Effects of Intrapersonal Communication on Reverse Culture Shock

A Senior Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Communication Studies Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

By
Serena Brown

Dr. David Askay
Senior Project Advisor

Dr. Bernard Duffy
Department Chair

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Abstract

This paper explores the connection between reflective writing in the form of journals and blogs and reverse culture shock in study abroad returnees. The experiences of 66 American college-aged students were analyzed in order to determine a relationship between the two variables. The study revealed significant findings that bear upon both students and expats returning to the U.S. First, those who engaged in journal writing reported higher levels of reverse culture shock than those who did not keep a journal. Furthermore, those who participated in any sort of writing, journals or blogs, had higher self-reported reverse culture shock than those who did not write at all. Two explanations are offered to interpret the data, based on theories of identity management and the contrast effect.

Key Words

Intrapersonal communication, journal writing, blogging, reflective writing, culture shock, reverse culture shock, identity, contrast effect
**Introduction**

In the 2013-2014 academic year, 304,467 United States students studied abroad. Of these students, 62% studied abroad for a summer session or up to eight weeks, 35% for a few quarters to a semester, and 3% for an entire academic year (Open Door Data, 2016). Furthermore, although there is currently no accurate estimate of the total number of Americans living abroad, it is theorized that about 2.2 to 6.8 million U.S. citizens are living as expats (MPI, 2001). For this study I define culture as “central to the way we view, experience, and engage with all aspects of our lives and the world around us” (Sorrells, 2013). Academic scholarship investigating study abroad programs tends to focus largely on culture shock, a state of anxiety and frustration resulting from the immersion in a culture distinctly different from one's own (Oberg, 1960). There are handbooks, guides, websites, and seminars to help travelers, expats, and sojourners alike prepare for and recognize the symptoms of culture shock and learn how to combat them. Since 1960, when Oberg (1960) first defined culture shock, the literature on its affects and consequences has proliferated. However, despite the term reverse culture shock, “the psychological, emotional and cultural aspects of reentry” (U.S. Department of State), being coined only three years later, comparatively less scholarly attention has been given to the issue, despite the contemporary literature claiming that, like culture shock, all returnees experience reverse culture shock to a certain degree (Adler, 1981; Church, 1982; Stelling, 1991; Zapf, 1991). While there exists many resources for preparing study abroad students for culture shock, relatively few resources exist for repatriation. This is important as many repatriates tend to experience frustration, boredom, depression, negativity, and value changes.

A separate vein of research considers how reflective writing ties to individual thought. It has been used by teachers, medical practitioners, and students to gain insight through deep reflection into their experiences (DasGupta & Charon, 2004; Bolton, 1999; Gullahorn &
Gullahorn, 1963). Reflection can be used for introspection, to analyze one’s feelings, or to process emotions. Most of the literature surrounding reflective writing has focused on those in the medical field (Wald, Borkan, Taylor et. al 2012), suggesting that such writing can “elicit, interpret, and translate [practioner’s] personal illness experiences” as well as “lead to more empathic and self-aware practice” (DasGupta & Charon, 2004). Despite these benefits, little research has investigated the connection between reflective writing processes and reverse culture shock. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between intrapersonal communication, communication with oneself, and reverse culture shock. Participating in the art of reflection can be a way for students to gain better insight on themselves and how they fit into both their new culture and their old one. By analyzing the journal writing and blogging behaviors of study abroad returnees, this study provides insight into how the process of reflective writing can promote or inhibit feelings of reverse culture shock.

**Literature Review**

**Culture Shock**

Oberg (1960) first defined culture shock as “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960). Following scholars built upon his definition, such as Winkelman (1994), who describes culture shock as “the consequence of strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture and the feelings of loss, confusion, and impotence resulting from loss of accustomed cultural cues and social rules.” Culture shock is often portrayed as a U-curve. The curve can be demonstrated using the Four Stages model, first used by Oberg to explain acculturation. The four stages are as follows: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. As the name suggest, during the honeymoon phase the individual is still in awe and struck with happiness by being in a new country. Crisis occurs
when the awe wears off and the individual begins to experience negative feelings toward the customs or people of the host culture. Recovery occurs when the individual starts to regain their independence and their confidence in interactions is restored. Adjustment is the final stage during which the individual begins to adapt and accept the new culture’s differences and starts to form relationships with its members. (“Culture Shock” n.d.). Culture shock happens during the crisis stage and two most common responses are fight or flight. Typically the sojourner begins to experience frustration and distress at the lack of communication and the ability to successfully complete day-to-day activities, leading to hostility or withdrawal.

