

Perpetual sojourning: An interpretive phenomenological study of latest re-entry in
emerging adulthood

by

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ABSTRACT

Re-entry, the experience of returning to one's home country a sojourn, involves a psychological and social readjustment that may include re-entry distress. Since most literature focuses on single re-entry experiences, little is known of the salient re-entry issues for sojourners who have re-entered more than once during their twenties. This interpretive phenomenological study looked at the latest re-entry experience of those who repeatedly sojourned and re-entered during emerging adulthood developmental stage. This qualitative study involved data from in-depth interviews with five participants that were analysed for main themes. Synopses or situated structures of each participant's experience were included. A general structure described the themes common in all the experiences. The six main themes that emerged were: 1) anticipatory thoughts and feelings about re-entry; 2) emotional struggle; 3) sense of rootlessness/desire for rootedness; 4) isolation and lack of social support; 5) sense of readjustment; and 6) awareness & appreciation of the benefits of sojourning. Findings distinct to this study were: the anticipatory excitement sojourners felt about changing the focus of their lives towards a career, financial stability, and relationships; the sense of urgency and pressure participants felt to achieve career goals and become financially stable during their readjustment; and that most of their emotional struggles were associated to set backs in employment and career. The findings add depth to the re-entry literature by offering firsthand accounts of those who experiences latest re-entry during emerging adulthood and they inform clinical practice and program development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Chapter One – Introduction	1
Re-entry	2
Emerging Adulthood	5
Purpose of the study	5
My Latest Re-entry Experience.....	6
Bracketing	8
Chapter Two – Literature Review.....	10
Host Country Transition	10
Culture Shock	10
Acculturation	12
Re-entry	14
Re-entry readjustment	14
Re-entry Distress Symptoms	14
Theoretical Perspectives.....	15
Expectations	15
Cultural Identity	18
Salient Factors in Re-entry	20
Value Changes	20
Age	21
Gender.....	21
Staying Abreast of Changes at Home.....	22
Communication in Re-entry Relationships.....	23
Preparation for Re-entry.....	23
Multiple Re-entry Experiences.....	24
Emerging Adulthood	25
Chapter Three – Methodology.....	28

Statement of Purpose	29
Rationale for the Method	30
Procedures.....	32
Recruitment	32
Participants	32
Data Collection and Interview Protocol.....	33
Recording and Transcription Practices	34
Data Analysis	34
Issues of Representation	36
Ethical Consideration.....	36
Criteria for Evaluating the Worth of my Study.....	36
Chapter Four – Findings.....	38
Situated Structures.....	38
Julie	38
Joe	40
Estella.....	41
Ginny.....	43
Barbara	45
General Structures	47
Theme 1 – Anticipatory Thoughts and Feelings	
About Re-entry	47
Theme 2 – Emotional Struggle.....	51
Theme 3 – Sense of Rootlessness/Desire for Rootedness.....	57
Theme 4 – Isolation and Lack of Social Support	64
Theme 5 – Sense of Readjustment.....	70
Theme 6 – Awareness & Appreciation for the Benefits of	
Sojourning	74
Chapter Five – Discussion.....	81
Core Findings in Relation to Re-entry Literature.....	81
Core Findings in Relation to Theoretical	
Models of Re-entry Distress.....	83

Findings Distinct to the Present Study	85
Implications for Practice	87
Limitations	89
Researcher's Subjective Experience.....	89
Suggestion for Future Research	90
References	92
Appendix A: Poster	95
Appendix B: Consent Letter	96
Appendix C: Telephone Script	98
Appendix D: Orienting Statement and Interview Questions.....	99

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The experience of relocating to a different country and culture provides one with an opportunity for self-discovery, adventure, cultural learning, and it can be particularly appealing to those in emerging adulthood, a developmental stage occurring between the ages of 18 and 30, typified by identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). Many who move abroad are referred to as sojourners because they reside overseas for only a fixed period with the intention of returning to their country of origin. For sojourners, moving abroad entails a major transition and cross-cultural adjustment. However, returning to one's home culture after a sojourn, which is known as re-entry, also involves re-adjustment in addition to securing employment and a place of residence. Consequently, sojourners endure the psychological and emotional reactions that result from such a transition. Once they return, some returnees remain in their home culture whereas others move abroad again either to the same host country or a different one. This study uses the term perpetual sojourning to describe moving abroad and returning repeatedly with constant intercultural transitions. Because little is known about the issues involved in multiple re-entries, specifically through a developmental perspective, this study aims to uncover and describe the core qualities of perpetual sojourners' latest re-entry experience in emerging adulthood.

To help us understand what sojourners experience when they return, it is important to delineate the psychological and emotional experience of sojourners while they are abroad. There are conflicting perspectives in terms of the psycho-emotional phases experienced when one moves abroad. Oberg (1960) called the experience *culture shock* and explained it as euphoria and enthusiasm about the new culture upon arrival that is soon replaced with feelings of anger, frustration, confusion and depression due to the absence of familiar social cues and customs.

Eventually, the sojourner learns culturally appropriate social cues and begins using them in daily interactions and social situations to the point where he or she embraces the new culture and feels well adjusted in the host country. Conversely, other researchers have not found evidence for the initial euphoria and they indicate that sojourners experience most difficulties psychologically and socioculturally upon arrival (Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998). Regardless, most cross-cultural researchers agree that sojourners experience psychological discomfort but that it serves as an impetus for learning coping skills needed to subsist in the new culture.

Not all sojourners use the same coping methods while abroad. Some strategies can be maladaptive but they still relieve acculturative distress (Berry, 1990). Some maladaptive methods sojourners may employ to deal with culture shock are embracing the host culture at the expense of one's own culture or marginalising oneself by shunning the host culture. According to Berry, an adaptive coping style involves a balance of embracing the new culture while maintaining aspects of the home culture. In short, sojourners endure a process of adjustment involving emotional and psychological distress and subsequently make cognitive and behavioural changes in order to alleviate distress and subsist in the host culture.

Re-entry

Re-entry or repatriation is the experience of returning to one's country of origin after living abroad for a sufficient amount of time to have learned and adopt aspects of the host culture. At a time when researchers assumed cross-cultural transitions pertained solely to the time spent in the host culture, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) proposed a cross-cultural transition cycle that included re-entry. They described sojourners' readjustment as initial elation followed by re-entry or repatriation distress, which is emotional and psychological distress such as disorientation, anger, isolation and depression, that dissipates when readjustment is complete.

Theoretical Stances

Several researchers have proposed theoretical models of re-entry distress. Some have considered the association between returnees' expectations of their re-entry experience and distress. According to Rogers and Ward (1993), discrepancies between re-entry expectations and actual re-entry outcomes exacerbate repatriation distress. Storti (1997) maintains sojourners assume they are returning to familiar places, people, and routines of predictable patterns of interaction. When they find that home is not exactly the way it was when they left, returning sojourners become dismayed and disillusioned. Bochner, Lin and McLeod (1980) examined sojourners' re-entry expectations and found most anticipated role conflict in their relationships.

Another explanation of re-entry distress involves cultural identity, which is the degree to which one identifies with their home culture. Sussman (2000) asserts re-entry involves a shift in cultural identity that incites a psychological response. Variables influencing cultural identity shifts are: a) task centrality—motivation to succeed at the overseas tasks such as learning for students or business for company employees; b) cultural identity centrality—how much importance the sojourner places on his or her original cultural identity; and c) flexibility—one's ability to make modifications in behaviour necessary during a cultural transition. Her model delineates four different identity shifts. Subtractive or additive shifts both result in high sociocultural adaptation while abroad, but are conducive to self-concept disturbances, lowered self-esteem and negative affective responses during repatriation (Sussman). In contrast, an affirmative shift has low sociocultural adaptation and since no shift occurs in cultural identity while abroad, the sojourner experiences no repatriation distress. Finally, an intercultural or global shift entails holding multiple cultural scripts and awareness of the shifting cultural identity and results in low repatriation distress.

Variables Associated with Re-entry Distress

Certain variables are associated with re-entry distress. For instance, when a sojourner experiences changes in their values, they experience more distress than those who do not report a change in values (Uehara, 1986). Sojourners in emerging adulthood are particularly susceptible to adopting their host culture's values because of the predominance of identity exploration and changing worldviews associated with the developmental stage (Arnett, 2000, Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Gender may also be a variable associated with distress since females tend to report more distress in relationships upon return than males do (Gama & Pederson, 1990). However, visiting home during a sojourn and maintaining an awareness of changes in the home country are associated with lower distress levels (Adler, 1981; Brabant, Palmer & Gramling, 1990).

Preparation for Re-entry

The re-entry literature has prompted universities to deliver re-entry preparation programs for international students. Sussman (1986) maintains programs should assist students to: a) become aware of how they have changed; b) bring awareness to the cultural adaptation process; and c) plan for their adjustment at home. Program facilitators have implemented this through guided visualisation exercises (Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986) and a critical incident approach (Arthur, 2003). The effectiveness of such programs stresses their importance, however many returning sojourners who are not associated to a particular institution or organisation do not have access to such programs.

Multiple Re-entry Experiences

Re-entry research to date mostly investigates single re-entry experiences. However, Sussman (2000) found that the small portion of those who sojourned repeatedly admitted

previous re-entry did not ease their subsequent ones. Onwumechili, Nwosu, Jackson and James-Hughes (2003) considered the multiple re-entry experiences of intercultural transients, those who alternate between residing in their home country and their host country. They theorise that shifts in cultural identity are *cultural contracts* that are implicitly negotiated between the returning sojourner and their family and friends. They describe different contracts but underscore that all serve as coping mechanisms to deal with acculturative stress.

Emerging Adulthood

Perpetual sojourners in this study have experienced multiple re-entries during emerging adulthood, which is the developmental stage occurring between the ages of 18 and 30 (Arnett, 2000). This study focuses on emerging adulthood for two reasons. First, it is a stage in life where people are more likely to sojourn and explore their identities in terms of love, work and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Moving abroad for a period can only amplify this exploration. Secondly, looking at the latest re-entry experience through psychosocial development can provide a context for salient issues. For instance, sojourners in late emerging adulthood are likely to commit to a career, relationship and/or family and may not feel motivated to sojourn again whereas those in early emerging adulthood may not consider their latest re-entry as their last one.

Purpose of the Study

There are several reasons for exploring latest re-entry of emerging adult sojourners. Most of the re-entry literature pertains to specific populations such as students, missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers, military families, and government and corporate employees. Perpetual sojourners in emerging adulthood are a unique group because their motivations for moving abroad and returning usually differ from investigated populations. They also face different tasks

during re-entry such as job search and housing that can influence their re-adjustment.

Furthermore, since they sojourn independently, they are more isolated than those who can share their experiences with other returning sojourners or partake in re-entry training programs because they are affiliated to an organization. Lastly, single re-entry literature does not answer questions such as: Does previous re-entry experience ease repatriation distress in the latest re-entry? Do expectations about coming home change as re-entry experience is accumulated? Do perpetual sojourners remain motivated to leave? What unique issues do returnees face that were not salient in previous re-entries?

This study's purpose is to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of latest re-entry in perpetual sojourning during emerging adulthood. Exposure of this phenomenon can inform practice by familiarising clinical counsellors with the issues involved. It can also advise supportive or psycho-educational groups for individuals in the community struggling with latest re-entry issues. This study can also serve returnees by normalising and validating their experiences of latest re-entry.

The question, "What is the meaning of the lived experience of emerging adult sojourners' latest re-entry?" guides this investigation. Interpretive phenomenology is the methodology chosen for this study because it asks *what* the experience is and does not attempt to offer a theory to explain the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). To elicit descriptions of the experience, participants will be interviewed in a semi-structured style to help them stay as close to the experience as possible (Moustakas, 1994). The analysis will include a situated structure that describes each participant's experience and a general structure that defines and describes the themes common to all the participants' experiences.

My Latest Re-entry Experience

I would like to familiarise the reader with my experience of latest re-entry and my experiences preceding it. My first re-entry occurred after living in Europe for one year. I thought my overseas teaching experience would lead me to an abundance of employment options in my home country yet I encountered the contrary. Because securing gainful employment proved challenging, I relocated within British Columbia several times. I expected to pick up where I had left off with my friends but instead I found it difficult to reconnect with them. One year after re-entry, I moved to South Korea for a year and then to Hungary for two years. In Hungary, I was keen to learn about my roots so I lived with relatives, learned the language and obtained my Hungarian citizenship. I felt connected to the culture but after three years of teaching English abroad, I knew it was not the career for me and I returned to Canada to begin graduate school. My feelings were mixed as I approached my latest re-entry; I was enthusiastic about school, sad about leaving Hungary and worried that my re-entry experience would be as negative as the first. I was convinced I would return to practice counselling in Hungary after graduation. Upon returning to Vancouver, I had difficulties reconnecting with old friends and they said they did not understand my behaviour or attitude. Although I had experienced this in the first re-entry, it still shocked me and I felt alienated. I tried to maintain what I learned abroad as much as possible. For instance, I immediately enrolled in a Hungarian class so I could maintain my language proficiency. I also maintained frequent correspondence with the friends I had overseas, cooked Hungarian cuisine and attended Hungarian cultural events. I was annoyed with many North American idiosyncrasies such as large portions in restaurants, "coffee-to-go," and what seemed to be contrived friendliness of shop clerks and serving staff in restaurants. I found solace in planning a trip back to Hungary for the following summer even though I knew it

was an unrealistic goal. Now, I am approaching my third year back in Canada. I am slowly losing the Hungarian I learned and although I still maintain contact with my friends overseas, we speak less frequently. I yearn to go back but now only to visit. My perception of Vancouver has changed since I returned; I have a renewed appreciation of the natural surroundings and I am aware of the many advantages we have in this country. I still cherish the Hungarian identity I created for myself while I was abroad but now when I am introduced to someone, the fact that I lived abroad is no longer the first thing I disclose about myself.

Bracketing

Interpretive phenomenology assumes that understanding always comes from a perspective or interpretation that is influenced by one's context. Bracketing is a technique in which the researcher explains preconceived notions and assumptions about the phenomenon as a means of holding them at bay when they ultimately emerge (van Manen, 1990). I will reiterate some of my experiences to illustrate my assumptions. One assumption I hold is that leaving becomes a coping mechanism or an escape for when perpetual sojourners feel dissatisfied with their situation in the home culture. My first re-entry was filled with struggle and I decided to leave due to feeling frustrated and stagnant. Still, when I worry about a potential lack of employment prospects upon graduation, I imagine myself sojourning again. Another one of my assumptions is that returning to a meaningful role or having some structure in place diminishes the need to move. I returned only when I secured the role of a graduate student thus minimising many of the uncertainties I previously faced during re-entry. My third assumption is that sojourners experiencing their latest re-entry in their late twenties feel normative pressure, which can exacerbate re-entry distress. This is an age where role identity is solidified and many commit to relationships, careers and arrive at financial independence (Arnett). Conversely, those

experiencing latest re-entry may feel like they are “starting over” in terms of employment and relationships. They may feel “behind” in relation to peers who have advanced in achievement and relationship domains. Finally, from my experience, I believe that sojourners in latest re-entry go through repatriation distress. The difference between the distress in the first re-entry and now is that the distress is compounded with the learned response of coping with struggles in the home country by moving abroad and perceived normative pressure.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is the lived experience of latest re-entry during emerging adulthood? This review attempts to bring together existing intercultural sojourning literature to begin to address this question. This chapter reviews host country transitions and subsequently, addresses re-entry, its key features and theoretical underpinnings. Specifically, this chapter reviews re-entry literature pertaining to international university students because they are in the same developmental stage as the sojourners considered in this study. Accordingly, literature on the emerging adulthood developmental stage is also included. The review concludes with a summary and discussion of the specific research questions provoked by the review and examined in this study.

