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## In the deep valley with mountains to climb: exploring identity and multiple reacculturation

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### Abstract

It is rare to find studies that focus on the *multiple reacculturation* of travelers who regularly alternate residences between their homeland and a host foreign country. These travelers are best described as intercultural transients. It is difficult to exactly say how many transients exist today because of the lack of accurate data. What is clear, however, is that the number is increasing because of improved global transportation and the large economic gaps between nations (World Telecommunications Development Report, Author, 1994). In an effort to extend general knowledge as well as consequences of intercultural adjustment, this conceptual-theoretic study facilitates understanding of the complex experience of these individuals who live on cultural borders negotiating both frequent cultural transitions and their cultural identities (Cultural Studies, Routledge, New York, 1992, pp. 96–116; Communication and Identity Across Cultures, Sage, Newbury Park, CA, 1998, pp. 34–55).

Within this essay, first, we review the acculturation and reacculturation literature within the discipline of communication and note what is missing in this literature. Then, we present a new concept called “cyclical curves” to explain multiple reentry. Additionally, we offer one example of a typical intercultural transient’s experience followed by a proposed taxonomy of intercultural transients. Also, we review several theoretical notions that help us understand the process of identity negotiation experienced by intercultural transients, while identifying coping strategies that may facilitate identity negotiation. Finally, we re-introduce a theory that has only recently emerged in intercultural communication studies—cultural contracts theory (African American Communication: Exploring Identity and Culture, 2nd Edition, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, 2002; Communities, Creations, and Contradictions: New Approaches to Rhetoric for the Twenty-first Century, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, MI, in

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press-a; Commun. Quarterly, 50(4) (2002); Howard J. Commun. 12(4) (2002) 43–57; J. Rural Commun. Psychol. E4(1). [Online Journal]. <http://www.marshall.edu/JRCP/>—to conceptually frame the ontological nature and problems confronted by transients.

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Intercultural adjustment studies have largely focused on the nature of sojourners' acculturation in a host country and the sojourners' reacculturation upon return to the homeland. Scholars have widely recorded the importance of studying both acculturation and reacculturation (Adler, 1987; Berry, 1999; Clifford, 1992; Kim, 2001; Neto, 2002; Sussman, 2000). They note, for example, government programs that are designed to promote international exchange of students and scholars. In addition, there are international programs designed to encourage foreign students to return to their homeland after stay in a foreign country. On the other hand, it is rare to find studies that focus on the *multiple reacculturation* of travelers who regularly alternate residence between their homeland and a host foreign country. These travelers are best described as intercultural transients. It is difficult to exactly say how many transients exist today because of the lack of accurate data. Kim (2001) and Berry (1999) suggest that accurate statistical data concerning the actual number of transients is made virtually impossible by constant transient mobility. What is clear, however, is that the number is increasing because of improved global transportation and the large economic gaps between nations (ITU, 1994).

There are additional reasons for studying transients, apart from the increase in their numbers. There is the need to extend knowledge in intercultural adjustment and there is a need to investigate whether or not transiency involves more complex adjustment problems than is known to exist in acculturation and reacculturation situations. Scholars have only begun to understand the complex experience of these individuals who live on cultural borders negotiating both frequent cultural transitions and their cultural identities (Clifford, 1992; Hegde, 1998).

It is in light of these issues that this paper intends to theorize the nature of cultural identity negotiation as it occurs during transients' multiple reacculturation. This entails descriptions of the various strategies transients use for negotiating their cultural identities, and suggestions for future studies of the increasing transient population. The impetus for this essay is the authors' friendships with Nigerian transients, who do business both in the US and Nigeria, going back and forth on a regular basis.

Although the literature concerning immigrant and international business sojourners' identities is extensive (Bennett, 1993) much of the communication, identity and acculturation literature has only emerged within about the last 10 years (Bennett, 1993; Isogai, Hayashi, & Uno, 1999; Kim, 2001; Martin, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Yep, 1998). Considering that the inception of intercultural communication studies took place in the late 1950s in association with both the

Foreign Service Institute and Edward Hall's anthropological research (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Hart, 1999; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990), it is significant that we have only recently experienced a major shift to study transients' reacculturated identities as primary units of analyses. It is even more significant that very few studies have focused on multiple reacculturation, which indubitably has several long-term identity consequences, some of which may be severe (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Within this essay, first, we review the acculturation and reacculturation literature within the discipline of communication and note what is missing in this literature. Then, we present one example of a typical intercultural transient's experience followed by a proposed taxonomy of intercultural transients. Also, we review several theoretical notions that help us understand the process of identity negotiation experienced by intercultural transients, while identifying coping strategies that may facilitate identity negotiation. Finally, we re-introduce a theory that has only recently emerged in intercultural communication studies—cultural contracts theory (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Jackson, in press-a, in press-b, 2002, 2001)—to conceptually frame the ontological nature and problems confronted by transients.

Among dozens of acculturation and reacculturation studies reviewed below, within the communication literature; we point to the following common and salient themes: patterns of migration, intercultural communication competence (worldview typologies and overseas training), intergroup anxiety and culture/transition shock.

## **1. Brief review of acculturation and reacculturation literature**

In reviewing the acculturation and reacculturation literature, we intend to highlight the limitations of extant literature, which either explains movement to a new culture or movement back to an original culture, with inadequate attention paid to transients' ontological experiences. Before illustrating the voids in the literature, it is significant to note that the two most relevant aspects of these studies to transients' identities are patterns of adaptation and changes in identity. Yet, although these aspects are relevant, the transient's experience is likely to differ from the more typical sojourners and returnees. Explaining that experiential difference is the major contribution of this study.