Adler (1975) gives a slightly more in depth definition of culture shock, suggesting that it is “primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences. It may encompass feelings of helplessness, irritability, and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured or disregarded” (Adler, 1975). He divided up the stages of culture shock into contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy and independence. Taft (1977) followed up two years later with six symptoms of culture shock:

1. Strain due to the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptations
2. A sense of loss and feelings of deprivation in regards to friends, status, profession and possessions
3. Being rejected by and/or rejecting members of the new culture
4. Confusion in role, role expectations, values, feelings and self-identity
5. Surprise, anxiety, even disgust and indignation after becoming aware of cultural differences
6. Feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment. (Cited
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in Yun Yue, Quynh Le, 2012).

Further research on culture shock has been done by Zheng and Berry (1991), who re-defined culture shock as acculturative stress, a form of stress in which “stressors are identified as having their source in the process of acculturation, there is often a particular set of stress behaviors, which occur during acculturation, such as lowered mental health status (specially anxiety and depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level, and identity confusion” (Zheng & Berry, 1991). They believed that stress better captured the negative and positive aspects of “culture shock,” and thought acculturative added a deeper dimension than “culture” which has more of a mono context (Cited in Yun Yue, Quynh Le, 2012).

Reverse Culture Shock

Reverse culture shock is the process of readjusting, reacculturating, and reassimilating into one’s own home culture after living in a different context for significant period of time (Gaw, 2000). Although the concept of reverse culture shock was explored as early as 1944 by Scheutz in his studies on returning veterans, culture shock and reverse culture shock were not intrinsically linked until 1963 by Gullahorn & Gullahorn. Despite a lack of data, scholars familiar with the subject claim that no traveler is exempt from reverse culture shock (Adler, 1981; Church, 1982; Stelling, 1991; Zapf, 1991; Gaw, 2000), although it appears more prominently in children and adolescents (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Stelling, 1991; Werkman, 1980; Gaw, 2000). Some of the symptoms of returnees include alienation, disorientation, stress, value confusion, anger, hostility, compulsive fears, helplessness, disenchantment, and discrimination (Adler, 1981; Church, 1982; Hannigan, 1990; Locke & Feinsod, 1982; Raschio, 1987; Zapf, 1991; Gaw, 2000).

While culture shock has been found to follow a U-shaped curve, reverse culture shock
follows a different pattern. Gullahorn & Gullahorn suggest that reverse culture shock follows a W-shaped curve instead, with the second curve starting where the first ended.

They suggest that the core cause of reverse culture shock is expectation. Sojourners and travelers alike expect to return as an unchanged individual to an unchanged home (Gaw, 2000). Instead, they have the realization that life has not stayed the same while they were away; just as they themselves have undergone transformations. Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) also noted that those travelling abroad expect to run into cultural differences, thus potentially dampening the effect of culture shock, but do not anticipate as many changes coming home. Furthermore, for those who have lived abroad for an extended amount of time, much of their perception of “home” is filtered through the words of their family, friends, and the media (Stelling, 1991), and may not be entirely correct or meet expectations.
**Reflective Writing**

Both culture shock and reverse culture shock are influenced by a type of cognitive dissonance within the traveler. The symptoms of both include frustration, confusion, and depression. Within the medical field, reflective writing has been shown to increase empathy and lead to better understanding of one’s experiences (DasGupta & Charon, 2004; Bolton, 1999). Understanding experiences and increased empathy have been shown to reduce cross-cultural misunderstandings often found in the crisis stage of culture shock (Levett-Jones, Everson, Van de Riet et al.). Before reflective writing, comes reflective thought. Dewey (1933) defines reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933). “It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalizations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalizations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively” (Gibbs, 1988). Moon describes reflection as “a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complex or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution” (Moon, 1999). Many scholars have written models to guide self-reflection, such as Gibb’s Reflective Cycle (1988) that focuses on six steps: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. Even if the steps are not explicit within the minds of writers, most reflective writing generally follows the same blueprint.