Host Country Transition

Sojourners are individuals who voluntarily live in another culture but usually have expectations of returning to permanently reside in their country of origin. Moving to a host country entails a great social and psychological transition and adjustment.

Culture Shock

The term culture shock denotes the psychological reaction of an individual who encounters an absence of familiar cues in an entirely different environment or country (Oberg, 1960). While lacking the ability to interpret the social norms and customs of the new culture, many sojourners experience physical and emotional discomfort such as anxiety and feelings of surprise, isolation, rejection, frustration, disorientation and confusion (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Often this is combined with strong disgust (morally or aesthetically) about certain aspects of the foreign culture (Oberg).

Oberg (1960) considered four phases of culture shock. The initial "honeymoon phase"

encompasses fascination, elation and optimism on the side of the individual exposed to a foreign culture. In the second phase, the individual experiences hostility, displays emotionally stereotyped attitudes towards the host culture and seeks closer contact to fellow sojourners. In the third stage, the sojourner begins to recover and experiences an increase in his or her language knowledge and ability to navigate in the new culture. In the final stage, the sojourners feel adjusted to the host culture and they enjoy and accept the customs of the new culture.

Lysgaard's (1955) depicted sojourners' psycho-emotional adjustment to the host culture graphically in a U-curve. He interviewed 200 Norwegian Fulbright scholars in the United States and found they experienced euphoria and easy adjustment upon arrival. Shortly their elation dissipated into a crisis in which they felt less well adjusted, lonely, depressed and unhappy. This was depicted by the dip in the curve. Eventually, the sojourners arrived at a resolution, felt better adjusted, and integrated into the host culture. Lysgaard noted that those who resided in the United States for at least six months and up to twelve months encountered the greatest adjustment difficulties.

One weakness in the study was that it was cross-sectional and subject to memory bias. Furthermore, it has not received much empirical support, yet is referred to in the sojourner adjustment literature for its illustrative purposes (Rogers & Ward, 1994). Ward, Okura, Kennedy and Kojima (1998) found no support for the U-curve hypothesis when they examined the adjustment of 35 Japanese university students in New Zealand whose average age was 18.6 years. Their study addressed the students' psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation. Sociocultural adaptation refers to one's ability to 'fit in' and negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment and it is influenced by the sojourner's amount of contact with host nationals and his or her cultural knowledge. The participants answered questionnaires at

four different points in time: twenty-four hours upon entry and then at four, six and twelve months after arrival. The authors found that psychological adjustment difficulties were greatest upon entry to the new culture while the level of sociocultural adaptation was high at entry but markedly decreased within the first months of residence. The relationship between sojourners' psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation increased over time. In contrast to the initial stage of euphoria illustrated in the U-curve, most sojourners had difficulties mainly in the early stages of transition.

Acculturation

Adler (1987) considered culture shock as the centre of profound learning, growth, and self-awareness. This way culture shock is not considered a psychological illness or negative emotional response but a motivator for sojourners to develop coping strategies to facilitate the adjustment to the host culture (Adler, 1987, Westwood, et al., 1986; Kim, 2001; Sussman, 2000). Acculturation is a process in which individuals acquire some aspects of the host culture and unlearn home cultural elements. Consequently, situations or interactions that would have normally called for the old, home culture responses now evoke new host culture-appropriate ones (Berry, 1990; Kim, 2001; Sussman, 2002). Once culture shock symptoms subside, acculturation begins.

Berry proposed four psychological reactions or strategies sojourners adopt in response to culture shock: assimilation, separation, marginalisation and integration. When sojourners adopt an assimilation strategy, they develop an ongoing absorption into the dominant culture. Consequently, they seek daily interaction with the host culture and do not wish to maintain aspects of their home culture. The separation strategy involves sojourners holding on to their original culture while avoiding interaction with host country members and refusing to learn host

culturally appropriate behaviours. Sojourners who choose to socialise only within the expatriate community while abroad have adopted this strategy. The third strategy described in the model is marginalisation in which the sojourner holds little possibility or interest in his or her home cultural maintenance or in having relations with host culture members resulting in seclusion and estrangement. Lastly, the integration strategy involves maintaining one's original culture but also partaking in daily interactions with members of the host country. This is an adaptive strategy conducive to positive host country experiences and exemplifies acculturation (Berry, 1990).

Kim (2001) regards culture shock and acculturation as part of a cross-cultural adaptation defined as "the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed environments, establish (or re-establish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal and functional relationships with those environments" (p. 31). She considers cross-cultural adaptation a goal for long-term sojourns since host culture members expect those on short-term sojourns to learn only some aspects of the host culture and they make allowances for sojourners' culturally inappropriate behaviours. According to Kim, some sojourners adapt to host cultures more effectively than others because of predisposition variables such as: preparedness for change, ethnic proximity and adaptiveness.

In sum, moving abroad is a deeply felt experience both emotionally and psychologically. The experience of culture shock can be distressing but serves as a motivator for acculturation although some sojourners may apply more adaptive strategies than others (Berry). Culture shock and acculturation can be considered as parts of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim).

Re-entry

The great journeys are pilgrimages to a sacred place, and then after the journey has done its

transformative work, pilgrims return back home again. No matter how enormous the discoveries are they are meant to be brought home into everyday life. As the Zen saying puts it, "After enlightenment, the laundry." Although, of course, it's not the same laundry anymore.

(William Bridges, *The Way of Transition*, 2001)

As the quote suggests, returning to one's home environment after much change requires re-adjustment. Typically, during re-entry most returning sojourners, in reaction to the change, experience distress such as feelings of disorientation, anger, isolation and depression that can be traumatic and long lasting (Storti, 1997). Most of the studies and theories selected for this review concern international students because they tend to be in the emerging adulthood developmental stage.

Re-entry Readjustment

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) interviewed returning American Fulbright grantees about their re-entry experiences and found that many experienced re-entry distress. They proposed the W-curve to illustrate inclusion of re-entry as the last phase in the cross-cultural experience. They concluded sojourners feel hope upon return but that over time they experience a decline in mood due to the shock that home was not like what they had expected and consequently socially withdraw. Eventually, returnees' mood elevates as they readapt to life in their home culture.

Re-entry Distress Symptoms

Gaw (2000) examined American college student returnees' symptoms associated with re-entry, their severity, and students' willingness to see a counsellor. He used a cross-cohort, descriptive survey that included 66 American citizens (32 male and 34 female) who had completed high school education outside the United States. Their average age was twenty and

the average stay abroad was ten years. He used the revised Personal Problems Inventory (PPI) and the Reverse Shock Scale (RSS) developed by Seitar and Waddell (1989, cited in Gaw) in his survey. Symptoms of distress included depression, alienation, isolation, loneliness, general anxiety, speech anxiety, friendship difficulties, shyness concerns and feelings of inferiority. Loneliness and isolation were considered severe or significant by at least 30% of the sample and 22% found college adjustment, depression, career choice, feelings of alienation and trouble studying as either significant or severe problems. Over 80% of the participants were not willing to see a counsellor for any given problem or concern. Because the study dealt with involuntary sojourners who followed their parents, the results may not generalize to sojourners who move abroad on their own volition or at an older age. Furthermore, other studies have also reported participant perceptions of re-entry distress symptoms as mild or moderate (Gama & Pederson, 1977).

Theoretical Perspectives

Expectations. There are several re-entry theoretical models. Some researchers assume expectations are an important factor in determining adjustment during cross-cultural transitions and re-entry (Rogers & Ward, 1993). In an effort to empirically support this assumption, Rogers and Ward (1993) systematically looked at the association between expectations of social difficulty and psychological adjustment in returning student sojourners. They proposed a social-cognitive framework whereby a discrepancy between expectations and actual re-entry experiences affects psychological adjustment during re-entry. They tested two competing hypotheses about expectation-experience discrepancies: the realism hypothesis and the directional/evaluative hypothesis. The realism hypothesis claims large absolute discrepancies between expectations and experiences are associated with psychological distress. The

directional/evaluative hypothesis maintains a large discrepancy between unrealistic positive expectations and actual experiences is associated with psychological distress during re-entry.

The sample in this New Zealand study consisted of fifteen female and five male secondary school students (average age of 18 years). The students were completing a year long secondary school educational exchange in one of six countries: the United States, Canada, France, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Indonesia. Sixty percent of the participants had had previous overseas experience although the researchers did not specify the type of experience. The researchers used a longitudinal approach in which the participants completed questionnaires during their overseas placements and upon their return to New Zealand. The first questionnaire focused on the returnees' expected social difficulties during re-entry and the second one focused on actual social difficulties experienced upon return. This 13-item sociocultural adjustment scale asked the students to rate expected and actual difficulty experienced on a 5-point scale in areas such as resuming friendships and becoming accustomed to the pace of life. To assess psychological distress, they measured depression by using the Beck Depression Inventory and they used the Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory to measure anxiety.

They considered variables such as length of return and previous overseas experience. They found no significant correlation between length of return and psychological distress nor did they find any significant differences between students who had previous overseas experience and those who did not. There was however, a significant association between experienced social difficulty and psychological adjustment. Furthermore, the directional hypothesis received some support since participants with a large discrepancy between negative experiences and negative expectations encountered more depression and anxiety than those with a small discrepancy. The researchers suggest due to the association between unmet positive expectations and

psychological distress, it may be worthwhile to over-prepare sojourners for the social difficulties they may encounter during cross-cultural re-entry transitions.

Some returning sojourners may be aware of the potential interpersonal re-entry challenges. A study by Bochner, Lin and McLeod (1980) set out to explore prospective attitudes of sojourners before returning home. The participant population consisted of eleven male and four female international graduate students whose average age was thirty years. The students were returning to their home countries in Asia upon finishing their program in Hawaii. They were given a one-page questionnaire that asked them how they felt about going home. The participants also listed and ranked what they hoped would happen when they returned home and what negative expectations they had about going home. The researchers categorised the answers and found that most answered anticipatory thoughts and feelings about entering or resuming interpersonal relationships such as work and peer groups, and family relations (89%). As a group, the topic of relationships was represented in both positive and negative statements. Some typical positive phrases were meeting with family and being with friends and typical negative statements included family relations being too formal and friends having different views. The researchers claimed that the simultaneous expression of both positive and negative expectations in interpersonal relations indicated that descriptively, the sojourners felt ambivalent and anticipated role conflicts upon return. They concluded returning sojourners consider the process of re-engaging with social networks as the most significant aspect of re-entry.

In his book, *The Art of Coming Home*, Storti (1997) focuses on the returning experiences of sojourner populations such as exchange students, Peace Corps volunteers, military personnel and their families, missionaries and missionary children. He considers re-entry distress from a changed home environment perspective. He breaks down the definition of home into three parts:

a familiar place, familiar people and routines of predictable patterns of interaction. Returnees expect these three criteria unchanged but find the contrary. He suggests returning sojourners acknowledge that home is not merely a place that is inhabited and anticipate creating their sense of home anew upon arrival.

Cultural Identity. According to Kim, cultural identity is a “self-definition and definition by others and serves as a frame of reference or a system of knowledge and meaning—it is an extended conceptual horizon against which the individual assesses his or her own thoughts and actions” (p. 49). Sussman (2000) uses the term cultural identity to describe the degree to which sojourners identify with their home and host country that shifts during cross-cultural transitions. The manner in which cultural identity shifts depends on the sojourners’ task centrality, cultural identity centrality and flexibility. Task centrality is the motivation a sojourner has to succeed at the assigned overseas task. Cultural identity centrality pertains to the amount of significance sojourners place on their cultural identity. When it is high, less extreme cultural accommodation is likely to take place while sojourning. Conversely, when it is low the sojourner is likely to adapt to the new culture. The last variable, cultural flexibility is the sojourner’s ability to make the modifications in behaviour necessary for adjustment in a cultural transition. According to Sussman, cultural identity can also be a predictor and mediator of re-entry adjustment. Sussman’s Cultural Identity Model delineates four types of cultural identity shifts returnees can experience during repatriation: subtractive, additive, affirmative and intercultural/global shifts. Sussman assumes that task centrality is high in each shift. A subtractive shift takes place when a sojourner’s cultural identity centrality and flexibility are low. For instance, an American sojourner who feels “less American” upon return to her home country most likely adopted a host culture identity and finds it difficult to be flexible at re-entry. Consequently, the sojourner does

not feel she has much in common with compatriots (Sussman, 2000). The additive shift characterises one who holds a moderate home-cultural identity and high cultural flexibility. This combination results in feeling similar to host country members while feeling alienated at home. Both additive and subtractive shifts are generally characterised with high sociocultural adaptation, lower stability and clarity of self-concept, which results in low self-esteem and negative affective responses during repatriation. An affirmative identity shift entails a home culture identity centrality that is strengthened throughout the transition cycle. This shift is associated with an unsuccessful host culture adaptation and low repatriation distress. Finally, the intercultural/global identity shift is characterised as holding multiple cultural scripts simultaneously and having an awareness of one's own cultural identity. One's self-concept is clear and stable and low distress is experienced during repatriation. The author notes that this type of identity shift is not attained through multiple cultural transitions but rather with an understanding of oneself as a cultural being and with an awareness of change in cultural identity (Sussman, 2001).

Sussman (2002) found empirical support for the hypotheses that cultural identity strength is associated with repatriation distress. The participant population of this study consisted of 113 American returnees (62 women and 51 men) who had previously taught for the Japanese English Teacher's (JET) program for up to 27 months. The average time since initial re-entry was 30 months. Ethnicity/race data were not collected although the author claims that most teachers in the JET program are White. Participants were recent college graduates with a mean age of 28 years. Twenty-five participants filled out a self-report in person and 88 participants completed an online version. Scales used in the questionnaire measured cultural adaptation, cultural identity strength, cultural identity change, transition change, repatriation preparedness and

repatriation distress. The results indicated cultural identity strength was inversely correlated with repatriation distress. Those who experienced high levels of distress during their repatriation to the United States felt the most estranged from their American identity. Lastly, there was no significant correlation found between cultural adaptation level and cultural repatriation distress and the author hypothesised this was due to a lack of accurate recall on the part of the participants.

Salient Factors in Re-entry

Much of the re-entry literature examines variables associated with re-entry distress such as changes in values, age, gender, communication with home while abroad, and communication in re-entry relationships.