Rogers (1999) reminds us that intercultural adjustment involves contact with a strange cultural environment and the process of adapting to such an environment. This concept of adjustment as well as Georg Simmel's concept of the stranger (cited by Rogers, 1999) has been explored in many studies of groups of travelers including: international businesspersons, diplomats, foreign students, Peace corps volunteers, exchange workers, refugees, tourists, various types of expatriates, and immigrants. All these groups can be broadly categorized as sojourners and immigrants and are regarded as groups of strangers. Each group values cultural attributes that are different, at least in some sense, from those attributes that are valued by the people they encounter in their host locations. Thus, they must face the prospect of adjusting to the host location in order to be viewed as competent communicators (Fig. 1).

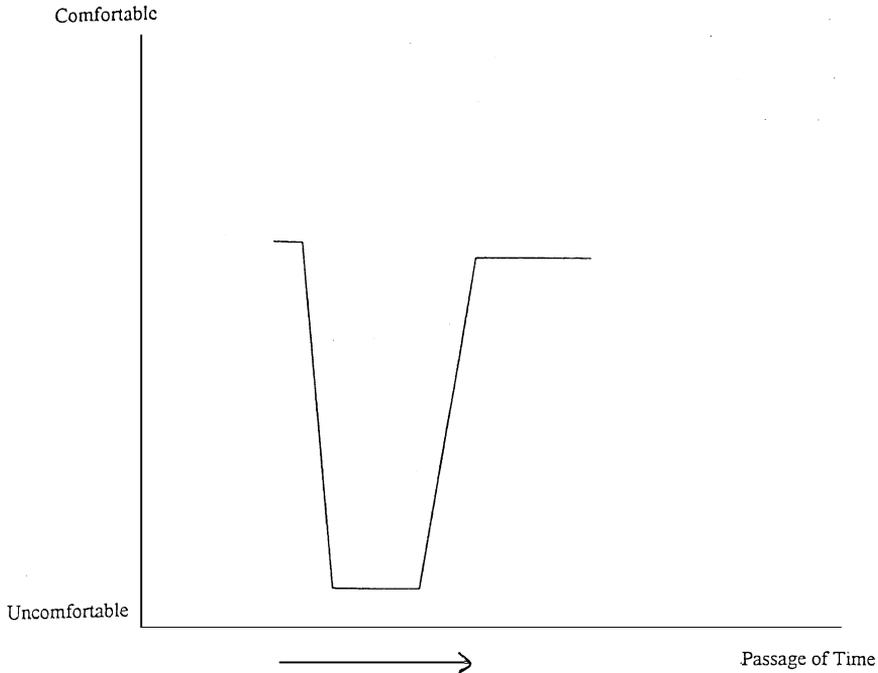


Fig. 1. Graphic representation of U-curve.

### 1.1. *Acculturation*

Acculturation studies emerged in the 1950s when study exchange students and diplomats began to receive training for overseas assignments (Hart, 1999). Since then, most acculturation studies have continued to concentrate on travelers to foreign countries and on foreign visitors (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). In large part, the key concepts investigated in this area include the acculturation process and its characteristics, as well as the importance of culture shock in adjustment. The acculturation process was initially symbolized by the U-curve hypothesis proposed by Lysgaard (1955) in a study of Norwegian Fulbright scholars in the United States. The hypothesis proposed that acculturation involves a period of elation, depression (a reaction to culture shock), and an eventual recovery (a symptom of acculturation).

Scholars such as Anderson (1994), and Ward, Okura, and Kojima (1998) have found little research support for the curve but the model remains powerful even today. Its strength lies more on its general illustrative ability rather than its accurate reflection of acculturation reality. In any case, Berry (1999) has proposed alternative processes of psychological reactions to culture shock during cultural contact in a foreign country. He noted that adaptation, assimilation, marginalization, and deviancy were four possible outcomes to such contact.

Acculturation studies, including the U-curve and Berry's (1999) proposal, have recognized the importance of culture shock in adjustment. Thus, culture shock has

been widely studied as a central piece of acculturation (Adler, 1987; Ward, 1996; Ward et al., 2001). Over the years, culture shock has been studied as a psychological illness and emotional reaction to learning (Adler, 1987), among others. There is now a general agreement that culture shock triggers, in most people, the motivation to adjust to a host culture (Kim, 2001; Sussman, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

### 1.2. Reacculturation

The study of intercultural adjustment was extended to include reacculturation after scholars realized that overseas travelers were confronted by the same culture shock and adjustment issues upon return to their homeland. Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s (1963) W-curve study marked the initial extension of intercultural adjustment studies into the “reentry” experience. The W-curve was an extension of Lysgaard’s U-curve as the Gullahorns noted that the adjustment phases identified by Lysgaard also reoccurred when the sojourner returned home (Fig. 2).

However, the W-curve has shortcomings. Klineberg and Hull (1979), Brislin (1981), Adler (1981), and Sussman (2001) have found that the W-curve does not provide accurate descriptions of the reacculturation process. For example, the W-curve does not elaborate on the why and how reacculturation takes place. Furthermore, the W-curve does not significantly differentiate acculturation from reacculturation. Instead, it merely states that the process involved in the initial acculturation in a host country is repeated during reacculturation upon reentry to the homeland. We now know that both processes are quite different. The W-curve,

