scholars regarding topics such as intercultural intelligence, everyday communication skills, intercultural communication skills, and the psychological development process from childhood to adulthood. Following this was the proposed and executed methodology of an interview-based qualitative gathering of data from participants who offered their willing consent to be involved in the study. Finally, an analysis of coded data was conducted and shared, in such a way that displayed identified themes throughout the research process, and the final answer to the original research question.

### Discussion & Summary of Findings

The final answer to this study's research question may be answered as: concerning communication skills, international travel and intercultural experiences at a young age contribute towards sharpening a posture of open-minded engagement with others, increased observational skills and adoption of nonverbal communication skills, and increased overall confidence for the traveling individuals, extending towards communicative realms such as finding ease and confidence public speaking and engaging with new individuals from foreign cultures.

As referenced in Chapter 4, participants emphasized with an overwhelming unanimous response that intercultural travel and experiences have contributed to their expansion of mindset

and perspective, specifically in regard to not jumping to presumptuous judgmental conclusions about others, whether concerning individuals from a foreign culture or not. While many participants did explicitly state that gained knowledge about cultural differences has increased less judgment, and more empathy and listening skills toward foreign individuals, they also stated that this renewed perspective has allowed for an entirely shifted mindset in regard to exercising patience, curiosity, and devoted attention towards every single individual, whether native or foreign to the given culture. Many participants elaborated on this specifically, by emphasizing that intercultural travel has helped them realize the value and inherent worth found in every person, and the awakened realization that every human carries a story. This was true for participants who had traveled since infancy, as well as later years in their youth. Thus, it can be stated that the intercultural traveler has a positively shaped way of being open-minded, empathetic, and a good listener, which consequently carries an impact on how they will proceed in communicating with other individuals.

Participants also mentioned how intercultural travel carried a noticeable impact upon the ways in which they observe nonverbal communication characteristics on a daily basis, as well as how they observe and apply them when immersed overseas. Participants unanimously stated that being overseas forced them to modify their communicative behavior to some extent, in effort of respectfully adapt to the culture. 100% of participants also stated that upon returning to their culture of origin, they maintained some element of the modified communicative habits, integrating them into their routine in some regard. This act was done sometimes consciously, such as being observant and inspired by which chronemics operate in foreign settings, and actively seeking to put forth the effort to adopt the tendencies towards time and create a routine,

or subconscious ones, such as becoming more prone to demonstrates affectionate haptic touch or cultural greetings without realizing it until later.

Finally, participants from this study repeatedly referenced instances in which they were immersed in moments of discomfort, and unfamiliar, unknown surroundings, yet all of which proved to be the most pruning and refining for their ultimate growth in confidence. Such instances ranged from moments of being faced with a daunting language barrier to feeling lonely during a season of time from a lack of community to being placed in a public speaking forum within a foreign cultural environment. While participants expressed their feelings of discomfort during the moment, they all commented on how these experiences are what contributed to their ultimate growth, walking away with a profoundly increased sense of individual confidence in daily communication skills, having conquered past challenges.

These themes which emerged during the interviews closely align with the collected literature published from scholars and experts within the fields of intercultural studies and communication studies. As mentioned in Chapter 2, many researchers note the value that stems from being placed within international settings, as it serves as a major benefitting factor of growth in various skills, many of which closely align with the results drawn from participants in this research study.

### **Age as a Contributing Factor**

As stated in both the study's title and the research question, young age is a large factor regarding this study and the question at hand. The participant pool only consisted of individuals who had traveled internationally for a duration of time which accumulated to one or more month(s) prior to the age of 18. As such, derived results all attest to the benefit that traveling at a young age may offer to young individuals. The inspiration which caused this study to focus

primarily on youth-focused travel stemmed from interest and curiosity regarding human psychological development, as early as childhood, and how the developing mind is able to gather and absorb information during the pivotal, shaping years that occur during childhood.

Participants who had not traveled until later in their youthhood, holding the cognitive ability to notice distinct aspects of culture shock, made comments of such, noting that there was an obvious language barrier, or closer proxemics and haptics, and other cultural differences, which is normal when traveling to Niendorf (2015), and Ting Toomey & Chung (2012). The participants noted the unfamiliarity, discomfort, and time that it took to adapt before feeling comfortable again. Participants who had traveled throughout infancy still noted differences as they grew up and the distinct aspects that stood out to them as they became more conscious and observant but did not seem as bothered or taken aback as other participants who traveled later in life. This noticeable difference between the two groups of participants could raise the idea that the earlier one travels, the earlier they are able to begin cultivating the communicative skills identified in Chapter 4.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, researchers noted that children learn the system of their social surroundings, and intake information, mimicking and adopting the behaviors until it is ingrained as their own. As a result, communication skills are learned from their immediate surroundings, with the earliest observations being deeply rooted within their psychological development (Almaney & Alwan, 1982). Thus, age is a significant factor regarding this study, and this study may certainly propose that traveling at a young age eliminates struggles as intense as those experienced by individuals traveling internationally for the first time as adults.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Another item of significance is that of the attached theory to this study: social learning theory. As extensively covered in Chapter 2, this theory discusses the ways in which individuals observe, learn, and apply communicative traits and tendencies from their immediate social surroundings. Similar to the way in which a child mimics behavior from as early as infancy, this theory is tied to this study because of the way in which it involves individuals being immersed in foreign environments and having to learn how to best adapt and thrive within the culture, by way of observing, asking questions to locals, and adopting behavior accordingly. To extract the direct weight of application that this theory had upon this study, interviewees were asked questions 8 and 9, which focused on the learning methods of individuals, and the ways in which they modified behavior through observation, and adopted such practices as a result. Through the results, especially Theme 2 (Adoption and Increased Awareness of Cross-Cultural Forms of Nonverbal Communication), it may be confirmed that this theory served its purpose in aiding to reveal ways in which learning and applying from social surroundings was seen in this study.