Value Changes. Uehara (1986) studied variables associated with re-entry distress by investigating 41 female and 17 male university students' readjustment experiences. The students' mean age was 23 years. They had sojourned for an average of 12.5 months and had been back for an average of 19.4 months. Participants' answers to a 146-item questionnaire were compared to a control group of 74 similar-aged students who had only travelled within their home country. The questionnaire measured the intensity of problematic adjustment by focusing on different psychological and physical problems such as alienation, loneliness, feelings of loss, withdrawal, unhappiness, anomie, depression and sickness. The study examined the relationship between re-entry distress and variables such as: age, length of foreign sojourn, adjustment to host country, international political and social concern, value change, desire to return home, and information on the home country. Uehara postulated that the younger the age at which an individual lives in a foreign country, the greater the re-entry adjustment problems would be occur, and the more one's basic values change, the greater the problems in readjustment. The

results indicated that the sojourn group experienced re-entry distress to a significantly greater degree than the control group. The only variable found significantly positively associated with re-entry distress was value change. Some of the changes in values included relationships with old friends, changed views on female and male relationships, individualism and changed achievement-oriented behaviour. Uehara speculated that the sojourners' developmental stage and its predominant task of identity exploration made the sojourners susceptible to changing their values.

Age. Gullahorn and Gullahorn also surmised that age could be a variable in re-entry distress. Although senior Fulbright grantees such as professors and lecturers reported distress such as annoyance and frustration when not afforded the same respect as when abroad, they generally did not find returning traumatic. Many student grantees however, felt lost upon their return. Gullahorn and Gullahorn suggested the students, typical of their developmental stage, had not yet 'found themselves' in their own country and zealously adopted host culture values when abroad. During re-entry, they were hesitant to relinquish the security they had achieved in doing so while abroad.

Gender. Gama and Pedersen (1977) surveyed twenty-two male and nine female Brazilian Latin American Scholarship Program of American Universities (LASPAU) graduate students who returned from a period of study in the United States. The participants' average age was 28 years and the average time spent abroad was 25 months. The data were collected through interviews on 14 potential problem areas and assessed for critical incidents and readjustment problems, intensity of problems, and self-perceived adequacy in coping with the problem. Significant differences between sexes were related to family life in that female participants reported more difficulties coping with family expectations and value conflicts. They also felt

less adequate in coping with family supervision in regards to lack of privacy than the male participants did. Most returnees experienced conflicts and problems related to their professional lives such as a lack of intellectual stimuli, and unmet high expectations of the system and their roles. Most however, did not consider their problems intense and felt they were coping with them adequately.

Brabant, Palmer and Gramling's (1990) study supported gender as a variable associated with re-entry distress. They analysed questionnaires returned from 96 international students (mean age of 30) from the Near East, Central and South America, Asia and Nigeria who returned from studying in the United States. The questionnaire included items on demographics and areas such as relationship problems with family and friends, and problems with daily life. The results indicated female participants experienced more relationship and daily life problems upon return to home country than male participants did. Brabant et al. concluded it was mostly likely that the female participants changed while they were abroad and their families and friends' responses to the change may have been problematic.

Staying abreast of changes at home. Another finding in the Brabant et al. study was that visits home during the sojourn period inversely correlated with family problems upon re-entry. They suggested that maintaining communication and contact with the home country during the sojourn facilitates re-entry. Adler (1981) also found this in her study of the re-entry process of 200 corporate and governmental employees returning to Canada after living abroad for at least two years. She used questionnaires and interviewed the participants in order to explore emerging patterns of what returning to a familiar place was like. The results showed that employees found re-entry into their home country and home company more difficult than the initial move to the foreign country. Furthermore, those who were aware of changes taking place back home while

abroad claimed to feel much more effective in the workplace compared to the returnees who were not kept abreast of changes. Adler concluded that maintaining frequent communication with their home company while abroad contributed to having less surprises and unmet expectations. Unfortunately, the author failed to delineate her methods or empirical results.

Communication in re-entry relationships. Martin (1986) explored dimensions of communication change in re-entry relationships during periods of transition. One hundred and seventy-three American student sojourners (138 female and 35 male) averaging 18 years of age answered questionnaire surveys at least four months after returning. The participants studied in Turkey or Germany for a period ranging from a month to a year. The participants were asked about their current communication and specific communication changes in re-entry relationships with parents, siblings, and friends. The results indicated that parent and sibling communication became closer, equal and smoother while friend-relationship communication was characterised as more superficial than it was pre-sojourn. The author attributed the changes in the communication pattern with parents to the developmental stage of the students in which their thinking shifted from a dichotomous, absolutistic thinking to a relativistic one. Martin surmised that the changes in friendship communication were a result of having less in common since the sojourners may have experienced a shift in attitude and personal constructs while living abroad.

Preparation for Re-entry

From the literature on student returnees, researchers and counsellors have created programs to help ease re-entry transition. According to Sussman (1986), regardless of the sojourner population, re-entry training must entail helping them to understand and become aware of their increased knowledge of their host country, changes in their thinking and behaving, changes in their home culture, and expectations of home culture individuals. She maintains that

programs should also include a component on the cultural adaptation process and assistance in planning for an individual's adjustment to home culture's social and work settings.

Re-entry programs may use different strategies to help sojourners. For example, Westwood, Lawrence and Paul (1986) implemented a program that focused on preparing returnees for a wide range of social, cultural, political, educational, and professional re-entry difficulties. A unique feature of this training program is the use of guided visualisation exercises in a group setting to sensitise the students to issues that they may confront upon return. Students reported the program stimulated them to proactively deal with re-entry issues upon their return.

Arthur (2003) proposed a critical incident approach to facilitating returnees' awareness of change. In a psycho-educational group setting, returning international students highlight particular instances that were conducive to or resulted in cultural learning and ways they had changed. Unfortunately, the lack of feedback of the group's effectiveness is a limitation. Although these programs are geared towards international students, the strategies for training can also extend to perpetual sojourners, although targeting them for a program may prove difficult.

Multiple Re-entry Experiences

In re-entry training, Sussman (1986) hypothesised from the existing literature that distress associated with re-entry diminishes with repeated re-entry. She later found in a study of American corporate sojourners that multiple re-entries did not ease repatriation transition (Sussman, 2001). Eight of the eleven participants with more than one overseas experience reported subsequent repatriations were as or more difficult than the first.

Onwumechili, et al.'s (2003) theoretical paper considered intercultural transients, such as diplomatic families, seasonal migrant labourers, sailors and long-term tourists, who regularly alternate residence between their homeland and a host foreign country. The authors use Knight's

(2002, cited in Onwumechili, et al.) metaphor of *cultural contracts* to explain the cultural identity shift that occurs during transients' re-entry. It refers to the product of a cultural identity negotiation between the transient and his or her family, friends, and acquaintances during each re-entry. This cultural contract is exchanged and managed implicitly and pertains to a shift in values, beliefs, norms and patterns of communicating. There are three cultural contract types: ready-to-sign, quasi-completed, and co-created. The ready-to sign cultural contract involves the transient pre-negotiating and choosing the contract by him or herself. The transient is not mindful or respectful of the cross-cultural experience and may do this because they are exhausted with the stress of multiple repatriation experiences. The quasi-completed cultural contract is partially pre-negotiated but partly open for negotiation and this type of contract allows the transient to maintain some measure of sociocultural distance upon re-entry as a protective measure in avoiding stress. Finally, the co-created contract is fully negotiable and only limited by personal preferences. It is considered optimal for maintaining relationship coordination across cultures and it requires an acknowledgement and valuation of cultural differences by all parties involved. This framework may apply to perpetual sojourners' latest re-entry.

Emerging Adulthood

According to Erikson (1968), the lifespan is divided into stages or periods that are identifiable by specific conflicts that must be resolved. The conflicts created by the demands of the environment can be dealt with adaptively or maladaptively but only when the conflict is resolved can an individual deal competently with the next stage of development. From twelve to twenty years of age, adolescents tackle the conflict between identity and role confusion (Erikson). It is purported that an adaptive, successful resolution of this conflict results in establishing one's own identity as separate from parents. The next stage is young adulthood,

which lasts from the age of nineteen to forty years (Erikson). The conflict in this stage is between intimacy and isolation to which resolution gives way to intimacy with others. It refers to one's ability to relate to another human being on a deep, personal level and to give and share with another individual without expecting to receive in return. When a sense of identity is not achieved, one usually fears committed relationships and retreats into isolation.

Arnett (2000) proposed a stage in development referred to it as emerging adulthood that spans from the late teens and throughout the twenties. The emerging adult subjectivity's is not that of an adolescent but not yet of an adult. They do not perceive marriage and parenthood as defining one as an adult. Instead, being an adult means accepting responsibility for one's self and making independent decisions leading to self-sufficiency and financial independence (Arnett, 1997 cited in Arnett). The transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood intensifies in the late twenties and is reached by 30 years of age in these respects.

A key feature of emerging adulthood is identity exploration in areas of love, work, and worldviews. The focus of romantic relationships is on exploring the potential for emotional and physical intimacy and not on role commitment. As a part of identity exploration, some emerging adults may travel and live abroad for a limited period, often in the context of limited term work or educational experience (Arnett). However, work experiences in emerging adulthood point at preparation for adult work roles (Arnett). In addition, changes in worldview are a central part of cognitive development for emerging adults (Perry, 1997 cited in Arnett). For instance, a college education challenges one's worldviews and most emerging adults finish their education with different worldviews than when they began university.

I focus on Arnett's emerging adulthood developmental stage because I agree that many people in their early twenties are engaged in identity exploration rather than role commitment

and therefore have the freedom to move abroad and experience different cultures. The chronology of Arnett's developmental stage provides context to issues occurring in the sojourner's readjustment. For instance, those in latest re-entry will be further along in the developmental stage and more likely to commit to identity roles.

Concluding Comments

Cross-cultural transitions are deeply felt phenomena and the changes sojourners undergo when abroad affect their re-entry adjustment. Although not all re-entry experiences are negative and distressing, the literature indicates that they have the potential to cause returnees emotional and interpersonal discomfort particularly for those in emerging adulthood. If re-entry is a deeply felt experience, what is it like for sojourners who experience this phenomenon more than once? Some research indicates that regardless of previous returning experience, latest re-entry can be distressing. From my experience with multiple re-entry, I concur that latest re-entry is not eased by previous ones. In my latest re-entry, not only had I experienced repatriation distress, but I also dealt with changes in my cultural identity and typical emerging adulthood issues such as role commitment. I propose that latest re-entry in emerging adulthood is a distinct phenomenon that is not represented in the re-entry literature and it is the intent of the present study to address this gap in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

One cannot assume single re-entry research sheds light on the issues faced by emerging adult sojourners in their latest re-entry for a variety of reasons. First, emerging adult sojourners comprise a unique population. Most of the re-entry literature however, pertains to populations such as: students, missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers, military families, and government and corporate employees whose motivations for moving abroad involve formal education or involvement in an organisation. Alternatively, perpetual sojourners may sojourn primarily for reasons such as pleasure seeking or cultural learning. Another reason the literature may not explain the issues faced by this population is that different re-entry tasks may be involved. For instance, most sojourning corporate or government employees undergo intercultural transitions with their families and may return to the same house they lived in before leaving. Conversely, perpetual sojourners mainly move abroad alone and many must find a new place of residence each time they come home. Furthermore, it is unlikely that they return to an established employment opportunity as corporate sojourners do. Lastly, unlike previously investigated populations, perpetual sojourners can experience isolation since they do not move abroad within an organisation where they can share their experiences with other returning sojourners or partake in re-entry training programs.

This study looks to fill gaps left by previous research. Specifically, previous research has not examined many other facets of this phenomenon including questions such as: Do previous re-entries ease the transition and reverse culture shock of subsequent re-entries? Do sojourners' expectations about coming home change as they accumulate re-entry experience? Once re-entered, do these sojourners still feel motivated to leave? Are there issues that are specific to

latest re-entry? Investigating the experience of latest re-entry can help answer some of these questions.

Finally, the existing re-entry literature has not considered developmental stages specifically, which may be overlooking the psychosocial developmental issues directly influencing re-entry distress. Considering latest re-entry in the context of emerging adulthood can help delineate psycho-social developmental variables associated with re-entry distress. One variable may be normative pressure to “settle down” or achieve in a career. In addition, there is a perceived loss of freedom to leave again because of a desire to commit to roles in career or relationship.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of latest re-entry in perpetual sojourning during emerging adulthood. The outcome of this study can inform counselling practices by familiarising clinical counsellors with the issues of this phenomenon. Furthermore, universities and international organisations have long realised the importance of re-entry training programs for returnees yet there remains a lack of supportive or psycho-educational programs offered to individuals in the community struggling with re-entry issues. I hope that learning more about this phenomenon can underscore the importance of such programs even while accessibility to this population may prove difficult.

Lastly, exposure of this phenomenon can serve to normalise and validate the experiences of latest re-entry of those who returned to reside in their home country several times. Some sojourners may assume that re-entry distress diminishes with each re-entry. Therefore, when they find their latest re-entry distressing they may internalise feelings of inadequacy or shame. Having their experiences reflected in this study can help them recognise that others endure

similar experiences.

Rationale for the Method

The following question guided this study: “What is the meaning of the lived experience of emerging adult sojourners’ latest re-entry?” Interpretive phenomenology was this study’s methodology because of its suitability for uncovering the meaning of the lived experience. The epistemological assumptions of interpretive phenomenology are post-positivist, thus assuming that empirical observations are important and possible while simultaneously being refutable. Furthermore, interpretive phenomenology asks *what*, rather than, how or why an experience occurs, as it does not attempt to offer a theory to explain or control the world (van Manen, 1990). Its goal is to offer a possibility of conceivable insights that bring our attention to and give us direct contact with the world, or more specifically with its *everydayness*. Heidegger, the philosopher most closely associated with interpretive phenomenology, coined the term *everydayness* to capture the essence of this phenomenon and this study seeks to reveal it (McLeod, 2001).

Interpretive phenomenology evolved from Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology (van Manen). Accordingly, it inquires about the lived experience of phenomena and assumes it has a universal essence or common structure that can be systematically uncovered and transformed into a textual description (van Manen, 1990). Lived experience is the term used for the events or occurrences experienced by persons in the world (Colaizzi, 1978; van Manen). By exploring and describing this lived experience, a phenomenological approach attempts to reveal or extend significant new knowledge about an everyday human experience (Moustakas, 1994). However, there is an important epistemological distinction between the two methodologies. Husserl maintained researchers could achieve a pure, objective description of a phenomenon whereas

Heidegger (1927/1996) espoused the term *natural attitude*, which states that knowledge or understanding always comes from a perspective or interpretation that is influenced by one's context. Husserl used the technique of *bracketing* in which the researcher explained all preconceived notions and assumptions about the phenomenon as a means of suspending them. In interpretive phenomenology, this technique is used not with the intention of suspending fore-understandings or eliminating the researcher's presuppositions, but rather to help hold them at bay when they ultimately emerge. It also makes them explicit therefore assisting the readers' understanding of the researcher's context. This epistemological underpinning aligns with my belief that previous knowledge about the phenomenon and my experience of it can influence my interpretation of the data.