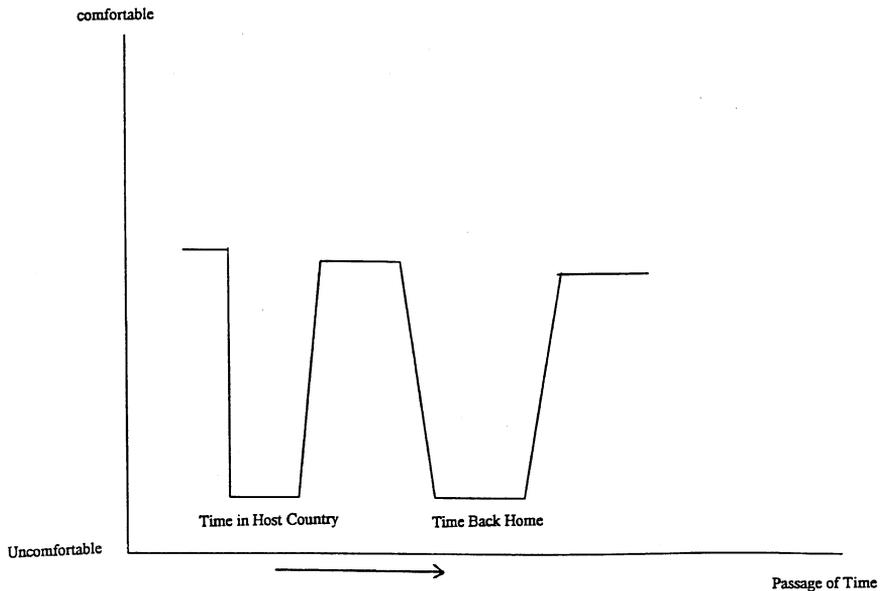


Fig. 2. Graphic representation of W-curve.

just like the U-curve before it, remains important largely because of its illustrative power.

There have been several studies that help us to better understand reacculturation (Adler, 1981; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Sussman, 1986, 2001; Uehara, 1986; Rohrlach & Martin, 1991). Those studies not only differentiate acculturation from reacculturation but they also identify the reacculturation process as involving a “stranger’s” attempt to readjust upon reentry to the homeland. The scholars note that the key concepts that differentiate reacculturation from acculturation are as follows: (a) unexpectedness of reentry problems, (b) a fixed perception of an unchanged homeland, (c) the returnee’s unawareness of his/her own changes, (d) family, friends, and colleagues, expect an unchanged returnee, and (e) general lack of interest in a returnee’s foreign experience (Brislin & Pederson, 1976; Sussman, 1986; Uehara, 1986). In addition, Martin and Harrell (in press) and others have identified the following variables that affect reacculturation to the homeland: the length of sojourn, value change, amount of information about the homeland, desire to return home, past experience of travel abroad, motivation of foreign sojourn, personal characteristics, as well as level of satisfaction in foreign country and at home.

### *1.3. A note concerning trends in research*

While early acculturation and reacculturation literature focused on culture shock and adaptation, recent literature have focused on issues of cultural identity (Sussman, 2000; Kim, 2001), third culture building (TCB) (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Casmir, 1999), and multiculturalism (Adler, 1982). This shift in the literature is a recognition that sojourners and immigrants are not only influenced by the host culture but that they also largely retain their cultural values or instead they develop entirely new identities different from their home and host cultures. That is, the literature is taking a turn towards identity negotiation as a broad category under which these other previously mentioned areas fit. In fact, several scholars have alluded to the existence of TCB (Chen & Starosta, 1998).

The above shift is mostly owed to a renewed focus on cultural identity within the field of acculturation. Kim (2001) points out that the acculturation field’s earlier focus on adaptation had led to themes like culture shock and competence. The shift to cultural identity has now generated investigations surrounding issues of culture building and multiculturalism. However, most of these recent literatures on culture building, multiculturalism, and cultural identity have focused attention on reports from the widely studied groups of travelers such as immigrants and sojourners. There remains a lack of attention to the growing number of transients and their identity negotiation experiences. A search of the literature shows that intercultural adjustment discussions have largely focused on diplomats, multinational workers, refugees, exchange students, tourists, and Peace Corps volunteers. None of these largely studied groups are transient. Intercultural transients frequently move between their initial host country and home, keeping more than one place of abode. That is the primary point of distinction.

## 2. One example of a typical intercultural transient

As mentioned previously, the impetus for this paper arose from informal conversations with friends who are African transients. These are individuals who previously sojourned in the United States before becoming transient international business travelers. Although it is not our intent to offer an empirical study of transients, since this is a purely conceptual essay; it is important that readers understand challenges that confront many transients. To illustrate our points and give a better understanding of the intercultural transient experience, we describe one such traveler, Okechukwu, a West African.

Initially, Okechukwu had difficulty “making ends meet” at home. His meager income could hardly sustain his family of four. A hometown friend living in the United States decided to help him apply for a United States lottery visa. Africans see the United States as an economic haven where all who are in the United States are able to make ends meet. After several applications, Okechukwu won a lottery visa but was only able to pay his way to travel to and live in the United States, not that of his family. At this point, he began his initial *acculturation* to the foreign host culture. He gained employment shortly after he arrived in the United States and he began to remit a large portion of his earnings back home to his family. He raised a substantial amount of savings after several years in the United States. This savings was then used to set up a retail store at home where he displays used computers and typewriters for sale. This remains his livelihood. He experienced initial *reacculturation* to his homeland upon his first return home from sojourn. Since then, he has embarked on frequent trips between his homeland and the United States. Those trips involved *multiple reacculturations* upon each entry. While in the United States, he usually works for 5–6 months saving a large part of his earnings. This savings is allotted for buying large quantities of used computers and sometimes discarded computers and typewriters, which he ships home with him. At home, he stays as long as it takes him to sell most of his wares before he travels back to the United States and the cycle repeats itself.

Okechukwu never mentions identity directly in his recollection of events that occur in the process of moving back and forth from Nigeria to the United States. However, he alludes to it when prompted by questions. He notes, for instance, that his primary social relationships are essentially with close relatives, as he has not been able to keep up with regular community and social events either in Nigeria or the United States. Thus, his friendship networks in both locations have progressively weakened. Moreover, this situation has essentially stripped him of critical elements that comprise his initial cultural identity as “a Nigerian” or the cultural identity he had assumed during his continued stay in the United States before his first reentry to Nigeria. More problematic is that he continues to negotiate his cultural identity during his back-and-forth movement from one country to the other.