Reflective writing is more than simply reporting day-to-day events; it involves a level of sophisticated thought and introspection. It acknowledges that the writer’s point of view can alter due to the passage of time; his or her own emotions at the moment of the writing do not remain stagnant (Watton et. al, 2001). In order to analyze one’s feelings, one must first describe them,
and to describe them, they must first be identified. Individual reflection can be used to “enhance the development of insight, heighten cognitive awareness, promote critical thinking, and engender personal transformation” (Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997). Reflection allows writers to not only share their personal insights and ideas, but to explain their rationale and thought processes, either to themselves or to an audience. Both journal writing and blogging are types of reflective writing, which are common writing practices among study abroad participants.

Journal Writing & Reflection

For this study, journals can be defined as hand-written personal accounts of events, emotions, experiences, and inner thoughts. Journal writing can be used to facilitate reflective thought through first recording one’s experiences, then later meditating on them. It can be used to promote personal growth and document the writer’s inward transformations (Diamond, 1991). It helps the writer draw linkages between thoughts, actions, behaviors, beliefs, and values (Berthoff, 1987) and offers opportunities to make meaning from experiences by reflecting upon them in writing (Cited in Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997). Journal writing can also allow the writer to organize their thoughts more clearly to later share with another and work as a preemptive to social interaction (Summerfield, 1987). It can engage an individual in conversation with the self, promoting the development of introspective awareness (Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997).

Blogs and Blogging

Blogs, along with many other forms of New Media are changing the way people communicate (Malleus & Slattery, 2014). Instead of being constrained by geography and time, blogs are breaking down the barriers with increased connectivity of people worldwide. A blog can be loosely defined as a “platform that allow for both the global dispersion of information, and for communication between bloggers and their audience”. Blogs can “serve as thriving sites of intercultural communicative exchange when they are unmediated—or, at least, minimally
mediated—by third parties” (Pfister & Soliz, 2011). There are no gatekeepers when it comes to blogging, instead we find a uniquely open communication channel between the blogger and their audience. According to J.W. Rettberg as quoted in an paper by Freeman & Bett (2012) “blogs resemble online journals with a reverse-chronological ordering of posts; however, blog applications offer features that serve to create a socially connected form of communication, offering timely, up-to-date entries to a public audience” (Rettberg, 2008).

Blogs can be used by travelers and sojourners to enhance intercultural communication and understanding, however one must take into account cultural differences when blogging about or reading content from authors in different cultures. In her research, Helene Snee identified four themes that travelers who write blogs tend to focus on. Those themes were “the exoticness of the places they visited, a feeling of being out of place in their host cultures, interactions with host culture nationals and construction of place as different, tied to historical legacies” (Snee, 2013). These themes directly correlate to the feelings many experience during culture shock: displacement and trouble adjusting to their new home.

One unique aspect of blogs is that they are simultaneously a private and public space. Some write blogs for personal reasons, and others, to publically share their ideas. Motivations for blogging also vary between personal bloggers and travel bloggers. “While travel bloggers may write based on how useful their information might be, enhancing reputation, building trust and altruism (Ting et al. 2014), personal bloggers have been found to report helping, passing time, exhibitionism, social-connection, and archiving” (Malleus & Slattery 2014).

With this in mind, blogs can be extremely varied in their use. They can be an outlet for self-reflection, as well as a platform for sharing stories, photos, and experiences. Chong et al views them as “channels for reflection” and the blogging process is “seen as a way to enhance
and encourage reflective thinking” (Chong, 2010; Lee, 2010; Bonk & Zhang, 2006; Dos & Demir, 2013; Gregg, 2006). Blogs of study abroad students are simultaneously personal and geared for an audience, usually friends and family back home. In comparison, journal-writing is an extremely personal form self-reflection often viewed only by the author themselves.