Another difference between interpretive phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology is that the former attempts to go beyond mere descriptions by uncovering the meaning of everyday practices (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This can be referred to as hermeneutics. Interpretive inquiry does not assume that the participants are aware of the meanings they attach to their experience. The researcher abstracts the meaning from the narratives produced by the participants during the interviews by focusing on what they experience and not what they consciously know. Thus, the outcome is considered to derive from the intersubjectivity of the researcher and the participants. While it must be logical and plausible of the participants' experience, one true meaning is not expected (Lopez & Willis).

Another underpinning of this methodology is that lived experience is examined through a retrospective lens in order to learn about its essence and meaning (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, we gather data through recollections or reflections of experience that we have already passed or lived through. This assumption corresponds with my desire for participants to have enough

temporal distance from the experience in order to enrich their reflections and thoughts about it.

Procedures

Recruitment

I recruited participants through word of mouth and by placing posters around UBC campus, UBC Life and Career Centre at Robson Square, and at several ESL schools and community college ESL programs with the intention of targeting teachers. I also placed posters in public areas such as Granville Island Market and community centres. I sent an email to the alumni associations for the Asia Pacific Management Cooperative Program and Canadian Crossroads International (CCI) program. The poster informed prospective participants about the study and provided a contact number. I employed a purposive sampling strategy with certain inclusion criteria. Participants considered Canada their home country because the study took place in Vancouver, British Columbia. They sojourned and returned to live in Canada at least twice for a minimum of six months at a time. It was hoped that by requiring them to have re-entered at least 6 months ago, they would have had enough temporal closeness to the phenomenon to recall significant details of the experience, while having enough distance to give a full account of their experience. They had to be between the ages 25 to 35 years and the latest re-entry could not have taken place past the age of 30. I conducted a screening telephone call, explaining the focus of the study, its design and the time commitment required and ensuring that they met the inclusion/exclusion criteria (Appendix C). If caller met the criteria and agreed to continue, we scheduled an interview.

Participants

Four women and one man were interviewed. One participant responded from the email sent out to a program's alumni association, two from word of mouth, and two from the posters

places at community centres and Granville Island Market. One participant was 24 years old, two were 30 years old, another was 31 and one was 35 years of age. Most sojourn experiences were overseas except one participant who returned from the United States. Most sojourns were longer than 6 months except for one that returned from a three-month sojourn. The temporal distance from re-entry ranged from 8 months to 5 years. All participants sojourned and re-entered at least twice.

Data Collection and Interview Protocol

The interviews were held at UBC Life and Career Centre in a counselling room. I chose this location because of its convenient downtown location and because it is a community resource. The interviews were semi-structured and one hour long. Before the interview began, participants read and signed a consent form outlining confidentiality (Appendix C). I explained process consent, which is the right to withdraw from the project at any point if they felt the need. Once the consent form was signed, I started the audio recorder and began the interview.

According to Colaizzi (1978), the success of interview questions depends on the extent they tap into the subjects' experiences of the phenomenon apart from their theoretical knowledge of it. My opening question was, "Tell me about your latest re-entry experience starting from the time you decided to come back until now" (Appendix D). Although I had predetermined questions, I strove to maintain a conversational style with the aim of helping the participant to feel comfortable but at the same time producing themes and insights in order to stay as close to the experience as possible (van Manen, 1990). I continually asked what the experience was like and tried to stay as concrete by asking the participant to think of specific instances, situations, people, feelings or events. To do this I asked sub-questions such as:

1. What expectations did you have about coming back?

2. What incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
3. What thoughts stood out for you?
4. What feelings were generated by this experience?
5. Do you think you will leave again? If yes, what is prompting you to leave and is it similar to past motivations? If no, what is different about this time?
6. What do you feel are some major differences between this re-entry and previous ones?

At the end of each interview, I asked the participants what the interview experience was like for them and provided them with a contact number in case they had any questions or concerns.

Before conducting any interviews with participants, I held a pilot interview with a colleague who volunteered to share her latest re-entry experience. I wanted to ensure the questions that I asked were conducive to arriving at a deep and rich description of the phenomenon. That data generated from that interview was not used in the results of the study.

Recording and Transcription Practices

I audio recorded the interviews with a directional microphone placed on the table. I ensured the confidentiality of the participants by identifying tapes and transcripts with pseudonyms. Transcribing the interviews provided a hard copy of the conversation to isolate themes of the lived experience. I realised as I transcribed that I was the interpreter of the words of the interviewee.

Data Analysis

The goal of analysis in interpretive phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence. I adhered to a combination of van Manen's (1990) methodological themes, and Colaizzi's (1978) and Karlsson's (1993) steps for analysing the data. I used sub-steps for presenting the results in a manner in which all the participants' experiences

were considered individually as well as collectively.

1. The first step was bracketing which required me to describe my personal experience of the phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). The researcher is required to describe the phenomenon in experiential terms without offering causal explanations or interpretive generalisations (van Manen). In chapter one, I included my description of my latest re-entry experience. I also delineated my assumptions about the experience.
2. Karlsson (1993) refers to this step as developing “situated structure” or a synopsis of each participant’s experience of the phenomenon. I carried out the following sub-steps to develop the situated structures.
 - a. I created a table with three columns. The first column contained the transcript broken down into meaning units. Meaning units were discerned by subjective shifts in meaning so the content of each unit had one meaning. The second column contained my rephrasing of each statement of the participant. The third column contained a tag word used to represent the text of the meaning unit.
 - b. I considered the tag words that occurred most frequently as core themes in the experience.
 - c. I used the themes to develop a coherent description of each participant’s latest re-entry experience.
 - d. Once the situated structures were developed, I emailed each participant his or her own situated structure and asked if they felt it resonated with their experience. Each participant read his or her own situated structure and provided feedback about its accuracy. All the responses were positive and they all agreed the situated structure corresponded with their individual experiences.

3. The final stage consisted of writing the general structure based on the themes common in most of the experiences (Karlsson, 1993). The general structure includes descriptions of the themes and their manifestations. I used participants' quotes to bring the theme to life and validate them. In some instances, some participants' experiences contrasted to the common theme and were therefore delineated.

Issues of Representation

Although I had interpretive authority over the text, which is the nature of the methodology, my aim was to honour each participant's experience in its unique form by including the situated structures. I also obtained consensual validation through member checks and included my participants' feedback in this chapter.

Interpretive phenomenological writing requires that one reveals oneself in a deep collective sense (van Manen, 1990). My voice had a large part in the writing and I wrote about my personal experiences and assumptions of the phenomenon in the first person.

Ethical Considerations

This study obtained the approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of UBC. Using pseudonyms and changing identifying markers addressed confidentiality, which was the main ethical concern.

Criteria for Evaluating the Worth of the Study

There are certain criteria that I used to discern the value of this study. The first standard was resonance—the extent to which my findings resonated or related to the topic. This standard is highly pertinent to this methodology since good phenomenological description elucidates an aspect of a world of lived experience or *life world* and resonates with our sense of lived life (van Manen, 1990). To accomplish this, I used member checks and I asked my participants if they

felt the essence of the lived experience was captured in the situated structure I presented to them. I also completed a peer review, asking my committee members to what extent they felt my findings resonated with the topic.

My goal was to uphold fidelity by accomplishing my study's objective, which was to uncover the lived experience of latest re-entry. Through peer review, I obtained confirmation that I have accomplished what I set out to do.

The third standard I used to measure the worth of my study was pragmatic usefulness. Do the findings have a promise of being useful? Can the results better inform clinical counsellors when working with this client population? Can they serve to normalise and validate the experiences of these people? Through peer review, I had those questions answered. Moreover, I hope to further ensure this claim by making the information accessible in workshops and groups for this client population.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study aimed to uncover the essence of the latest re-entry experience of those who sojourned perpetually throughout emerging adulthood. Interviews with five participants were audio recorded, transcribed and later analysed for emerging themes. First, I analysed the data from each interview and developed situated structures describing each participant's latest re-entry. Subsequently, I abstracted the themes that were common in most of the participants' experiences and described them in a general structure. I included excerpts from the participant interviews to exemplify and support the themes. The common themes were: 1) anticipatory thoughts and feelings about re-entry, 2) emotional struggle, 3) sense of rootlessness/desire for rootedness, 4) isolation and lack of social support, 5) sense of readjustment, and 6) awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sojourning. Different aspects of the themes are delineated. This chapter includes the situated structures detailing the essence of each participant's latest re-entry experience followed by the general structure of the participants' latest re-entry experience.

Situated Structures

Julie

Julie eagerly anticipated her last sojourn but a culmination of negative experiences such as boredom at the workplace, frustration with cross-cultural barriers and alienation led to disappointment and a desire to return to her home country. As she planned her return, Julie felt uncertain about what she would do in her home country. Consequently, she delayed her return and continued to travel. She tired of being a foreigner however, and eventually she returned to her home country to satiate her desire for belongingness.

Upon arrival, several aspects of her home country and culture stood out for her. On the positive side, she had a new found appreciation of her home country's natural beauty, its vast amount of space and its diverse population. Conversely, she found home country members' focus on consumerism a harsh and disturbing contrast to the extreme poverty she had witnessed during her travels. She perceived the conversations she overheard in public places as superficial and trivial. Customer service seemed exceedingly friendly and disingenuous and she no longer desired to or felt she could connect with people about pop culture and media. She also noticed a lack of community that contrasted sharply with her host country where the streets were filled with people and children playing.

Loneliness was a part of Julie's latest re-entry experience. She felt she lacked the support of a social network and recognised that while sojourning, she had idealised her social situation in her home country. She envisioned returning to a large pre-existing social circle but soon realised that most people she knew had moved away and had difficulties reconnecting with the friends who remained since most led busy lives. Further alienating Julie was a sense of inhibition about sharing her negative experiences abroad. She felt talking about her experiences would overwhelm others and she sensed her social group expected to hear short, simple and positive answers to their questions about her sojourn. The friendships she formed within the expatriate community while she was abroad remained precious to her and despite the long distance, she continued to connect easily with them and felt a particularly strong bond due to the shared sojourn experience. Since leaving her host country, her appreciation of its culture has strengthened despite the struggles she endured there. She forged friendships with host culture members in Canada and enjoyed her host language with them. She was also grateful for her sojourn experience.

Initially, Julie struggled to obtain employment in her home country. Unsure of her focus, she decided to seek work in the same field she had worked in while abroad. A lack of formal training however was a barrier to securing employment in that area. Eventually, she formed a career goal and pursued the education and training necessary, but felt no pressure to commit to the profession long-term.

Julie felt that she lacked a home base and was unsure where to call home. She changed residences repeatedly and consequently learned she had a limited need for possessions. She desired a sense of permanence and was determined to remain at her latest residence for at least a year. Julie's family moved abroad while she was sojourning and their absence in her home country contributed to her sense of rootlessness. Her desire to sojourn persisted and she felt free to live abroad because her family no longer resided in her home country. She contrasted her situation to her friends who felt obligated by their families to stay in their home country. Julie pursued an occupation favourable to working abroad and planned to sojourn again once she graduated.

Joe

Joe did not experience a feeling of loss or of leaving something behind when he left his host country. Joe viewed his latest sojourn as mainly work related and transitory. He was familiar with his host country from previous business trips and therefore found it lacked the excitement of sojourning somewhere new and different. Viewing his sojourn as temporary resulted in his putting little effort into forging new friendships and he maintained close ties to his family and friends back home. He and his spouse decided to return when they were presented with insurmountable employment obstacles.

Joe considered his latest re-entry smooth and pleasurable. Having secured his former job while abroad gave him financial security and a sense of reassurance during re-entry. He maintained connection with his host country business contacts and they played a pivotal role in his transition to self-employment. Upon arrival, Joe felt at home and he enjoyed the familiarity of the city. His strong home social support group gave him a sense of belongingness, which was in contrast to his feeling foreign while abroad and not always fitting in or feeling connected to a social network. During his latest re-entry, he reminisced with his friends who visited him during his first sojourn. He felt this experience bonded them further and he enjoyed talking about the memories.

Joe had certain expectations of his latest re-entry. For Joe and his spouse, re-entry provided them with the opportunity to change their life focus. They felt it was time to begin a family since they were approaching their thirties and they were surrounded by the social support of their families. He considered his return permanent and desired to set down roots. His subsequent purchasing of a home contributed to his sense of rootedness. Joe's perspective on sojourning shifted as he currently feels sojourning would be too disruptive to the life he created for himself and his family in his home country. Furthermore, responsibilities such as a mortgage and his business made sojourning unfeasible. He remained desirous of going abroad but only on vacation. He remained appreciative of his time abroad during his twenties and he was glad he took the opportunities when he was presented with them.

Estella

Unavoidable circumstances occurring in her host country forced Estella to return much sooner than she had anticipated. Her declining health was the main factor prompting her return,

although she denied its severity for a period. Another reason for her return was increasing tensions at the workplace wherein cross-cultural issues became insurmountable.

From previous experience, Estella expected readjustment challenges but several issues made her re-entry complicated and she felt her latest re-entry was the most testing in comparison to previous ones. The health issues she faced required a period of recovery and she was forced to postpone creating her life in her home country during her convalescence. Estella isolated herself from her friends, which was in stark contrast to the social lifestyle she led within the expatriate community while she was abroad. One variable contributing to her desire for isolation was she felt unprepared to answer questions about her sojourn and felt others expected her to recapitulate it in a few short comments.

Estella was unemployed for the first six months of her re-entry due to the health problems. However, once she had convalesced, she felt apathetic towards her unemployment and considered herself as “wasting away” during that period. She experienced relationship strain at home with her parents as they urged her to work. Eventually, she gained employment and the daily routine of work served as an impetus to pursue personal interests and social activities during her free time. She felt her job would not fulfill her long-term but she was appreciative of having a stress-free job to ease her back into the workforce.

Estella felt her readjustment period was extensive and she lacked a realistic sense of time. For instance, she noticed she referred to her sojourn as if it had occurred only a few days prior despite having been back for months. Ultimately, she realised that readjustment involves time, becoming patient with herself and refusing to feel guilty. Estella’s parents were a great source of support during her re-entry. She lived with them and enjoyed the comfort of home but she felt it was not an ideal situation to be in at the age of thirty. She wanted to become financially stable

and independent and residing with her parents was immensely helpful in attaining her goal. She no longer intended to sojourn because she felt she was in the life stage where she needed to work towards reaching her goal of becoming financially independent particularly if she planned to have children.

Estella appreciated aspects of her home country such as its natural beauty but she was also aware of its disadvantages. She felt nostalgic about certain elements of her sojourning experience such as her friendships and her lifestyle. She was appreciative of her friendships formed within the expatriate group and remembered the emotionally difficult good-byes. She missed the conveniences available in her host country such as affordable entertainment, expedient, well-situated public transportation, and the host culture cuisine and products. Although she longed for many things from her sojourn experience, Estella knew returning to her host country would not satiate her longing because it was the life she created for herself there and not the place that she missed the most.