One of the primary challenges for transients is how to negotiate their cultural identity. Who are they? With which culture should they align themselves? Can they align themselves with both or all cultures equally? Which cultural values do they embrace? This issue of cultural identity is relatively unique for the transient. They are

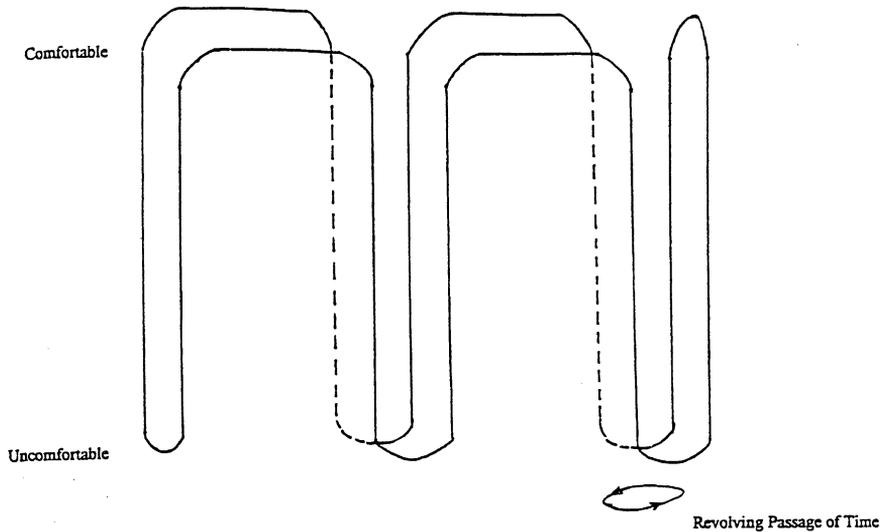


Fig. 3. Graphic representation of cyclical curves.

not long-term immigrants, in which case cultural identities may be only slightly adjusted or may experience subtle shifts. Also, they are not bicultural members of society shifting cultural identities daily (Bennett, 1993; Yep, 1998). Their transiency poses cultural identity challenges not fully experienced by either previously mentioned group.

Fig. 1 provides a visual representation of transients' multiple reacculturations in order to differentiate it from both acculturation and reacculturation. This visual representation is what we describe as cyclical curves. The curves perceptually represent several valleys in negotiating cultural identity (Fig. 3). Below, we provide taxonomy of transients. While several scholars have noted this gap in the literature, there has been no research to date that addresses the particular issues faced by this group of travelers (Clifford, 1992; Martin & Harrell, in press).

### 3. Taxonomy of intercultural transients

There are several groups of travelers that can be classified as intercultural transients and most of them have been ignored in intercultural communication studies. As shown in Table 1, these groups can be differentiated on two dimensions: length of stay (long-term or short-term) and function of transient activity (socioeconomic/political or employment). These groups include transient international business travelers, legally supported multiple residents, seasonal migrant laborers, sailors, diplomatic families, and long-term tourists. It is important to note that all these groups keep multiple residences, usually one at "home" and the other in a "foreign" land and because they do not reside in any of those residences on a

Table 1  
Taxonomy of transients

Function of transient activity	Typical length of stay	
	Short-term	Long-term <sup>a</sup>
Socioeconomic/political	International business travelers	Legally-supported multiple residents e.g. Hong Kong's "astronauts"
Service/employment requirements	Seasonal migrant labor groups	Navy/military personnel <sup>b</sup>
	Commercial sailors	

<sup>a</sup> Long-term refers to a period which typical includes residence in one location for most of the year or more.

<sup>b</sup> Note that some Navy personnel are better associated with short-term travel that often last 3–6 months.

permanent basis, they have become transients. In most cases, these transients move between the “home” and “foreign” abode frequently.

### 3.1. *Transient international business travelers*

We have used the case of an African transient to provide a general description of this group. Transient international business travelers have been in existence for a very long time, though they are characterized as short-term travelers. Rossler (1995) notes that such travelers, particularly German craftsmen and artisans, were widely documented from the early 19th century. These early craftsmen/artisans traveled all over the region to augment areas where there was low skill labor. These travelers differ from the typical business travelers because they did not keep a permanent home but made their homes in several places of work as they traveled.

These travelers are increasingly small-business persons who travel from their homeland to a foreign country, back and forth (Martin, 1998). At each location, the traveler resides for a significant period of time, for example 3 months. This time period is important to differentiate these travelers from mere holidaymakers who may spend few days or couple of weeks in a foreign country. In addition, the intent of the traveler’s trip is business rather than pleasure. By business, we refer to self-employment or any employment activity that provides monetary earning for the traveler. It is important to note that these travelers often have to maintain specific living quarters in each of these locations. For example, most of the Nigerian transients, who became the impetus for this study, had their own “homes” in Nigeria and then had a specific friend or family member with whom they stayed when in the foreign country. However, some of the Nigerians pointed out that they knew other Nigerian transients who had a “permanent” rented room that they kept in the foreign country.

### 3.2. *Legally supported multiple residents*

This is a group of transients whose dual residency is primarily induced, inspired, or supported by national laws such as dual citizenship. Some Hong Kong residents fall into this category. These Hong Kong residents have obtained permanent residency in other countries but reside primarily in Hong Kong. Their families live in the country of permanent residence where the individual is able to visit them from time to time. The Hong Kong case is significant because of the uncertainties that surrounded the Island during the impending take over by Communist China and the fear of the residents that the capitalist structure in Hong Kong was going to be undermined by the Chinese. They, therefore, sought alternative residence in capitalist-friendly countries. The phenomenon can be found among other people elsewhere in the world but perhaps to lesser extent.