**Hypotheses**

The act of reflective writing is closely tied to identity management and inward transformations. Those who participate in reflective writing can better organize their thoughts and explain their experiences, allowing them to further acclimate to their new environment. The process of reflective writing is continuous and transformative. This suggests that those who partake in journal writing specifically for themselves are continuously in the process of identity development and change.

In comparison to journal writing however, many individuals who keep blogs often cater or tailor their writings to the public, whether that be friends, family, or strangers (Pfister & Soliz, 2011). Those who keep blogs will still have higher levels of reverse culture shock than those who don’t write at all, but lower levels than those who engage in journal writing, since typically journals are written for the self and not an audience. The above theories of reflective writing and reverse culture shock have led to the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Individuals who engaged in journal writing while abroad have higher levels of reverse culture shock after returning home than those who did not write.

**H2:** Individuals who engaged in blogging while abroad have higher levels of reverse culture shock after returning home, but lower levels of reverse culture shock than those who engaged in journal writing.

**H3:** Individuals who engaged in any form of intrapersonal communication (journal
writing or blogging) have higher levels of reverse culture shock after returning home.

**Methodology**

All participants (N=66) were invited to take part in an online survey (Appendix 1), distributed through both email and Facebook. Participants were fully informed that they were taking part in a study to explore the relationship between reflective writing (blogging, journal writing) and reverse culture shock. The survey consisted of five demographic questions (major, gender, date/duration/location of study), as well as 18 questions regarding blogs and journals, and a 16 question Reverse Shock Scale (RSS) (Appendix 2) (Seitar & Waddell, 1989). The response categories for all scales consisted of a Likert-type 7-point scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree.

**Sample**

Participants were recruited through email and Facebook. The survey was posted on various Facebook group pages at California Polytechnic University, UC Santa Barbara, and Loyola Marymount University but some respondents did not attend school at these three institutions. The sample consisted of 66 college-aged students (18-23) from across the United States. All of which had studied abroad in Europe within the past 2 years. The respondents were 77.3% female (N=51) and 22.7% (N=15) male. 43.1% (N=28) studied abroad in Fall of 2015, 33.8% (N=22) Summer 2015, 9.2% (N=6) Winter 2015, 12.3% (N=8) “Earlier” 1.6% (N=1) is currently studying abroad and one participant (N=1) deigned to answer.

In regards to duration, the majority of participants (N=44) studied abroad for longer than 15 weeks. Although all participants studied abroad in Europe, the cities and countries they lived in varied. The most popular destination was London (N=17) followed closely by Italy (N=13) and Spain (N=13).
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Descriptive Statistics (Journals)

After answering the demographic questions, participants were then asked questions about their journal writing habits while abroad. 54.5% (N=36) answered “Yes” to the question “Did you keep a personal journal while abroad?” In regards to frequency of writing, 29.7% (N=11) journaled once a day, 18.9% (N=7) once a week, 16.2% (N=6) a few times a week, 10.8% (N=4) once a month, 18.9% (N=7) a few times a month, and 5.4% (N=2) once every few months or less. Out of the 37 who kept a journal, 91.9% (N=34) wrote throughout their entire study abroad experience, while the other 8.1% (N=3) only wrote in the beginning.

Descriptive Statistics (Blogs)

Participants were then asked about their blogging habits while abroad. Out of the 60 respondents to the question “Did you keep an online blog while abroad?” 31.7% (N=19) said “Yes” and 68.4% (N=41) said “No.” All those who kept a blog had their settings on public. In regards to frequency of writing, the majority wrote either once a week (N=7) or a few times a
month (N=6) with the rest of those who blogged writing anywhere from a few times a week to once every few months. A good number of participants who kept a journal, also kept a blog.