Ginny

Ginny returned unsure of what to do and at times she felt she was aimlessly wandering. She was aware of re-entry challenges from previous experience and she wanted to take her time before committing to a certain career or place. Initially, Ginny sought proximity to her pre-existing social network, but ultimately, her sense of rootlessness and employment dissatisfaction led her to relocate within Canada.

For Ginny, it was a readiness to focus on career and gain financial independence that impelled her return to Canada but soon she felt engulfed by pressure to achieve a successful career. This pressure stemmed from a combination of perceived societal expectations coupled with her desire to contribute to society and feel accomplished. In response to the pressure Ginny

put her career before her other needs; she chose to stay in a work environment that was emotionally trying and unsupportive because it was instrumental to her career advancement. Eventually, however Ginny became overwhelmed and she felt out of control. She extricated herself from the situation although it delayed reaching her career goals. Dissatisfaction with her environment instigated another relocation to a city that met her needs in social support and lifestyle.

Eventually Ginny stopped pressuring herself to quickly attain her career goals. She pursued the education necessary to broaden her skill set but did not pressure herself to commit to it as a lifelong career. The experience of unemployment was disheartening, frustrating, and isolating for Ginny. Her underemployment in her home country was a sharp contrast to the plethora of employment opportunities abroad and she felt humbled by it. At times, she even felt judged by others.

The desire to feel rooted was also central to Ginny's latest re-entry experience. She feared being unable to readjust but she remained determined to feel at home in Canada. Ginny explored what rootedness meant to others in order to help her create a sense of it for herself. Being in a committed relationship contributed to her feeling rooted and she believed owning property would provide her with a base that would strengthen her sense of rootedness. When Ginny initially returned, she felt critical about certain aspects of her home culture. She was struck by the focus on materialism, a lack of community and a near obsession with work and career. In time, she became less critical and realised not all home country members adhered to those aspects of the culture.

Ginny felt bonded to those with whom she shared sojourning and travel experiences because she could reminisce and be nostalgic with them. Ginny felt misunderstood and judged

for her choices by those in her social network who did not sojourn. More recently, she felt her relationships were strengthened because she displayed vulnerability about her re-entry struggles and in turn received emotional support. Sojourning no longer defined her but was something she did in the past as Ginny intended to permanently reside in her home country.

Barbara

While abroad, Barbara had mixed emotions about her return. She was content with the life she had created for herself abroad but she was also excited to start her life back home. From previous re-entry experience, she expected challenges readjusting, and thus strove to ensure minimal disturbance to her home life by keeping her apartment and beginning her job search online while she was in her host country. However, upon return, Barbara faced many challenges in securing housing, employment, and in maintaining her relationships. She experienced social isolation and disconnection from her home social network. This was particularly true for her during the time of her initial arrival since the usual activities she partook in with her friends now disinterested her. A culmination of grief over the loss of a relative, financial strife, and loss of a relationship made her feel she was barely coping. No longer able to afford her apartment, she was forced to find a new place to live. After staying with a friend, she moved into a shared accommodation but found it uncomfortable living with strangers. Eventually, Barbara became depressed, felt confused, unable to function and helpless. Fortunately, with the encouragement of a family member, Barbara sought treatment and her depression ultimately subsided.

Several factors contributed to her re-entry adjustment. She began to seek out social support by opening up to her friends and dealt with the loss of her relationship. She forged connections with her new roommates and felt at home in her new place. She focused on her job search and obtained employment she enjoyed and felt excited about. She also became involved

in her community. She felt no desire to sojourn again but she planned short trips abroad. She thought sojourning could sometimes be used as an escape but for her it forced her to examine parts of her life she otherwise would not have. She acknowledged she had a challenging re-entry yet she held a great appreciation of her sojourn experience because it was personally fulfilling and empowering. She created strong bonds and received social support while she was abroad and was disappointed over losing contact with her friends abroad.

General Structure

The general structure of the of latest re-entry experience for five people who perpetually sojourned during their twenties will now be described. Six main themes that represent the core experience of latest re-entry are: anticipatory thoughts and feelings about re-entry, emotional struggle, sense of rootlessness/desire for rootedness, isolation and lack of social support, sense of readjustment, and awareness & appreciation of the benefits of sojourning. Each theme is described and excerpts from the participant interviews are included to further delineate the themes.

Theme 1: Anticipatory Thoughts and Feelings about Re-entry

Participants experienced anticipatory thoughts and feelings about re-entry as they prepared to return. The thoughts and feelings about re-entering pertained to expectations of facing multiple challenges, excitement about changing life focus, and intentions of remaining in their home country permanently.

Most participants referred to their expectations of facing multiple re-entry tasks and challenges. The sojourners were aware they could potentially become overwhelmed because of concurrently having to secure employment, seek a place of residence, and face career decisions upon returning. A participant described her anticipation of the challenges she faced upon returning to her home country and yet felt she underestimated the intensity of the difficulties.

I knew I was going to be in for it (laughs) but I didn't know it was going to be that intense! Like you know it is going to be really hard but you can't grasp exactly what that is going to be. I knew I would be looking for a job and looking for a place to live and breaking up (her long-term relationship), like a lot of huge things on my plate, right? So there wasn't any really easy solution.

Because the participant anticipated facing many challenges simultaneously, she attempted to keep the disruption to her life in her home country at a minimum.

I knew I only wanted (sojourn) to be a short period because of how much work goes into getting back into the country, knowing that from the first time. That's why I jumped on board with this (latest sojourn opportunity) because I knew it was only going to be (a short period). I thought it wouldn't provide as much disruption in my life. I also kept my apartment and tried to make a bit more of a planned re-entry. So it wouldn't be as chaotic....

In response to her anticipation of the challenges that lay ahead, one participant planned to be easy on herself and not force herself to deal with all the challenges at once. She arranged to live with a friend and spend time visiting family and friends.

I knew that it would be hard and I knew that I had to have stuff in place because last time I didn't do as well. Like the first time I left pretty soon after, a year and a half after. So I wanted to be easier on myself about the whole thing.

Participants felt excitement about changing their life focus. For these participants, moving back involved letting go of one lifestyle and beginning another. For most, it was a shift from exploring different countries and experiencing life abroad to committing to roles in career, family, and relationship. For example, one participant described her excitement and readiness to redirect her focus towards productivity by formulating and reaching career goals.

I was really excited about returning. By the end of the year (end of sojourn)...I

was just so ready to get my life going. I just really felt like I was just drifting and I had seen as much as I could. ...When you move home, it is like I don't want to do this anymore (sojourn) and I want to start building towards something else...like my whole twenties have been really lateral since university and I really wanted to start building up something.

Another participant's excitement was about beginning a family. For him, returning to his home country provided him with the opportunity to proceed to the next life task of having children.

We had sort of decided at that point that we wanted to start a family as well so, that was another part of not wanting to stay in (host country). We knew we were getting to that time where you say well you know, we are getting to be thirty and if we are going to (have a family), now would be a good time to start to get serious. There was a sort of sense of inevitability and relief like we can now get on with the next step, kind of thing.

In addition to the sojourners redirecting their lives towards family and career, one participant described her re-entry as an opportunity to shift her attention from external, physical travel and sojourning to psychological processes and growth.

My friend put it this way. She said I have been doing all this exterior travelling and she said if you want to be successful in Canada then you have to do a lot more interior travelling, right? Use the same concept but do it psychologically. So that was part of the moving north to just take the time to explore the inner stuff

because I've put so much stimulus into my system, insane amounts of stimulus and people and events and places and, I think there is a lot of process time. You know, play with the definition of travelling a bit.

In contrast to participants' excitement and eagerness to begin a new phase in life, one participant looked at her re-entry with trepidation and uncertainty. She was insecure about her return because she felt she lacked a plan or purpose for coming back. Consequently, the participant delayed her return.

(I felt) a lot of uncertainty about what I was going to do when I was going back to Canada. I didn't really know what I would be doing or if I was going back to school. Then I figured why am I rushing back to Canada? I'm not really going back for any special reason.

Another anticipatory thought was the participants' intentions of remaining in their home country upon their return. As one participant explained, "*I knew that when I came back this time I was pretty much coming back for good.*" The returning sojourners considered their latest sojourn their last and they were intent on remaining in Canada permanently. One participant expressed his conscious decision to remain in his home country.

Certainly the second time (last time) when we came back from (host city) we said alright, that is it, barring any major incidents then we are probably here in Vancouver to stay.

This intent to remain in the home country stood out in the minds of the sojourners because

they considered their other re-entries as transitory. A sojourner explained her first re-entry was due to illness in her family. Since she did not return on her own volition, she knew she would leave again.

It (first re-entry) was a little bit weird because it wasn't that I decided to come home, it was that I had to come home and that is why I travelled again partially because I didn't feel like I got to really finish it. I felt like I was just getting into it and then I got pulled home so for the whole time I was committed that I would get to travel after. (Therefore) the first time it was like, if I don't like it then I'm just going to leave but I can stay if I want to whereas this time is was like you can't leave, you are not allowed to leave.

Theme 2: Emotional Struggle

The emotional pain endured during their latest re-entries was illustrated in the theme, emotional struggle. Most feelings were related to common re-entry challenges such as unemployment, lack of social support and readjusting to life in the home country. In reference to the struggle endured upon returning, one sojourner exclaimed, *"I just think that it is really important that people know when they are travelling, that the really, truly hardest thing about travelling is coming home and there is no doubt about it. One hundred percent hardest thing to do is to come home."* In particular, the emotional struggle experienced were helplessness and feeling depressed, frustration, and feeling pressure.

Participants felt helpless and depressed as a result of health or employment setbacks. One participant had these feelings because she could not create a life for herself in her home

country until she convalesced. She felt forced to put her life on hold and powerless over her situation.

This time was the hardest to come back and I've been back a couple times but nothing was like this time because my life was stalled for so long. Like it was stalled for two months before I could sort of try to get a routine back. Had I come home and started looking for a job, I would have given myself a couple of weeks and then started job-hunting...it would have been fine. I think I would have been a lot better than having to waste away on my parents couch...yeah, I think ...it definitely put a wrench in it (re-entry experience). Like I couldn't drive myself really, I couldn't work. Like it was about a month and a half before I could go for a proper couple kilometre walk ...and it was brutal. It was a really, really long recovery... so I didn't even get a job...and I was so apathetic and I just couldn't. I think if I had not had the (health issue) I could have taken a few weeks at home and then started job searching and got my life sort of on track a lot faster but because of the (health issue) it just didn't. I just couldn't seem to get my life going so I was at home and I didn't see any of my friends.

Another participant explained she felt depressed and helpless because of her dissatisfaction at work, lack of social support and the dark winter days.

I was in (place of residence) and I didn't know anyone and it was dark all the time and I just kind of lost it. I got no support. I went to (employer) crying twice and he was like you can do it, believe me, just make your way through it...and I was just like it was bad and I'm not the type of person who usually goes crying like that...it

is not me.

One participant felt helpless and consequently humbled by her experience of underemployment. Eventually, her experience influenced the way she felt about herself.

You know I would love to say okay I don't care if I ever have money and I don't care if I ever have a career but it's really, really difficult to especially when you grew up having everything and assuming that you would have everything. Then you spend a few years where no one wants to hire you and you are not getting paid very well and it is pretty disheartening and it is pretty hard on the ego no matter how much you care about it. I mean not working is pretty hard on your self image...it builds up. ...Anyone knows when you are unemployed and especially here, because work is such a huge factor and for some people that is what you do. ... And there is so much baggage on that right?

In the case of one participant, her relationship, employment and housing situations eventually lead her into a depression.

It was just all such chaos and eventually, five months later, I had a complete break down where I went into really bad depression. I wasn't eating... I started to cry everyday like walking down the street everywhere. I was sleeping all the time and I couldn't motivate to exercise which is usually a big part of my life. I wasn't seeing my friends anymore. I didn't want to talk or call any of my friends because I didn't have any positive energy to contribute to our relationship basically. ...I was just in such a hole... I literally could not function everyday, I couldn't do anything...I

couldn't think straight for myself...I had no idea what the solution was.

Experiencing frustration over setbacks in attaining employment or achieving career goals was common for most participants. One participant spoke of her frustration over financial woes that accompanied her underemployment and her extended job search.

I didn't have the time or money to do all the activities that I did or used to do like rock climbing and all that sort of thing so that was frustrating and hard but what can you do? If you don't have any money you just can't. I tried to do the alternatives as much as I could. ...I really pushed for getting a job and I looked in a whole bunch of different ways, got a lot of advice. I only got a job just a month ago so that took a really long time (approximately 8 months).

One returnee described how she initially felt frustrated with her lack of employment options because she felt her education and overseas experience made her employable. Eventually she came to accept further education and training was necessary to become gainfully employed.

It is pretty competitive in (home country). At first, I was all annoyed by it and like now I kind of got to the point where I realise that I haven't put enough training in. Like I have to kind of accept that that is my doing and not like I went to school and I did this and I travelled and I should be really employable and they should be giving me jobs. (I have to) make it happen for myself and I guess I've come to terms with it.

Feeling pressured is a part of the emotional struggle returning sojourners experienced. They felt pressures in relation to meeting the society's expectations as well as their own concerning what someone at the age of thirty should have already achieved. Due to the normative pressure, they felt they had to accelerate in achieving their goals. For one participant, it was about reaching her career goals by the time she turned thirty.

A lot of last year was about me being 29 and being freaked out ...So there was a lot of that last year and I think that was the whole rush, like I'm going to get this job, I'm going to get into this one year teaching program because that is going to look good and I'm going to go through these courses... and that'll be it ...and in one year I will have a career and that part is done, tick.

Another participant felt pressured by her home cultures focus on career and work. It annoyed her that people constantly asked her what she did for a living and eventually she rebelled against them.

I was like so pissed off about all the pressure. I decided to not have an official job. ...It was alright. I got a real kick out of telling people that I'm a professional vagabond and some people wouldn't know what a vagabond was (laughs).

One participant expressed feeling pressure to improve her financial situation. She wanted to work towards being financially independent because she desired having a family in the future.

I'm thirty-one and I don't have it together and I feel the need to get it together. I want to be more financially stable and I don't necessarily want to get married or I don't necessarily need to own a house but I need to be financially stable and

completely financially independent and I'm not, I'm just not. I have never sort of given that a chance and so now I have to do it and if I ever want to have kids I will probably do it by myself and I can't do that unless I'm financially independent and stable.

One returnee described the normative pressure she felt in her latest re-entry experience and contrasted it with her first re-entry. During her first re-entry in her early twenties, her focus was not future-oriented because she felt she had time to travel more before settling down.

For some reason, to me in my head (re-entry at age) 24 and 30 (are different) because I want kids and I want some of those things and I want to get a career. Like at 30 wow, I have to get my butt in gear but at 24 it was like well I still have a few years to slack off or just enjoy travelling and seeing things.

Conversely, the theme of emotional struggle was absent in one participant's experience. The participant found his re-entry experience pleasant and painless. He felt there was nothing keeping him in his host country and considered the experience of coming home as a positive one.

So no, all in all, it was a very positive thing the whole experience of coming back was not particularly traumatic. ...I suppose I was painting a picture that it was a relatively painless thing to come back and I, for us (participant and his partner), it truly was. We had nothing really keeping us (in host country) and there was much more a draw to come back to Canada. ...I mean psychologically, personally, emotionally it was a very positive transition coming back to Canada.