Kyle (2000) has described other legally supported transiency; for example, Ecuadorians who shuffled between New York in the United States and Ecuador. This is how he described the life of one Ecuadorian: “Jesus was home for the month of May to see his family and to oversee improvements to their ever expanding two-story house, ... Jesus’ life had a permanently unfinished quality; he had no clear exit strategy from the binational life he had built over the course of 11 years shuttling back and forth between his two countries” (pp. 1–2). Ecuador recognized this phenomenon and responded in 1995 by changing its laws to allow dual citizenship. Ecuador is not alone, and many other countries including Nigeria have introduced dual citizenship in the last decade or so, partly to confront this emerging phenomenon.

### 3.3. *Seasonal migrant labor groups*

This is a group of laborers who are seasonally admitted to work in foreign countries for a temporary period. These guest workers return home at the end of each season and then return to work abroad the next season. They do this repeatedly until the end of the contract period. In the United States, these groups of laborers are usually agricultural laborers who work in most farms in the South to supplement inadequate farm labor. For example, Martin (1994) points out that *The Bracero Program* was introduced in 1942 and lasted until 1964. This program permitted over 4 million Mexican farm workers to enter the United States on a temporary basis to work in farms. Martin confirms that “some workers returned year after year” (p. 877). Beyond *The Bracero Program* there have been several guest worker programs introduced in the United States.

### 3.4. *Sailors*

Sailors often work for a significant part of the year away at sea and away from home. It is because the sailor’s employment takes him or her out of the home community to and from the sea, that we define sailors as a transient group. These sea travelers are different from the groups that we have discussed in this section. The earlier groups, while away from their home environment, often encounter a foreign

culture for a significant period of time. On the other hand, sailors while away from home may be among a network of other familiar sailors or friends. However, this network is clearly isolated from the larger community while the sailor is at sea.

This study would be non-unique if we stopped here, after having simply noted extant acculturation literature and intercultural transient types. The fact is that intercultural transients experience frequent and exhausting adjustments of their cultural identities with every reentry experience as they attempt to resume their lives in each social context. The next section of this essay reviews several *identity effects* or theoretical notions that assist in understanding the identity management of intercultural transients.

#### 4. Effects of identity shifting among transients

Identity studies tend to focus on at least five *identity effects* that are relevant in the case of the intercultural transient. We call them *identity effects* because each of them has been conceptualized in order to understand the nature and potential outcomes of identity conflicts due to cultural difference among interactants. Although several of them appear to be prescriptions for effective communication, they have each been devised in response to observation of and personal experience with identity conflicts among transients. The effects we will discuss are as follows: mindful identity shifting, multicultural personhood (self-construal; intercultural person), I-Other dialectic (e.g. Stranger-Host), Community builder (TCB) and the establishment of friendship networks upon each reentry. While each is useful, the theoretical framework of cultural contracts seems to be most helpful in understanding identity negotiation of intercultural transients. The cultural contracts theory will follow our discussion of identity effects.

##### 4.1. Mindfulness and identity shifting

The first identity effect is *Mindfulness and Identity Shifting*. Langer (1989) was perhaps the first to explicitly speak of mindfulness as an intercultural concept. She suggested that mindfulness has three criteria: creation of new categories, openness to new information and awareness of more than one perspective. The latter two are self-explanatory; however, what she meant by “creation of new categories” deserves further clarification. Langer posited that those who create new categories resist being stuck with rigid categories, mindsets and ways of seeing the world. Rather than fully adapt to one culture, they live between the borders and boundaries of different cultures. Mindful communication is juxtaposed to mindless communication in which case one does not lend attention to or allow others’ perspectives and worldviews to permeate his or her way of being. This mindless type of communicator is the kind of transient who moves in and out of cultural boundaries and is never conscious of how those boundaries could have affected behaviors, never conscious of how the natives live in an unfamiliar location. Indeed, Fisher (1998) would consider this person to be preoccupied with deep culture, that cultural standpoint which is so deeply rooted

that one's value orientations seem normal and the way things should be. According to Fisher, this type of individual is intransigent. In some ways, this person is self-absorbed. Langer (1989) cautions against this type of mindless behavior and argues quite cogently in favor of awareness and sensitivity to cultural and value differences.

#### 4.2. *Multicultural personhood*

*Multicultural personhood* is the second identity effect. Langer's first criterion of new category creation is similar to Adler's (1982) "multicultural man," Kim and associates' (Kim & Ruben, 1988; Kim, 2001) "intercultural person" and Milhouse, Asante, and Nwosu's (2001) "transcultural person." These refer to an individual who competently traverses cultural borders. Kim (2001) maintains that the intercultural person is capable of persevering when confronted with prolonged identity stress and adjustment due to transition from one culture to the next. She asserts:

Unlike the original identity that had been largely programmed into the stranger through childhood socialization experiences, the emerging identity is one that develops out of the many challenging and often painful experiences of self-reorganization under the demands of a new milieu. Through prolonged experience of trial and error, the stranger begins to "earn" a new, expanded identity that is more than either the original cultural identity or the identity of the host culture. (Kim, 2001, p. 65)

Though Kim's (2001) description of intercultural personhood is enlightening, it is likened more to acculturation rather than reacculturation. It seems to suggest that some people have the personality, will and wherewithal to endure the shock, stress, and adaptation often associated with cultural newness. What happens when the experience is not completely new or prolonged? What if it is frequent, yet periodic and occurs in short intervals? If in fact there is a new expanded identity, what does that identity look like and how does it function with respect to the previous identity? We cannot assume one is able to totally discard a prior identity. Either the core or remnants of the core are likely to still remain. These questions and concerns are virtually unanswered by Kim (2001) and others who do similar research in this area.