*Reverse Shock Scale (RSS)*

The second half of my survey dealt with feelings of reverse culture shock in repatriates. I measured reverse culture shock using a Reverse Shock Scale (RSS) (Appendix 2) taken from (Seitar & Waddell, 1989). The RSS is a 16 item self-report measure that assess the degree of reverse culture shock experienced by each individual. Each question is measured using a 7-point Likert Scale with 1= Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree. Reverse culture shock was analyzed through participants attitudes to both their host country (e.g. “Life was more exciting in the host culture”, “I miss my friends that I made in the host culture”) and home country (e.g. “My friends seem to have changed since I have been gone”, “I had difficulty adjusting to my home culture after returning from abroad”). Internal consistency for the scale was fairly high (α = .869), therefore the scale is reliable. In order to create a continuous variable from the 16 item scale, each survey response was summed and averaged for an individual mean (Table 1)
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability Statistics</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.869</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item-Total Statistics</th>
<th>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</th>
<th>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</th>
<th>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I returned, people did not seem that much interested in my experiences abroad.</td>
<td>64.460</td>
<td>219.252</td>
<td>.271</td>
<td>.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life was more exciting in the host culture.</td>
<td>61.984</td>
<td>207.435</td>
<td>.661</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends seem to have changed since I have been gone.</td>
<td>64.333</td>
<td>206.387</td>
<td>.538</td>
<td>.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I returned home I felt really depressed.</td>
<td>63.730</td>
<td>190.620</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>.848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had difficulty adjusting to my home culture after returning from abroad.</td>
<td>63.746</td>
<td>194.934</td>
<td>.686</td>
<td>.852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since I have been abroad I have become more critical of my home culture’s values.</td>
<td>62.556</td>
<td>213.283</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I miss the foreign culture where I stayed.</td>
<td>61.667</td>
<td>213.935</td>
<td>.577</td>
<td>.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a lot of contact with members of the host culture.</td>
<td>63.175</td>
<td>207.888</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I have changed a lot because of my experiences abroad.</td>
<td>61.984</td>
<td>218.403</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td>.882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I returned home I felt generally alienated.</td>
<td>64.688</td>
<td>194.537</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>.850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends and I have grown in separate directions since I have returned.</td>
<td>65.016</td>
<td>208.500</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life in my home culture is boring after the excitement of living abroad.</td>
<td>63.460</td>
<td>195.994</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>.851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I miss my friends that I made in the host culture.</td>
<td>62.222</td>
<td>213.821</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since I have been abroad I have become more critical of my host cultures’ government.</td>
<td>63.524</td>
<td>223.737</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends and family have pressured me to “fit in” upon returning home.</td>
<td>65.619</td>
<td>221.465</td>
<td>.312</td>
<td>.869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The values and beliefs of the host country are very different from those of my home culture.</td>
<td>63.302</td>
<td>222.569</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td>.870</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

An independent sample T-test between the dichotomous independent variable (Journal Writing) and continuous dependent variable (Reverse Culture Shock) was calculated to test Hypothesis 1, which predicted that there would be a significant positive correlation between journal writing and reverse culture shock. In support of the data, participants who journaled had higher levels of reverse culture shock (mean = 4.55) than those who did not (mean = 3.82). This difference of was statistically significant, t (62)= -3.28, p<.001.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a significant positive correlation between blogging and reverse culture shock, but at a lower level than those who engaged in journal writing. Those who blogged (mean=4.39) did report slightly higher levels of reverse culture shock than those who did not blog (mean =4.14), but due to a small sample size of bloggers (N= 19), the results were shown to be insignificant (p=.36). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Both Hypothesis 1 and 2 directly relate to the final hypothesis. Hypothesis 3 predicted that there would be a positive significant correlation between those who engaged in any type of intrapersonal communication (journal writing, blogging) and the self-reported level of reverse culture shock. The data supports this hypothesis in that those who journaled or blogged had higher levels of reverse culture shock (mean = 4.40) than those who did not write at all (mean = 3.88). At an alpha level of 95% and receiving a p<.005, we have enough evidence to conclude that Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Discussion

Summary of purpose and findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between reflective writing and reverse culture shock in returning study abroad students. Specifically to see if those who kept handwritten journals had higher levels of reverse culture shock than those who kept blogs and if
those who wrote at all (journals or blogs) had higher levels of reverse culture shock than students who kept no written or online record of their time abroad.