Theme 3: Sense of Rootlessness/Desire for Rootedness

Another theme core to the participants' experience of latest re-entry was a sense of rootlessness and a desire for rootedness. A sense of rootlessness pertains to lacking a sense of home and/or not feeling one belongs to a particular place. Commonly, participants perceived themselves as feeling disconnected to their home country. One participant expressed a sense of rootlessness by questioning if the city she returned to was really her home. She states, "*I am familiar with the city but when I think about home I kind of am still like is this home or is it somewhere I haven't been yet?*"

After spending time in a different culture, the participants' perspective of their home country and culture changed. They could see their home country objectively through fresh eyes and contrasted it to their host country, which resulted in the participants feeling disconnected and rootless. As one participant explained, "*I think that your perspective changes so much because you start being able to see your country a little bit more objectively and it kind of distances you from your own culture.*"

Participants made certain observations about their home country once they returned. Despite appreciating certain aspects such as its vast amount of space, relative cleanliness and natural beauty, participants also found shortcomings with their home country. For instance, participants perceived a lack of community in their home culture particularly in comparison to their host countries. One returnee perceived home country members as private and isolated in contrast to members of other cultures she had visited.

I really do like Canada but I always kind of felt like even being in (host country) and being in little towns...there was such a culture. ...All the kids are out playing soccer on the street and everyone is out doing things and I just feel like

here, everyone is kind of at home and in their own little world. I also think that European cultures have a kind of connection...even in England, the pub culture and how everyone, kids and adults and everyone just goes to the pub and here it is quite looked down upon. ...I do really like Vancouver, I like the outdoors and I like the good quality of life but I have talked to a lot of people that say it is so hard to meet people in Vancouver and I don't know if it is true or it is just being from here and not having that same connections (but) you go out to other places and people are friendly enough but it just seems that in other countries I meet a lot more people.

Another participant also perceived a lack of community and too much focus on work and material gain in her home culture. However, she wondered if her conclusions about her culture were idiosyncratic.

I'm having issues with materialism. I'm having issues with people's obsession of work and the lack of community and family that I think is here and maybe it is my own but I think that is an issue in our society that needs to be addressed. I think we are too focused on career and money and not focused enough on community. But maybe I'm hanging out with the wrong sorts or I don't know maybe it is just me thinking that.

One returnee perceived her home culture as consumer-focused, a quality drastically different from the developing countries she had visited while sojourning.

Just after I had finished volunteering in rural, rural (developing country) and it

was crazy poor and I came back and everything seemed so superficial and (I wondered) why do people need to buy things and the whole 'there is so much consumerism' and stuff and like but ... I also remember (riding) on the bus listening to other people's conversations and thinking the things they are talking about are so dumb. Like this girl was explaining how she had lost her sunglasses and I was just like well like who cares? That is so insignificant.

She found general interpersonal interactions in her home country unnatural. She felt host member friendliness to strangers exaggerated and insincere.

People were just like overly-friendly it seemed. Like everyone was talking to strangers and I don't know I just felt like no one ever did that to me (in host country) and like everyone was so happy and I was kind of confused and like weird.

Most participants desired a sense of rootedness and sought it in a variety of ways. For instance, one participant completed a project about identity and place as a means to understand and come closer to feeling rooted. She thought exploring the concept of home would help her feel connected to her home country. In the end, she concluded that she must make her own sense of home and community.

(The project) I did was on place and identity. I thought it would help me get resettled so I did a thing called home and what home means as a theoretical concept and interviewed local people and people from other cultures that have moved to Canada and asked them how they create a sense of home and what home

really is. Like is home a place? Is home a concept? Is it emotion? Is it people? It was kind of because I needed to learn that because I was looking for somewhere I fit. I took that it really isn't a geographical thing. It is more of a constructed concept...it is community and how you make community. I don't think it tied up loose ends or gave me any concrete answers but it helped me. Guess that there really isn't an answer and that you just have to make home.

In pursuit for a sense of rootedness, one participant felt compelled to travel and relocate within her home country. She was looking for a place where she could call home and because she was not accustomed to settling down in one place, she felt travelling around her home country would make her feel more comfortable.

I guess I've been back pretty much two years...and (I) didn't make a plan afterwards so when I came back ...I didn't know where I was going to live or what I was going to do and I kind of wandered around. I bought a (vehicle) and decided because I wasn't readjusting very well that if I treated Canada like a traveller then maybe I would like being back in Canada.

In contrast, repeated shifting of residences exacerbated another participant's sense of rootlessness. She was relieved and felt a sense of rootedness when she moved into latest residence where she planned to remain for at least a year. A place to call hers for an extended period was a welcomed change.

I just moved my stuff into my new place on Sunday and I'm just feeling like ah, this is so nice because I've been living out of a bag since June ...moving, moving,

moving. All my stuff was in my parents basement and storage where all there stuff is so it is just like (sighs with relief).

Another participant believed acquiring property would give her a sense of rootedness. She felt owning a home would give her stability and satisfy her desire for permanence because she would then have a place to return after she travelled.

I have this fixation on owning property and I think its partially that I want to have a nest and I want to go travel for a few months but still feel like I'm rooted. I find (the fixation) funny because like theoretically or intellectually I'm like that is stupid, that is really like who cares if you have a (house), but that is my obsession right now. It is just a piece of land but for some reason I like the idea of putting your stuff somewhere permanently since I've downsized myself almost to nothing and its been mobile for so long. ...Yeah, so I just want a space where I kind of be and that is my space and it is not going to be a temporary space.

Due to their desire for rootedness, participants no longer wanted to sojourn. As one sojourner explained, *"There is no real motivation at the moment to leave, it is just kind of the opposite where we are actually looking to set down more roots."* Participants believed leaving for a sojourn would only be disruptive to the lives they created for themselves in their home country. One participant did not consider sojourning a viable option anymore because he had a family and he wanted his children to live in the same city as their grandparents.

Coming back was the right thing for us to do. I think our traveling abroad was also the right thing at the right time and that it would certainly be more work to do

it with children. It would be more painful to separate from family and friends now that we have children and its been surprising how much so that is with children. You sort of when you don't have kids it is easy to think in an abstract way to think oh yes, kids that would be difficult but then when you think about it really begins a focal point and keeps you to where you are familiar and again family and friends and especially for us (participant and his partner) is a very big part of that.

For some participants, they viewed the purpose of sojourning differently. As they became re-adjusted to their lives in their home country, they wondered if sojourning was used as an escape from one's problems.

I can see it in my good friends that do a lot of travelling as well... I mean this is only my personal theory, people are always running away from stuff and that is what (sojourning) is more about rather than going to see the world and that sort of thing. Because even coming home now or just being in the sense that I am now, I can understand that there isn't really a huge desire to travel anymore. I think there is in some ways but I would be happy if I just stayed in my own community.

One participant realised that many people she met while sojourning also used it as a form of escape.

It kind of makes me wonder if a lot of people get addicted to travelling (sojourning) or if it is some way of escape or maybe something about my own issues but a lot of people I met overseas...didn't know what to do with their lives

and so this was a nice way of not having to deal with it. So I'm kind of curious about it because I think it (sojourning) is a wonderful thing but it is hard to know because it is wonderful and I love everything about it but I know I saw a lot of people who were living overseas and it was so obvious that they ran away.

Participants' desire to travel persisted and they wanted to vacation for short periods. One participant talked about wanting to vacation in the future but she worried she would miss something while she was away.

No, I mean I do have a couple of travel plans in the works a little bit but I don't I think it is more for fun and in some ways I don't want to go because I've made such great connections at home and then I'll be missing out on these things at home, which is really fascinating for me. So nothing is set in stone, it is kinda just there like an idea right now but I definitely have that sense of oh my god, what am I going to miss out on if I go away for a month.

One participant expressed her desire to return to her host country but only on vacation to visit her friends.

I'm going to have friends in the next few years end up getting married in (host country) and...I would absolutely go visit them and spend time there but I don't think I would go and try to make a life there, you know what I mean? I will go back to (host country) but I'll go back for two weeks. I don't think I will ever go back to (host country) to (work) again. I don't see that in my future.

One participant no longer wanted to sojourn because she was aware of the difficulties associated with re-entry and setting down roots.

That is another reason I don't want to (sojourn) again that quickly because I think that it might get harder, I think it might get harder each time. So I'm not so eager to take it lightly anymore that okay I'm just going to go a spend a year here because I know how much harder (returning can be).

A sense of rootlessness impacted one participant differently in that she did not want to settle down but instead, she wanted to sojourn again. Furthermore, her family's absence in her home country gave her a sense of freedom to leave. She contrasted her freedom to her home country friends' obligation to remain in close proximity to their families.

I'm not in a family where they are expecting me to stay in (home country) and have a family. My (parents) both left their parents and moved to a different country and even now they have left and gone away again and the option of staying in one place all the time is kind of not (appealing). Whereas I've got friends who are like, "Oh, gotta be here and I gotta have a family and I've gotta" and I just don't really (want that).

Theme 4: Isolation and Lack of Social Support

Participants experienced isolation and a lack social support. Initially, they felt unsociable and they did not feel a strong connection to most of the their friends and family. They also felt unsupported on different occasions throughout their re-entry experience.

A participant had difficulties bonding with others and she found it difficult to make new friends. She attributed her difficulties to her age group's focus on careers and relationship.

The older you get I think it is just harder to just to move somewhere and pick up friends. There is something that happens with age and I don't know if that is my perception but it seems like when you are in your early twenties you can meet people so much easier and then the older you get the more that it gets, I guess, everyone gets into their own pockets and lives.

Another participant found connecting with home country members while she was sojourning easier than connecting with them in home country and she found herself connecting more with people from other countries during her re-entry.

I meet a lot more people (when I) go away. My two experiences out of Canada I probably met more Canadians...then I have met in Canada, which is weird. Like in (first host country) I met tons of (Canadians) but I don't know if we connected because we were like abroad in that way... and then in (latest host country) same thing, I hung out with all the Canadians. Back here most people I meet seem to be from other countries so it is kind of weird. My friends call me international (participant's name) because I can't seem to quite, I don't know what that says about me but... I just seem to be more drawn to different cultures.

Another participant referred to having difficulties reconnecting and re-negotiating her pre-existing home country friendships upon her return.

I stayed home a lot when I first came back...most of them (home country friends)

live in Vancouver and have lives you know what I mean? Like, I was the one coming back and I didn't have... and they kept on going like they were always going, they had their routines and their lives and the things that they did. ... I knew that...it was not the first time that I had come home so I sort of knew what to expect.

Another participant also found it difficult to become involved in her friends' social lives.

Like those girls that I travelled with, they live here, and every time I came home for the summer or whatever for a short period I could see them a couple of times but when I ended up moving back here, I think it was more like they are used to me not even living here so even then it was kind of an effort to call people and see if they wanted to hang out.

One participant's sense of isolation and difficulties connecting was in part due to the lifestyle differences between her and her family. Her siblings had their own careers and families whereas the participant was single and currently facing career decisions. Due to their different experiences, she felt they could not relate to what she was going through in her re-entry.

That's always been challenging because I go home and they have their nice homes and they are pretty happy and they've got loving families and... you know, it is not the oh I would never want that, they have got nice kids. The hard part about that is I'm always feeling like I'm missing something and like when I come home I am the only one that is not a family, right? ... They (siblings) have always pretty much have had kids and are pretty happy with just what they are doing. You know,

they don't have all this restless angst about what am I doing with my life or none of that. They didn't go through that at all really.

Another aspect that contributed to participants' isolation was that they felt unsociable early in their re-entry. One reason for their lack of desire to socialise and reconnect with friends when they initially returned was that they felt uncertain about how to answer questions about the sojourn experience. One participant felt others expected a short version or summation of her entire experience abroad and she did not feel she could do that.

I just couldn't seem to get my life going so I was at home and I didn't see any of my friends. I didn't want to see any of my friends and I didn't even call people when I came home. I just didn't feel like seeing anyone and I didn't know what to say and ...people would say how was (host country)? Like, how do you answer that question right? I just didn't want to deal with it so I didn't.

Another participant felt inhibited about sharing the struggles she encountered abroad and only related the positive aspects of her sojourn. She felt it would be too overwhelming for her, and others, to talk about the struggles she endured.

When I got back I remember people would ask me how was (host country) and well it is was too much to tell people so I would say yeah it was good but it was too overwhelming to start talking about so I just kept it short and simple and even when people ask me now.

Participants perceived a lack of social support. For example, one participant felt this

way when she returned to her home country in that she needed a place to stay but did not feel comfortable asking others for help.

There has definitely been people that have been supportive but it was frustrating coming back from (a recent holiday) because we (participant and her partner) had no where to stay and it was like I'm from (home city) and I can't even think of people who would (have us stay with them). I could have started asking a lot more people than I had asked but we ended up staying on my friend's floor. But I just felt kind of like it is not as...welcoming as I had expected.

The same participant felt she had exaggerated the amount of social support in her home country while she was abroad. She returned to find her expectations of social support exceeded the actual support available to her in home country.

I think I even glorified (home city) thinking I know all these people here and when in fact most of the people I knew here or were very good friends with in high school have all gone away and done there own thing. Yeah, I was thinking that it was going to be so great and have one big party....never happened. It's kind of lonely and (I) don't really have a good base anymore and I feel kind of like my friends are everywhere.

Another factor contributing to a perceived lack of social support was ongoing unemployment or underemployment. The returning sojourners did not have the opportunity to make connections at the workplace. One participant described her experience of unemployment as, “*anti-social and if you are not working you have more social isolation.*”

One participant's theme contrasted with the others in that reconnecting with his friends and family was easy and enjoyable. He stayed in contact with his friends and family while he was abroad which helped him to feel connected because very little happened while he was gone that he did not know about.

I guess my wife and I are pretty easy going and it was very comfortable thing to come back and family is still there and friends we left behind, yup they are still there how you doing? See the face instead of on the end of a telephone or emails. We had friends that we stayed in touch with from back here in Vancouver and we knew where they were. We had a family base so it wasn't a particularly disorienting coming back. ...Again it was fairly seamless. And I mean, obviously my family, my parents, my wife's parents they were quite happy to see us come back. Nothing stands out as a particularly negative thing or positive...it was sort of hanging out with family and people would go, "Oh, hey your are back!"

Unlike the other participants, this sojourner found reconnecting with his pre-existing social group easier than making new friends in his host country.

There were certainly a number of people of with whom I had worked at the company here that we would also interact with socially and so that was nice and to be in touch with them and to be able to go out and do things with them. Well, it was nice. I mean there was a broader base of existing friends. Obviously, it is easier to pick up with your previous relationships, people that you were friends with before rather than sitting down and going out and playing pool or whatever

(in host country) and hey, you guys are the ones from Canada, eh? So that was sort of comfortable I suppose.