Ting-Toomey's (1999) nuanced conceptualization of mindful communication and her model of identity negotiation have both been instrumental in theorizing the identity effects and process of multiple reacculturation among transients. She explains what is meant by mindful communication:

We can define mindful intercultural communication as the process and outcome of how two dissimilar individuals negotiate shared meanings and achieve desired outcomes through appropriate and effective behaviors in an intercultural situation. (p. 50)

So mindfulness, in her definition, is related to two interactants with a shared meaning and interest in achieving desired outcomes. Her reconceptualization of this term is heuristic. The disputable dimension of her definition, however, is the notion of being behaviorally "appropriate and effective." This reminds us of the

inadequacies of the intercultural competence paradigm, in which all interactants are given a code, which sets the standard for correct behavior (Collier, 1998). If this code is dismissed, then the relationship ruptures, because assimilation is a core requirement of the model. As a transient that multiply reacculturates, there is a precarious effect that is experienced, because the transient has multiple homes. The key word is “homes.” As with any home, there is a sense of comfort and entitlement, but not a privileged entitlement. There is a sense of part ownership in that shared cultural space. The identity renegotiation aspect of reentry is much more of an issue of regaining access to the collective of which one is a part. This point is being made to suggest that there is a different tenor to the reentry process that is not best described or framed using terms such as “effective and appropriate,” which sound like distant terms, terms used to describe someone with little to no experience with the collective (Collier, 1998). In some cases, as with the sailor transient or the business transient, the distance is greater and may require greater repair of damaged relationships or greater effort in catching up with recent occurrences. However, when there is family present in both home locations, the transition is facilitated. The potential identity effects are still clearly implied as transiency continues.

#### 4.3. *Community builder*

TCB, which fits under the rubric of the third identity effect labeled *Community Builder*, was initiated by William Starosta and Anthony Olorunnisola (Chen & Starosta, 1998), and further developed by Fred Casmir (1999); however the paradigm has had limited empirical testing and verification (Jackson, 1999). This nascent metatheory is applicable to intercultural transients since it encompasses several gradations of identity negotiation during intercultural interaction ranging from micro (individual) to macro (societal) levels of communication analysis. The TCB model identifies these levels of communication analysis as intracultural, interpersonal, rhetorical, and mass media. The present study’s conception of negotiation of cultural identity is directed by a process-oriented approach to identity exploration. Casmir (1999) added depth to the process, and explained the interactive nature of meaning construction. He suggested that this interaction process can be either voluntary or coerced, with ephemeral or enduring effects, across or within national boundaries. The model’s design includes ten temporally arranged stages. The ten stages explain a process in which an individual responds to the symbolic realities and worldviews of another culturally different individual (Chen & Starosta, 1998). The end objective of the TCB model is to develop a “third culture” with a previous stranger, which requires that the two interactants move away from their previously ascribed culture toward one that is co-constructed. The identity effects of this sort of detachment may be deleterious.

#### 4.4. *Networks upon reentry*

The fourth identity effect is *Networks Upon Reentry*. There is extensive literature on network relationships. However, our interest is in the role of a transient’s cultural

identity in the development of friendship networks. A network refers to a close-knit group of associates that exchange information among one another over time. For transients, this process of exchanging information over time among other network members is a major concern because transients' relatively frequent travels lead them to enter and exit networks for short periods of time. This disrupts the information exchange process. Weimann's (1989) discussion of strength of friendship ties and Boissevain's early work (1974) on relationship between personal networks and the social environment are particularly insightful in understanding the process of identity negotiation within the friendship networks that accommodate transients.

#### 4.5. *I-other dialectic*

Our final identity effect is the *I-other dialectic*. One paradigm that has emerged from Ting-Toomey's work is Jackson's (in press) cultural contracts theory described later in this essay. His conceptual work is significant in that it combines mindfulness, intercultural personhood and identity negotiation to explain three types of "cultural contracts" often negotiated and "signed by" intercultural transients and others. The metaphor of cultural contracts has illustrative potential for explaining the reacculturated transient's identity challenges, because it suggests that the intercultural transient must make strategic choices about the degree to which he or she will be figuratively bound to one or more cultural communities. Consequently, the cultural contract is "signed with" another cultural interactant (i.e. family, friend, acquaintance or stranger) as a communicative gesture demonstrating interest in maintaining some access to a cultural collective. Although the multicultural and intercultural person concepts are intriguing, we contend that they are most operative and effective among those who have an individualist or independently self-construed orientation to the world. This is not necessarily the case for those with collectivist or interdependently self-construed orientations. Perhaps Cross (1995) explains it best when she asserts:

Members of collectivist societies tend to define the self primarily by referring to aspects of their social roles and memberships...As a result, members of collectivist cultures are likely to elaborate the interdependent self construal, in which the principal components are one's relationship with important others and in-groups...In most matters of social behavior in these societies, the internal, private or independent aspect of the self is subordinate to the collective or interdependent component of the self. (pp. 674–675).

So, not only is reacculturation complicated by the factors discussed earlier, but also, it is further pronounced by the collectivist and/or individualist tendencies that ground our perspectives toward the world. The principal concern of this essay is the identity effects of multiple reacculturation. The cultural contracts paradigm facilitates an understanding of this; hence, it is presented in detail below.

## **5. Cultural contracts as theoretic framework**

While the theoretical notions described above are useful in understanding some aspects of identity negotiation of intercultural transients, it is still not clear what is being negotiated when discussing “identity negotiation”; therefore, we contend the most useful paradigm is Jackson’s (in press-a, in press-b, 2002, 1999) notion of cultural contracts. This theory brings together the concepts of identity and intercultural relationships while eliciting a metaphor which makes sense when one asks what is being negotiated.