The data suggests that there is a positive significant relationship between writing journals and blogs and the degree of reverse culture shock experienced. Drawing from past research in the fields of culture shock and reflective writing, there are two possible ways to interpret the data. First, by looking at the way identity is constructed through reflective writing and second, through the contrast effect.

Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) posit that students are more susceptible to reverse culture shock because individuals of that age are often in a state of identity development. They write that those with a “firmer perception of identity” experience lower levels of reverse culture shock. When people from one culture move to a host culture and communicate with people from that host culture, they can be surprised, stressed, and anxious and can question their identity (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

We know that culture shock can also be understood as “losing the power of easy communication” and that this loss “can disrupt self-identity, worldviews and indeed all systems of acting, feeling and thinking” (Furnham, 2010; Malleus & Slattery, 2014). One symptom of culture shock as recorded by Taft (1997) is “confusion in role, role expectations, values, feelings and self-identity” common in the crisis period of culture shock. In relation to reflective writing, Diamond (1991) argues that it can used to enhance the writer’s personal inward transformation. Culture shock then enhances the “identity disruption,” a change in self-concept of worldviews (Young, 1988), felt by overseas students, who attempt to work out this cognitive dissonance through reflective writing. 84% of survey participants (N=30) answered that they were the only person who read their journal, implying an intrapersonal focus for their writing. Bain et al.
(2002), applied their “5Rs” framework to explain the different levels of reflection. These include Reporting, Responding, Relating, Reasoning, and Reconstructing. During the survey participants were asked “Why did you keep a journal?” Many responses mentioned recording experiences (N=12) and processing emotions (N=9), two key aspects of reflective writing (Moon, 1999; Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1995). Other keywords include ‘remember’ (N=12), ‘thoughts’ (N=8), and ‘document’ (N=5). Participants reported that they used their journals to work through their feelings during their time abroad, unpack their adventures, and try to understand themselves better in relation to their current home. They reflected upon their experiences in order to make sense of their changing identity in a new environment. We can suggest then, that those engaged in this type of reflective writing, and therefore a type of identity management, would experience higher levels of reverse culture shock.

The contrast effect can be defined as “a magnification or diminishment of perception as a result of previous exposure to something of lesser or greater quality, but of the same base characteristics” (Gonzalez, n.d.). There are two types of contrast effect, positive and negative. Positive contrast effect would occur when something perceived as better is being compared with something worse. Negative contrast effect does the exact opposite.

Most people who journaled positively depicted their host country as well as their home country. The questions “In your entries, how positive did you depict your host country?” and “In your entries, how positive did you depict your home country?” were asked based on a 7-point Likert scale with 1=Not Positive and 7=Very Positive. Within the sample that kept a journal (N=36), I ran two 1-sample t-tests to see if they positively depicted (μ = 4 vs > 4) their host country and home country and found that in each instance they did (p-value < 0.001). This could be explained by the U-shaped culture shock curve. As most of the participants wrote in their
journals throughout their entire time abroad, it is possible that they depicted their host country positively during the honeymoon and adjustment stages and their home country more positively during the crisis stage when the contrast effect was strongest.

Similarly to those who kept a journal, those who blogged also depicted both their host and home country positively ($\mu = 4 \text{ vs } > 4$) in their entries. I ran two t-tests and found that there is a significant positive correlation between those who blogged and their attitude towards their host and home countries ($p < .001$).

The data suggest that students who journaled about their experiences while abroad were more attuned to the cultural differences between their home and host countries, therefore influencing them to experience a contrast effect. Conversely, those who did not reflect on their experiences were not as impacted by reverse culture shock when returning home because the differences between their home and host county were less obvious. Students may have reported positively about both their home and host countries due to the U-shaped culture shock curve. During the honeymoon and adjustment stages, the host country would be more positively depicted. However, during the crisis stage, when cultural differences between home and host countries are recognized as most prominent, the home country would probably be more positively depicted.