Theme 5: Sense of Readjustment

Participants had a sense of readjusting to living in their home country through their re-entry experience. Readjustment involved integrating the abroad experience with life in the home country, renewing relationships at home, and securing gainful employment and a place of residence. Some participants felt more readjusted than others. Disclosures such as, *“But it is the last two years have been crazy...I have days where I wish I would have never travelled because I would have had an easier time integrating”* illuminates participants’ awareness of their degree of readjustment.

Some participants sensed their readjustment was prolonged. For instance, one participant shared, *“So I haven’t really resettled yet at all and it has been two years! So yeah, I’m still looking for some enlightenment.”* The participant expected a shorter period of readjustment than was actually the case. Another example of a sense of prolonged readjustment was a participant’s reference to having been back for months and talking about her sojourn experience as if she returned only days ago.

I still felt (reverse) culture shock 3 or 4 months after I had come back which was ridiculous...like by then it should have been over. I was still feeling slightly antisocial. I still had that ‘I just got back from (host country)’ feeling but wait a minute I didn’t just get back from (host country), I’ve been back for four months! I still had that feeling like every time I would tell a story, “when I was in (host country)” So, I still have that ‘I just got back’ feeling even though I didn’t

just get back. Not even close! I mean it has been...7 months. Pretty sad.

Participants rated progress in readjustment according to the re-entry tasks they faced such as attaining employment or settling into a residence.

Yeah, finally (feels resettled). I think just in the last month with starting the job and...I finally got a place to live and I feel more settled there. At first, it was hard living with strangers but I've made a really good connection with one of the people in the household and that has been a more positive experience.

Realising and accepting sojourning as part of the past contributed to feeling readjusted. Sojourning was a major part of their lives and as it diminished in importance, they could focus on creating new lives in their home country. One participant did not feel the overseas experience was part of her identity anymore but she still felt nostalgic at times.

I'm pretty much here now and... it (sojourning) is in the past but every once in the while I will see a movie or I'll see an object and all of a sudden I'm transported. Otherwise, it is just something I did and it is no longer part of me like how do I explain that? It is no longer...it is just the past whereas before I felt like it was really who I was.

Another participant was learning to embrace her life in her home country and accepting she would no longer sojourn.

I think I have come to terms with it and I mean I sort have accepted my life here. I sort of feel like I'm on the 12 steps and I'm probably on step 7 you know, like I

have sort have accepted that okay I'm here and I knew that when I came back this time I was pretty much coming back for good and that this is where I wanted to be...In my head, I know that, I just have to get my heart there as well you know, and I think it is going to be okay.

For one participant, her acceptance of certain aspects of her home culture highlighted her feeling of readjustment. She started to notice there were exceptions to what she perceived as her home culture's focus on materialism and lack of community.

I guess that I'm not as critical now. When I first came out I was, and I was always like, I think you get to a point where you realise that a lot of it is your own stuff too. Ya, I think I'm starting to realise how many layers there are to things and how many amazing people are walking around doing amazing things.

Most participants attributed gaining a sense of readjustment to increased connection and social support in their home country. They actively sought to enhance the level of social support they received by seeking connection and increasing communication within their social network and communities. As one participant explained, deepened social interactions contributed to her sense of readjustment.

My friendships, group of friends, my connections have been great and I feel really good about it. I feel really happy and supported and loved and all those things. I've made strides with my family and have a lot of love, support and communication there so that feels really good.

Another participant deepened her bond with her family by disclosing her feelings and the difficulties she was experiencing as she readjusted. In turn, she felt accepted and understood.

I feel really good now. My (family member) and I are really close now and that has been interesting. They (participant's family) are kind of at the point now too where they just, they know I have had a lot of a struggle since I got back and I've been really hard on myself and just kind of been like wow, I totally failed at my life, and my (family member) has been really good. She's like, "why would you ever think that? You have seen more of the world than anyone I know." ...You let yourself be a bit more vulnerable and then your family kind of gets a little less judgmental when you say actually I don't think I'm perfect and not that I ever did but they always had that impression because I always chose different things, like I was rejecting what they were doing.

Another participant's level of connection and social support increased due to contributing to her community by volunteering and increasing her involvement in community events.

Connecting with her community increased her sense of readjustment. She realised her ability to make a difference locally whereas previously she felt she could only do so by volunteering abroad.

I've made community connections a lot more and I felt that after my last (sojourn) experience too that I really wanted to make more community connections and do more things at home rather than always having this concept of wanting to see the world abroad. (I want) a lot more about connecting with the community and what I can do on a local level. (I want to) strengthen around me (by) just doing a lot of

volunteer work and the things that I love doing and meeting people in those sectors and exploring things that I like and that are interesting.

Theme 6: Awareness & Appreciation of the Benefits of Sojourning

A theme central to the participants' latest re-entry experience was their awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sojourning. Participants were aware of the ways in which sojourning positively affected them. Sojourning gave most of the participants an opportunity for personal growth and enhancement. One participant considered her experience fulfilling and empowering. It increased her self-confidence and as a result, improved the manner in which she interacted with others.

I was like that (self-doubting) before and if anything more so. I gained a lot of strength in myself while I was away. I don't really know how or why that came about but it did quite a bit. I was really empowered, like self-empowered. I guess because part of my social anxiety, I think, stems from (past) events and being within this society (home culture) made me feel that I'm still in that situation in some respects but taking myself out of that situation ...having the perception at least that I'm away from all those typical social triggers, freed me to be however I choose or want to be and gain strength in finding out who I am and therefore be who I am. I realise how positively people react around me from that and then of course it just positively reinforces it.

The same participant learned to assert herself in certain situations she encountered abroad. Her sojourn experience also increased her personal knowledge about the struggles her host

country faced.

It (sojourn experience) fulfilled me in on different levels I guess. I went because I had done a lot of travelling abroad and I had trounced around different countries that struggled, where people struggled for everyday needs that came so easily here and I just wanted to see if there was anything that I could contribute to those societies in a way. I wanted to learn what it was that entailed their development ...so, in those respects I learned a lot. ...I stood up for things that I believed in and that was very challenging but it felt really good that I had the guts to do it. And I learned tons, mostly just how complicated the situation is and it is just not something you can go in and fix. And of course you can kind of think that in the background from here but to actually experience it, just brings it home so much more.

Another sojourner was aware that sojourning helped her to challenge mainstream home culture and not conform to it.

So travelling has been kind of interesting because it changes you a lot but it makes me a lot less willing to conform to a lot of things and even when I'm trying to (conform).

Furthermore, the participants' were aware that their employment experience abroad influenced and contributed to the career choices they were making in their home country. One participant decided to pursue teaching even though her experience of it in her host country was not a positive one. She realised her struggles abroad were due to cultural differences and she enjoyed

teaching.

My ideas about what I wanted to do with my life were all over the place. Then (I) kind of started thinking about teaching and (I thought to myself) I liked doing that and maybe being a teacher isn't so bad after all. But it took me a while to get over teaching was separate from the whole cultural differences because it just put a damper or a shadow on what I perceived teaching to be so...you know, even if it isn't what I want to be doing for a long time... it will probably lead to something else.

Another participant's overseas work experience helped her to shape career goals in her home country. She was uncertain which career path to follow but her enjoyment of teaching abroad led her to pursue becoming a teacher in her home country.

That was the other reason I moved to (place of home country residence) because you can teach there without a degree and all my background had been teaching related. And I had no idea what to do so at least there I could work doing something I liked. So that was the other reason to go there because I could get teaching experience.

Another positive outcome of the sojourning experience that returnees appreciated was the social networks they made abroad. Friendships they formed while overseas remained precious to them and they maintained contact despite the long-distance.

Friendships are so important to me and even if my friends are on the other side

of the world they are keeping in touch...even more than family. So for me it is like (sojourn) friends are the main (social support). I still keep in touch with all the people I knew over there (in host country) and I'm interested in what everyone is doing.

One participant talked about the positive influence her social network abroad had on her. Their influence continued to affect her life on a daily basis upon her return home.

I went with two women who are very strong communicators and were very positively reinforcing self worth and that sort of thing so I think that having lots of long conversations with them and having their positive support made a big difference too.

One participant was saddened and disappointed by the loss of contact with the host family. She remembers the special bond she had with them.

So that (losing contact) has been definitely tough and really disappointing because we did become close and I definitely thought of my parents as parents and my sisters like sisters and they definitely treated me like a daughter and same with the extended family like a granddaughter and it felt very special. So that (losing contact) was disappointing.

In contrast, one participant did not forge special connections during his latest sojourn. He viewed his sojourn as transitory and therefore limited his investment in friendships with host country members.

We (participant and his partner) weren't there for years and years so we weren't putting down a lot of roots as it were. ...For me, I was fairly busy with work. We would go out...we made friends and contacts through some of the people in our apartment complex down there and people that I'd work with would be a similar age but it was fairly casual type of thing because, I mean there is always a sense of well, this(the sojourn) is likely to be a temporary thing.

One positive outcome of sojourning was that it enabled the returnees to strengthen bonds with their pre-existing friends who sojourned or travelled abroad after returning. At a time when feeling connected to home country members proved difficult, the sojourn experience gave them something to connect about through reminiscing. One participant reminisced with friends and they romanticized their time abroad and host countries.

I notice when I hang around with friends who have been travelling especially if we've been travelling together, we love to talk about that and there is a real nostalgia around 'oh when we were here and oh wasn't that the best?'. Yeah, it is funny how you can (think) anywhere but here (is exotic).

Another participant enjoyed reconnecting with his friends who shared part of his sojourn experience because they could talk about their experiences abroad.

It was nice to connect with them. They were also back here in Vancouver and so when we came back that was good because we had a lot of shared memories being abroad with them.

The sojourn experience influenced a participant's choice in friends. She sought connections with host country members in her home country. She felt an automatic connection with them because of her experience and knowledge of the culture and country.

I met a lot of (host country members in Canada) because I was mostly teaching (host country member) students and I made friends with a lot of them since I came back. ...And I started talking to a lot of (host country members) that I would just see randomly because I missed speaking (host country language) or I missed something about it and I felt like a I had a connection. I would be in a bar and I would just start going up to them and asking them questions. They must have thought I was such a creep. I don't know, I kind of had this link with (host country members).

The sojourn experience provided participants with an appreciation of their host country and culture. One participant appreciated certain aspects of her host culture and defended it when others looked down upon it.

I'm happy that I went (abroad) because I definitely developed an appreciation of the culture and it is a nice culture. I really appreciate (host country) because it was so clean and so polite and so respectful in so many ways... when people speak something badly about (host country)... I kinda find myself defending a lot of things about it.

Participants missed certain features of the host country and culture they became

accustomed to during their sojourn. They attempted to incorporate certain host culture features into their daily lives. One participant found it difficult to do so due to the unavailability of favourite host country products at home.

You get used to the stuff that you have there and when you come back, you can't get them... there are things that I want (from host country) and then when I went to the (host country shop) I would go bananas because they had all the food and I totally made myself sick because I was like, "oh my god this is like (host country) and they have that in (host country)". And there are things that I got used to eating there that I can't get here and I totally miss them. I've been to (host country) restaurants here and it is just not as good.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of latest re-entry during emerging adulthood. The core themes were uncovered through in-depth interviews and interpretive phenomenological analysis. Situated structures were developed detailing the main themes in each participant's experience. Subsequently, a general structure was created by abstracting themes common among all the re-entry experiences. The six themes that emerged were: 1) anticipatory thoughts and feelings about re-entry, 2) emotional struggle, 3) sense of rootlessness/desire for rootedness, 4) isolation and lack of social support, 5) sense of readjustment, and 6) awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sojourning.

This chapter includes a discussion of the significance of the present study's findings in relation to the existing re-entry literature. Subsequently, implications for future research and practice are delineated. Lastly, the study's limitations are discussed.

Core Findings in Relation to Re-entry Literature

Repatriation involves a psychological, emotional and social readjustment to one's own home culture. For returnees, readjustment often includes a period of elation and hopefulness followed by re-entry distress, which includes symptoms such as disorientation, anger, isolation, alienation and depression (Brabant, Palmer & Gramling, 1990; Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Gaw, 2000; Gullahorn & Gullahorn). Eventually however the distress dissipates and returnees readjust to their home country and culture (Gullahorn & Gullahorn).

In the present study, several themes illustrated the occurrence of re-entry distress symptoms. The theme, emotional struggle, highlighted returnees' depression and frustration mainly as a result of unemployment or underemployment. The participants expressed their lack

of employment prevented them from readjusting to life in their home country. The theme, isolation and lack of social support, demonstrated their difficulties connecting with home country members. They spoke of their difficulties reengaging their pre-existing friendships because they felt unable to talk about their experiences abroad. Several participants did not know how to fit in their friends' busy schedules. Furthermore, the returnees described a lack of social support both in concrete and emotional assistance.

A previous re-entry study discerned communication pattern changes in the interpersonal relationships of emerging adult returnees' (Martin, 1986). Specifically, communication patterns between returnees and their parents and siblings were found to become smoother and equal compared to pre-sojourn communication. In contrast, communication with friends became more superficial than in the past. Martin ascertained friendship communication patterns negatively changed because the sojourners' attitudes and personal constructs shifted while they were abroad. These shifts left them feeling they had less in common with their home country friends.

The themes in the present study reflected returnees' changes in communication patterns. The theme, isolation and lack of social support, reflected participants' communication difficulties particularly in pre-existing friendships with home country members. Interestingly, the theme, sense of readjustment, illustrated an eventual increase in participants' communication with their social network. The participants realised that strengthened communication with their family and friends contributed to their readjustment. They spoke of disclosing their emotional struggles during re-entry and conveyed the support they needed. In return, they felt a strengthened connection and they felt understood.

Several studies have associated basic value changes with greater readjustment problems (Gama & Pederson, 1977; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Uehara, 1986). Uehara (1986) found

specific value changes such as relationships with old friends, changed views on female and male relationships, individualism and changed achievement-oriented behaviour were positively associated with severity of re-entry distress. Changes in returnees' values were illustrated in the present study's theme, sense of rootlessness/desire for rootedness. When they returned, they saw their home culture from a different perspective and disagreed with what the culture placed importance on. Several participants perceived a lack of community and a fixation on materialism in their home country and they felt critical of it.

Researchers surmise sojourners in emerging adulthood experience the most changes in values because identity exploration in areas of love, work, and worldviews is a part of their cognitive development (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Perry, 1997 cited in Arnett, 2000). According to Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), sojourners at this age gain a sense of security by adopting host culture values while abroad and their inflexibility to change upon return exacerbates re-entry distress. The theme, awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sojourning, reflected participants' determination to uphold values they adopted abroad such as being non-conforming to mainstream culture because they regarded them as beneficial to their personal growth.

Core Findings in Relation to Theoretical Models of Re-entry Distress

There are several theoretical models of re-entry distress. One model considers repatriation through a social-cognitive framework that focuses on returning sojourners' expectations in re-entry social interactions (Rogers & Ward, 1993). According to Rogers and Ward (1993), a discrepancy between sojourners' social re-entry expectations and actual re-entry experiences affects psychological adjustment during re-entry. Furthermore, Bochner, Lin and McLeod (1980) noted prior to return, sojourners expected re-engaging with social network to be

the predominant problem in re-entry. The present study's theme, anticipatory thoughts and feelings about re-entry, referred to the expectations participants had about their return. In this theme, the participants did not describe a preoccupation with re-entry relationships yet other expectations were highlighted. Participants' anticipated concurrently facing various re-entry tasks such as becoming accustomed to a new residence and obtaining employment. They felt excited about commencing life tasks such as starting a career or family. Participants also expected their latest re-entry was their last, as they wanted to stay in their home country permanently.