Upon return to one’s homeland, a transient must not only renegotiate reentry, but also his “cultural contract.” “Cultural contract” is the name coined to explain an implicit, yet mindful agreement among two or more differing cultural interactants to coordinate a relationship. One unique aspect of this approach is that it recognizes the possibility of intracultural contract negotiations among friends, acquaintances, family and strangers.

The cultural contract subsumes the five identity effects that we have discussed earlier. Thus, each of the effects can occur during the process of negotiating a cultural contract. During the multiple reentry process, cultural contracts (or worldviews) are exchanged and implicitly managed. Since values, beliefs, norms, patterns of communicating and ways of seeing the world may shift throughout time, a leave of absence from a transient’s home may require some adjustment to changing times. A shift in any one or any part of one of these aspects of identity constitutes the “signing” of a cultural contract.

Everyone has “signed” at least one cultural contract in his/her life, and with every significant encounter, one or more of those cultural contracts is negotiated. The term “cultural contracts” refers to the end product of identity negotiation; hence, every “signed” or agreed upon cultural contract has a direct impact on one’s identity. The effect on identities, whether it is a shifting or solidifying move, depends upon the nature of the identity negotiation process or the significance of the incident, which initiated the negotiation. The word “cultural” in cultural contracts is deliberate. It is impossible to exist without culture. Even if one is unable to articulate the particularities of the cultural value system to which he or she subscribes, there are still cultural patterns of interaction, rules, and norms that guide everyday behavior (Collier, 1998). So, with this cultural contracts paradigm, there is no such thing as a non-cultural or culturally generic contract and everyone has at least one cultural contract.

As with any negotiation, one can either choose to abide by an existing contractual arrangement or sign another contract. Naturally, there are penalties associated with breaches or early withdrawals. Although the concept of identity negotiation is simple, it is not always clear what is being negotiated, especially since identities are non-material. The cultural contracts paradigm is being introduced to make sense of what is actually being negotiated (Hecht et al., 2003).

Everyone has identified or aligned him or herself with others throughout his/her life. This alignment can be behavioral and/or cognitive. Cultural contracts are most concerned with sustained alignments, whether short or long-term. For example, you

may choose to align yourself with a stranger to achieve desired ends as signified by Ting-Toomey's interpretation of mindfulness.

Identities are negotiable via cultural contracts at every stage of relationship development, irrespective of context, from initial interaction to relational termination. According to Jackson (in press a, b); Hecht et al., 2003; Jackson & Stewart, 2001), there are three fairly self-explanatory premises to the cultural contracts approach that must precede any in depth conversation about the process and/or outcome of this daily engagement. They are as follows: identities require affirmation; identities are constantly being exchanged; identities are contractual.

### 5.1. Cultural contract types

There are three contract types: ready-to-sign, quasi-completed, and co-created. *Ready-to-sign* cultural contracts are prenegotiated and no further negotiation is allowed. For these persons, "signing" or relational coordination may or may not be the goal. There is no such thing as not having a contract, hence they have either directly or indirectly chosen to contract with themselves. To say that one has no cultural contract is to say that one has no culture or understanding of how to function in the culture where he or she lives. One such cultural contract is with transients who avoid being mindful, respectful, or competent when traversing cultural boundaries. Essentially they take their cultural understandings with them with no interest in learning the norms or traditions of other cultures. Although this sounds almost impossible for a transient, it is not. Over time, it is fairly common for a reacculturating transient to take routine trips to the same location and become less and less mindful of subtle differences among the hosts upon reentry. They have changed little of themselves in the process. Naturally, the stress of multiple reacculturation can be exhausting and one means of lessening such stress is to avoid major adjustments to behaviors, attitudes and perspectives (Kim, 2001; Sussman, 2001).

*Quasi-completed* cultural contracts are partly prenegotiated and partly open for negotiation. These persons are not ready to fully co-create and not necessarily ruling out maintaining their own worldview. These persons "straddle the fence" in terms of their commitment to reacculturate. They would rather maintain some measure of sociocultural distance upon reentry. They typically begin seeing themselves as somehow different than their family and friends at home. The identity shifts are moderated by cultural orientation (i.e. individualist and/or collectivist) and purpose for reentry. If the purpose is to sell goods or conduct business, the transient will make greater efforts to shift. If the purpose is to see family, the shift may still occur, but in varying degrees. Arguably, quasi-completed contracts are "signed" as a self-protective measure in order to avoid stress.

Finally, *co-created* cultural contracts are fully negotiable with the only limits being personal preferences or requirements. This is often perceived as the optimal means of relational coordination across cultures, since the relationship is fully negotiable and open to differences. It is the epitome of mindfulness and intercultural personhood. If

a cultural contract is co-created, that means there is an acknowledgement and valuation of cultural differences. These cultural differences are not ignored, yet do not become the only reason the two relational partners are together. The emphasis is truly on mutual satisfaction rather than obligation to one another or each other's respective cultures. Metaphorically, each contract type is a result of how identities have been personally and socially constructed and explored.

## 6. Studying cultural identity and the multiple reacculturation of transients

We have focused this essay on identity issues of intercultural transients and their concomitant multiple reacculturation processes. Unfortunately, the increase in the number of transients has not been matched, with any appreciable interest, with a commensurate increase in studies of intercultural transients' multiple reacculturation experiences. Also, this essay has sought to demonstrate that transient multiple reacculturation should be considered separate from *initial acculturation to a host foreign country* and *reacculturation upon initial reentry* to the homeland. These two issues, which have been of principle concern in this analysis are intended to highlight the importance of intercultural transients' identities and their cultural readjustment experiences.

The next step is to suggest important issues that should interest those who intend to focus their scholarly pursuit in the study of transient multiple reacculturation and cultural identity. Here we focus on two issues: (1) identifying how transients negotiate identity, and (2) developing coping strategies for easing negotiation of identity during multiple reacculturation.