### **Limitations**

This study proved to effectively answer the original research question in a satisfactory manner, contributing to the field of communication research in a new and unique way. However, there are always limitations attached to any research study. One limitation pertains to the experiences of interviewees and the travel backgrounds of the pool of participants. While this study covered 34 countries and five continents, providing many different perspectives of intercultural experiences, there is still a limitation at hand, in the sense that it is lacking one country (Australia). Moreover, this study received the most commentary from experiences in The

United States, Latin America, and Europe, and while it still covered some of the following regions, it focused less so on the continents of Asia and Africa.

Additionally, this study did comprise answers and results in the most objective way possible, as analysis and grouping of data were completed confidentially by only the interviewer, sorting data by the most common themes found after the interviews. However, a consideration that may be recognized as a limitation is the notion that the self-identifying results, in regard to improvement in skills and behavior, are inherently subjective commentary, as stated by the interviewers themselves. However, this does not raise any concern for authenticity, as the resulting themes stem from data that was found to be consistent among the majority of interviewees with concrete examples of their experiences, offering validity to the claims given. However, there may be other ways to conduct a variation of this study, which could gather a broader range of data to objectively analyze, as will be discussed in the following section of “future research.”

### **Future research**

There are many ways in which this research could be expanded and further analyzed. One suggestion is continuing this study as a mixed-methods project, in which two groups of participants are analyzed; both the existing, of those who have traveled internationally prior to the age of 18, as well as a new pool of individuals who did not travel internationally until after the age of 18. It would be interesting to conduct a qualitative approach of interviews with the new pool of participants, and then run a quantitative cross-analysis between the two sets of data from both parties, and measure if one party has better communication skills than the other. This approach would offer more insight regarding if those who travel earlier on in childhood have better communication skills than those who travel later in adulthood, and vice versa.

Another recommendation for further research would be to choose and focus on a specific region of the world, and assess the communication skills of travelers who went to a certain context of culture, versus another context. This could shed some light in regard to the type of impact that traveling to a high-context culture offers, as opposed to a low-context culture, or vice versa. Either of these approaches could be valuable use of time poured into research, as it would be able to provide more insight into the benefitting communication tools that intercultural travel may provide.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study provide further insight into how international travel at a young age may contribute to communication skills as an adult. This topic contributes to the field of communication research in a way that no prior research has, as it provides a new and unique perspective of how communication skills may be cultivated and sharpened, in this case, as a result of being immersed in another culture from a young age.

This study, viewed through the theoretical framework of social learning theory, yielded valuable results, offering readers the knowledge that immersive intercultural travel from a young age contributes to open-minded communication with other individuals, awareness, and adoption of nonverbal communication skills, and increased confidence through uncomfortable new circumstances, all of which impact communication immensely, as provided data can confirm.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

#### Interview Questions

1. What is your experience spent overseas prior to the age of 18?
2. Do you know if your intercultural experiences took place within high or low context cultures?
3. What are some of the biggest differences you have encountered between your culture of origin and the foreign culture in which you have engaged?
4. What are some of the communication distinctives that you noticed when engaging with the culture?
5. How has your exposure to other cultures contributed to how you read body language?
  - a. How has it contributed to your awareness of:
    - i. Chronemics?
    - ii. Proxemics?
    - iii. Haptics?
    - iv. Oculesics?
    - v. Perception and communication standards on time?
6. Do you think that your cross-cultural experience refined your ability to listen well to others? How?
7. Has your exposure to other cultures impacted the way you empathize with others? How?
8. Did you find yourself having to modify your behavior, social norms, or communicative distinctives while in cross-cultural settings? How so?
9. Do you think that you have adopted or maintained habits from foreign cultures? If so,

- how have these habits affected your lifestyle now?
10. How has your intercultural exposure contributed to your confidence in public speaking?
  11. How has your intercultural exposure contributed to your comfortability in engaging with and meeting new people?
  12. How has your intercultural exposure contributed to your comfortability in your ability to hold a conversation with foreign cultures?

## Appendix B

### Interview Consent Form

#### Permission/Consent to Participate

**Title of the Project:** Cross-Cultural Travel: A Study of How International Travel at a Young Age Impacts Communication Skills in the Future

**Principal Investigator:** Allison Clark, Liberty University M.A. Student, Graduate Student Assistant in School of Strategic and Personal Communication

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and have spent at least a month in a cross-cultural location that is outside of your country of origin before the age of 18. Taking part in this research is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore how cross-cultural experiences at a young age impact communication skills as an adult.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Engage in a virtual or in-person interview with me (Allison Clark). The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and will be audio-recorded.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive direct benefits from participating in this study. However, this interview may serve as an enjoyable time for participants to share stories and experiences that invoke nostalgia.

Benefits to society include increased public knowledge on the topic, improved learning outcomes, more insight and awareness in terms of how cross-cultural experiences aid in the formative practice of communication and interpersonal skills.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the data.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of numbers corresponding to each participant.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

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IRB-FY22-23-383  
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- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and will be transcribed and stored in an online drive. Only the researcher will have access to the records. Segments of your answers will be incorporated into my thesis paper when revealing research results. After three years, the records of data will be destroyed by deleting all files on record.
- Recordings will be stored on my recording device. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. After three years, all recordings were be deleted.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact me and I will omit your interview from further conduction of research. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Allison Clark. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her by email [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Marie Mallory, by email at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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