Storti (1997) looks at repatriation distress as a response to changing environments and socio-cultural contexts. When sojourners consider returning home, they expect to return to a familiar place with familiar people and predictable patterns of interaction. Their distress arises when they find aspects of home have changed. Repatriates can keep re-entry distress to a minimum by expecting changes to have occurred while they were abroad and realising they must create a new sense of home upon their return (Storti). In the present study, the theme, rootlessness/desire for rootedness, referred to participants lacking a sense of home and described the manner in which they strove for a sense of rootedness. For instance, one participant spoke of the familiarity of the city as insufficient in creating a sense of rootedness. Returnees endeavoured to secure a sense of rootedness in different ways such as relocating within their home country in search of a city that would feel like home, working toward the goal of owning property, and deciding to remain in their home country.

Another theoretical model of re-entry distress addresses shifting cultural identities (Sussman, 2001). The term cultural identity describes the degree to which sojourners identify with their home and host country. The model maintains cultural identity shifts during cross-

cultural transitions. Re-entry distress occurs when shifts in cultural identity involve a moderate to high host cultural adaptation and low flexibility or willingness to readapt to the home culture upon return. As a result, returnees largely feel estranged from their home country members. In the present study, Sussman's model manifested in the way the participants' spoke to their level of cultural adaptation. The theme, sense of rootlessness/desire for rootedness, illuminated the participants' new found critical awareness of their home culture and their disconnection from home country members. These attitudes and feelings typified host cultural adaptation and low readjustment to the home culture. The theme, awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sojourning, exemplified participants' resolve to incorporate features of their host country in their daily lives at home. For instance, the returnees frequented host restaurants, markets, and attended host cultural events. Some participants sought and established friendships with host members sojourning in Canada and they continued to practice and learn the host culture language.

Findings Distinct to the Present Study

A major strength of the present study was that it uncovered an in-depth, unique description of latest re-entry for those who sojourned repeatedly during emerging adulthood. Consequently, core experiences of latest re-entry emerged that were not readily specified in the existing re-entry literature.

Awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sojourning were core to the participants' latest re-entry experience and it points out that, despite their re-entry struggle, the sojourners continued to value the ways in which their experiences abroad influenced them. They appreciated the critical awareness of their home culture and the personal growth gained through living overseas. Furthermore, participants spoke of the strong social connections they made

abroad and how they remained important to them. Cherished sojourn experiences bring a positive light to the re-entry experience and can be a source of strength during difficult times.

The findings illuminated readjustment aspects specific to late emerging adulthood—the participants' age group during latest re-entry. One re-entry experience unique to this age group was the returnees' excitement about changing their lives' focus. It highlighted the transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood resulting in a shift from identity exploration to role commitment (Arnett, 2000). The sojourners in this study spent their twenties abroad exploring their identities in different areas of work and worldviews but as they approached their thirties they wanted to commit to career and relationship roles.

Another finding pertaining to the unique aspects of re-entry associated with this sojourner group was the pressure or urgency they felt to achieve career goals and become financially stable. Furthermore, much of their emotional struggle related to set backs in employment. Feeling pressure may be a unique quality to re-entry distress for this returnee group because of societal achievement expectations for those in young adulthood. Participants referred to a major difference in their thinking between their latest re-entry and previous ones. When they were younger, they did not consider career advancement and financial independence to be important and they felt they had several years to travel again. A dramatic change in focus after sojourners' most recent re-entry is demonstrated by their dedication to finding a successful career path.

Another interesting aspect that emerged in this study was the returnees' sense of their own readjustment progress. When participants spoke of their latest re-entry experienced, they monitored and assessed their progress in accordance with their preconceived notions of readjustment and their previous experiences of re-entry. Participants described salient factors in

their readjustment such as: improved communication and social support, gainful employment or further education.

Implications for Practice

It is my hope the findings in this study attest to the importance of re-entry program development and delivery for this sojourner population. The themes that emerged from the data illuminate specific areas that could be targeted. The theme, isolation and lack of social support, highlighted a need for social support during re-entry. An on-going re-entry psycho-educational group can provide a source of support for returnees. The group also could be a place for returnees to debrief and honour their experiences abroad thereby alleviating the discomfort participants described about sharing their experiences and worrying about how their stories would be received.

In the awareness and appreciation of the benefits of sojourning theme, participants described bonding and connecting with others who sojournered was easier than with those who had not and a psycho-educational support group can provide returnees with the opportunity to meet others returnees. Hearing that others are enduring similar struggles can serve to normalise and validate returnees' experiences. Participants also explained their desire to maintain the ways in which their experience in the host countries changed them. A component of the program could direct attention to the ways sojourning changed returnees, explore and honour the affects it has had in re-entry and work towards finding a balance as they reintegrate. For instance, although sojourners felt displeased with the high level of materialism in their home culture, they could learn acceptable ways of communicating it without sounding critical of friends or family members.

Other areas a program could target are communication, readjustment as a gradual process, and career exploration. A program component could focus on communication and feeling comfortable sharing experiences with a social network. The theme, isolation and lack of social support, illuminated the returnees lack of emotional and concrete support. In a group, members could learn to determine their social support needs and convey the specific support they want from family and friends. The theme, sense of readjustment, is demonstrative of the fact that participants perceived their adjustment took longer than they expected. The program can deepen returnees awareness of readjustment and drive home the point that repatriation distress gradually dissipates and there is no fixed period of readjustment. The theme, emotional struggle, demonstrated depression and frustration in relation to employment barriers, therefore an important component to a psycho-educational/support groups would be to cover issues of career exploration and job search.

The present study's findings also have implications for clinical practice. The findings serve to inform and thereby increase counsellor sensitivity to latest re-entry. The therapist can help the returnee to appropriately label feelings as repatriation distress and attribute negative feelings to one's friends, family or work. A clinical setting can serve to work through issues of normative pressure. Clinicians can assist their client to determine what they need to gain a sense of rootedness. Therapy can give returnees the space to be introspective about what changes they have gone sojourner went through and what things they miss about the host country.

Lastly, the current study's findings are useful to family and friends of returning sojourners as it provides an in-depth view of returnees' experiences. The theme, isolation and lack of social support, suggests ways in which family and friends can give support. In this theme, participants spoke of their apprehension about sharing sojourning stories for fear of how

they would be received. Returnees' social support networks can learn how to ask questions about the sojourner's experience. For example, family members can ask specific questions about the sojourn or host country instead of asking broad questions about their overseas experience, which can be a daunting question to answer. Furthermore, participants in this study expressed their difficulties fitting into the lives of their home culture friends. During readjustment, sojourners may not take the initiative to socialize, so friends of returnees could learn the importance of making a concerted effort to include them.

Limitations of the Study

Although there were certain participant inclusion criteria (See Appendix C), some participants did not meet all of the criteria but were accepted because of limited time and number of volunteer participants. One participant did not meet the age criterion; she was 24 years of age. Another participant's period of sojourn did not meet the minimum sojourn period required; she resided abroad for only three months. Another possible limitation of the study was the number of participants interviewed. Due to limited time and resources, only five participants were interviewed and it is unknown how many participants were needed to reach theme saturation. If time and resources allowed, perhaps interviewing more participants would have allowed additional themes to emerge. Lastly, only conducting one interview with each participant is a limitation of this study. Holding two or three interviews may have increased the level of depth in the meaning of the experience.

Researcher's Subjective Experience

In line with the epistemology of this methodology, I interpreted the experience of others, which is not a limitation of the study but something to be mindful of. As a fledgling researcher, I tried to be aware of my humanness and beliefs on the topic and reflected how it may have

affected each step of the project; this process was challenging.

Similarly, with more experience in interviewing for phenomenological research, I feel I could have drawn richer data from the participants. I enjoyed the interviewing process and although my clinical experience was advantageous in forming a rapport with the clients, I found it held me back in some ways. I was nervous of stepping over the line between phenomenological interviewing and counselling. There were times when I was tempted to prompt the participant for a deeper explanation than what they were saying but I held back and consequently lost depth in the data. I tried to stay with the questions on the interview transcript but I used further questions to urge the participant to continue talking. I worry that some of my spontaneous questions may have leading. Furthermore, I found myself reframing statements made by the participants that were self-critical of their readjustment or normalised the behaviours they displayed during re-entry.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study's findings point to future areas of research. Further studies involving this returnee group could examine the salient factors unique to their re-entry experiences. It would be interesting to investigate the relationships between perpetual sojourners who are single and those who travel with a partner. While the basis of this study was not to determine relationships between variables, it is interesting to note the role age and marital status may have played in the different experiences of the participants. Only one participant travelled with his partner and he had a different re-entry experience than the others in many respects. Furthermore, the youngest participant was in her early twenties and she was the only one who desired to sojourn again. Considering the impact of age and marital status could provide valuable information.

Another potential area of research is looking at what drives some emerging adult sojourners to move abroad repeatedly while others remain in their home country after one sojourn. In the present study, several participants described using sojourning as an escape from problems in the home country or as a coping mechanism to deal with severe re-entry distress. Further exploration of this topic could be useful to sojourners.

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experience. It will be 1/2 to 1 hour long.

A chance to share your experiences in a confidential manner

Call: ##### for inquiries

APPENDIX A. Poster

Have you moved to a foreign country and
returned to live in Canada
more than once?

Were you between 20 - 30 years of age when
you last returned?

If so, your participation is welcomed!

A graduate student is looking for volunteer participants to explore their latest experience of returning to Canada after living abroad. This research is being conducted as part of a Master's thesis in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education at UBC under the supervision of Dr. Richard Young. The name of the study is:

Perpetual Sojourning: An interpretive phenomenological study of latest re-entry.

Participation in this study involves two meetings. The first will be an hour long interview about your thoughts and feelings on your latest experience of returning to Canada. The second meeting will be approximately 2 months later and will give you the opportunity to see the results and let the researcher know if they reflect your experience. It will be 1/2 to 1 hour long.

A chance to share your experiences in a confidential manner

Call: ##### for inquires

APPENDIX B. Consent Letter

Informed Consent Form

A Master's thesis research study called:

Perpetual Sojourning: An interpretive phenomenological study of latest re-entry.

Description of the Research:

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of your latest experience of returning to live in your country of origin.

If you decide to participate in this study, the co-investigator, Diana Kollar, will meet with you on two separate occasions for 2 to 2 1/2 hours in total, for the purpose of hearing and documenting your experience of your latest re-entry experiences and reviewing the data analysis results. Since the aim of the interview is to get a full description of the experience, you may be asked to elaborate on your thoughts and feelings which may elicit an emotional reaction. Low cost counselling referrals will be available, in case you wish to talk about these issues and feelings in more depth.

The first meeting will be audio taped and transcribed. All identifying information will be deleted from the study, and a pseudonym of your choice will be used ensuring complete confidentiality. This pseudonym will be used in any written or oral accounts of the study material. Once the tapes have been transcribed and the material analysed for themes, you will be contacted again and asked to read the results which will be a description of the experience and to indicate if it accurately portrays your experience of the latest re-entry. Your feedback will be noted in the discussion section of the study. At no time will any identifying information be made available to anyone other than to my research supervisor, Dr. Richard Young and me. All audiotapes will be destroyed after the study is completed and transcripts identified by pseudonym will be destroyed five years after the study is completed.

This study is voluntary. If you should choose to not participate at any time, your decision will be respected. If the above outline is unclear or if you have any concerns, you are encouraged to contact me at (university phone number).

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Richard Young at (604) 822-6380. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604 822-8598.

Consent:

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

I, _____, agree to participate in the study described under the conditions outlined and acknowledge receipt of this consent form.

Signature of Participant: _____

Participant's initials upon receiving a copy of this document: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Richard Young

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education

University of British Columbia

604-822-6380

Co-investigator:

Diana Kollar

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education

University of British Columbia

604-822-4919

APPENDIX C. Telephone Script

Telephone Script

When I receive calls from those interested in participating in the study I will read the following statement to them:

This study focuses on your latest experience of returning home after living abroad for an extended period. I am curious about what this experience is like and how it compares to what the literature says about single re-entry or returning experiences. The main question I am interested in answering is: "*What is the meaning of the lived experience of the latest re-entry?*" The study looks at latest re-entry in the context of life developmental stage between the ages of 20-30. I'm now going to ask you a few questions to confirm this study is a good fit for you.

1. Are you a Canadian citizen and consider Canada to be your home country or the country you grew up in?
2. Are you between the ages of 25 - 35?
3. Were you 30 years old or younger the last time you returned to live in Canada?
4. Did you live in a foreign country at least twice between 20 and 30 years of age?
5. Were you away for at least 6 months each time you lived abroad
6. Did you live in Canada between those times?
7. Did you return over 6 months ago?

If the caller says no to any of the question, I will thank them for his or her interest but say that study's criteria and their experiences do not match.

Your experience meets the criteria so now I'll explain a little about the study. It is an interpretive phenomenology method which means my aim is to *uncover a universal description for latest experiences* of returning home during the age of 20-30 years. If you are interested, I would like to interview you for an hour to an hour and a half. The interview will take place at UBC Life and Career Centre at Robson Square downtown. Before the interview begins, I will ask you to sign a consent form but you maintain the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed but to ensure confidentiality they will only be identified by a *pseudonym* of your choice.

A few months after the interview, I will contact you again so we can meet. This will give you a chance to look at the results and let me know if your experience is reflected in them. I will include your feedback in the study as well. This second meeting should not take any longer than one hour.

You are not obliged to make your decision at this moment. I can guarantee you a space in the study for a week but thereafter the number of participants needed may be satisfied. If you have *further questions* please let me know.

APPENDIX D. Orienting statement and interview questions

Interview Script

The researcher will read the following statement to all participants at the beginning of the interview:

I am interested in learning about your latest experience of returning home after living abroad for an extended period. I am curious about what this experience is like and how it compares to what the literature says about single re-entry or returning experiences. The main question I am interested in answering is: "*What is the meaning of the lived experience of the latest re-entry?*"

Helping me understand your experience to the fullest involves talking about your thoughts, behaviours and feelings and anything else you may feel is relevant to it. Throughout the interview, I may ask you to clarify or expand on something you say in order to better understand but by no means are you obligated to tell me something that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you would rather not share. Please feel free to take time to reflect on your answers and/or ask for clarification. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Main interview question:

"Tell me about your latest re-entry experience starting from the time you decided to come back until now."

Sub-questions:

1. What expectations did you have about coming back?
2. What incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
3. What thoughts stood out for you?
4. What feelings were generated by this experience?
5. Do you think you will leave again? If yes, what is prompting you to leave and is it similar to past motivations? If no, what is different about this time?
6. What do you feel are some major differences between this re-entry and previous ones?