### 6.1. Identifying how transients negotiate identity

Transients negotiate their cultural identities in one of three ways: maintain their own identity or that of the familiar host (i.e. ready-to-sign cultural contract); compromise by retaining who they have become in the process of multiple reacculturation, although making subtle accommodative identity shifts to satisfy or alleviate any relational tension (i.e. quasi-completed cultural contract); or collaborate with the familiar host by co-creating a third culture or communal arrangement where neither person feels like an outsider when visiting one another (i.e. co-created cultural contract). The important thing to note here is that each of these options can be carried out subconsciously or consciously and are directly aligned with each of the three cultural contracts previously explained.

The first identity negotiation option is perhaps the most exhausting, counter-productive and potentially most dangerous. Reentry shock and stress are enhanced by positions of assimilation (Cross, 1995). The literature is dense with reasons for why this is not advised. Langer's (1989) and Ting-Toomey's (1999) notions of mindfulness each suggest that open-mindedness is key. If one is unconcerned about these issues, they will most likely encounter relational obstructions.

The second identity negotiation option is to calibrate one's identity shifting so that it does not supersede a certain comfort level with the core self. The core self is that which guides everyday action in subtle and overt ways. To ignore the instinct to calibrate is to ignore those protective and adaptive reflexes that secure oneself from vulnerability. At the same time, a transient who is returning to familiar territory and chooses to see friends and acquaintances may find some active resistance to his or her holding on to this other identity, this other home. The familiar other may wonder why that individual is not acting like him or herself- that self that is indigenous to the home the familiar other knows you are a part of.

The final option may appear to be optimal at first glance, however a transient who tries to co-create a third culture may be considered disloyal. The immediate response from family and friends may suggest, "Why are we creating this other thing when we already have something I thought we were okay with?" The idea of a co-created contract is to negotiate identities so that both parties can feel comfortable, but more often than not in transient situations, the transient is the one who tends to adjust the most.

The interesting facet to this discussion is how does the familiar host adjust to the familiar "stranger" if at all? The fact that a host may not feel the need to adjust at all is a contract in itself—the ready-to-sign contract, in which the host expects the stranger to assimilate. However, let's say the host does adjust a bit, to what extent does that happen? Will the host seek to understand this altered way of living of the stranger? Will the host go so far as to co-create a third culture or new way of interacting with the familiar stranger? These are all fascinating questions to be answered by future research on this topic.

## 6.2. *Coping strategies for easing negotiation of identity*

There are many paradigms which explain how individuals cope with the stress of cultural identity shifting. The best we have discovered to date is Cross and Strauss' (1998) "everyday functions" of identity: buffering, bonding, bridging, code switching, and accenting individualism. The first four apply mostly to intercultural transient experiences.

Buffering is the act of protecting and insulating oneself from potential identity threats. One way this can be done is by "putting up a wall" between oneself and another interactant. Bonding functions to enhance personal connectedness via attachment to the cultural collective as a means of alleviating psychological stress. A transient accomplished this function by reestablishing friendship networks immediately upon reentry. Bridging refers to the attempt to be empathetic toward a cultural other's worldview. This requires that the transient learn the latest news on community and personal occurrences before or immediately upon reentry and relearn the codes of the ingroup. Code switching is an adaptive function that temporarily relieves others' negative perceptions of one's cultural competency by not only relearning the code, but by attempting to adhere to it in order to appear as one of the ingroup members.

These four strategies are useful for exploring the identity negotiation and coping mechanisms for transients who multiply reacculturate. The stress incurred from multiple reentry is significant unless coping measures are taken to alleviate the stress. Much of the stress is perceptual, but it can have an impact on physical health. Cross (1995) argues that consequences include lowered self-esteem and self-construal, which may lead to lowered life satisfaction.

## **7. Conclusion and directions for future research**

Within this essay, we have explored the extant literature on acculturation and found that there is a lacuna in previous thinking about intercultural transients' experiences—the negotiation of identity. We presented a new concept called “cyclical curves” to explain the process of multiple reacculturation, and an example of a typical intercultural transient's experience and we offered a taxonomy of intercultural transients. Moreover, we have examined current concepts that are useful for discussing identity effects among intercultural transients. Finally, we introduced a paradigm coined “cultural contracts theory,” which synthesizes several existing concepts such as mindfulness, identity shifting and the I-other dialectic, while initiating a framework that accounts for intercultural transients' negotiations of worldview as manifested in value-shifting and readjustment to social norms after multiple reentry.

Future studies must systematically examine intercultural transients' identities via empirical research. There is much more that must be known about how intercultural transients and their families and friends are affected by the transient's frequent reentries into different cultures. Does it matter if the cultures share similar values? How does that affect the adjustment? Does familiarity with a given set of cultures enhance or lessen the identity negotiation process? Does the transient type, function of activity or length of stay influence intercultural transients' selections and negotiations of certain contracts? In other words, is an intercultural transient, who is military personnel, more likely to create only ready-to-sign contracts due to her nature of business? Finally, how do various social identities interact with cultural self-definitions among intercultural transients? That is, does an older African American male business traveler with a family at home tend to adjust differently than a younger Korean female seasonal migrant laborer who is single? If so, how do we make sense of and characterize these differences?

It is clear that there is much work to be done with respect to multiple reacculturation research. Likewise, there is much to be accomplished in identity research. The cultural contracts paradigm is one theoretic contribution in the multidisciplinary field of intercultural studies. It does not and cannot cancel the importance of other paradigms in the field, which seek to explain and explore intercultural transiency. Yet, it is significant, because of what it offers as an explanatory model as we consider the ever-increasing global marketplace where intercultural transients remain highly active and intercultural transient identities remain ever more vulnerable.

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