Furthermore, during the final stage of culture shock, the adjustment period, travelers are often more comfortable and attuned to the differences in the new host culture and how they can personally respond and relate to new situations. Since students studying abroad often return home during the adjustment stage, when their host country is being perceived as most positive, the contrasts between their host and home cultures would be felt the strongest, potentially leading to higher levels of reverse culture shock.
Theoretical Implications

Existing theory on reverse culture shock suggest that no traveler is ever completely exempt from its symptoms (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), however this study can begin to explain how different people may be affected and the potential causes associated with it. Reflective writing has been largely implemented in the medical field, with positive results (DasGupta & Charon, 2004; Bolton, 1999). However, by changing the context to focus on travelers abroad, reflective writing seems to have caused more distress than benefits.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have direct implications for how students should be prepared not only when going to study abroad, but when they return home as well. Although culture shock is popular in pre-study abroad seminars, reverse culture shock is rarely mentioned or addressed to returnees. If 54% of participants of this survey kept a journal while abroad, it’s fair to pose the idea that a fair amount engage in journal writing across the globe. Watton et. al (2001) suggests that reflective writing “explores the motives of both the writer and of others while investigating how behaviors and reactions are related.” Many reported journaling for personal reasons, to document their time abroad, address cross-cultural communication barriers, work through their emotions, and host of other reasons. If journaling can be viewed as a way to manage and work through one’s identity, perhaps it would be wise to encourage those who engage in journal writing abroad to continue doing so at home.

It’s also possible that the data goes the other way and those who journaled and consequently experienced higher levels of reverse culture shock were already the type of people to be more at risk for depression and the symptoms of reverse culture shock. In that case journal writing and reflection could be viewed as potential warning signs for those more at risk for
reverse culture shock and steps could be taken to alleviate the effects before their departure.

**Limitations**

The research of this study was limited in several ways. While the number of participants (N=66) allowed for insight into the relationship between journal writing and reverse culture shock, there weren’t enough individuals who kept blogs to do the same for the relationship with blogging. Ideally the sample size would be over 100 to be able to discern a positive relationship between both dependent variables. Furthermore, although all participants were college-aged study abroad students, they were from different universities around the United States, all with different pre and post study abroad programs. The sample size as a whole could have been more controlled. The research also only focused on those who studied abroad in Europe within the past few years. Different locations around the globe could have made a difference in the levels of self-reported reverse culture shock.

**Future Research Suggestions**

I would encourage future researchers in the field of travel and reflective writing to explore longitudinal studies that look at whether or not students continue to keep a journal when they return home. This knowledge could offer insight into whether keeping a journal enhances or mitigates feelings of reverse culture shock over time. However, since our society is becoming more and more digitized as the years go by, and with the introduction of new media, in the future journal writing may become obsolete and new research can explore the blogging medium more fully. Studies focusing on the difference between personal self-reflection (journals) and public self-reflection (blogs) could also offer insight into how different types of reflection effect reverse culture shock.

Mediating variables should also be taken into consideration, such as comparing the duration of the students’ time abroad with how often they write and how both variables together
impact reverse culture shock. Studies could also look at the state of mind of students pre-departure to see if there are indeed warning signs in those more susceptible to reverse culture shock. Furthermore, studies that look at the prominence of reverse culture shock in the workplace could offer assistance for expats and sojourners alike returning to their home country after working abroad.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to find a relationship between intrapersonal communication, specifically in the form of reflective writing, and reverse culture shock. While reflective writing has been studied within the medical field, little research has been done on the impact of journal writing or blogging in regards to travel and culture shock. The data suggest that there is a significant positive relationship between journal writing and reverse culture shock, as well as a significant positive relationship between any type of writing (journal or blogging) and reverse culture shock. Past literature suggests that reflective writing can be used to increase empathy, unpack experiences, and lend help to identity management and creation. Theories of identity development and the contrast effect are two possible ways to interpret these findings. Those suffering from culture shock are typically in a state of identity disruption which can be linked back to the effects of reflective writing. Furthermore, by reflecting on experiences in a new country, writers can better internalize the differences between their home and host country, leading them to experience a sharper contrast once returning home. This research can be applied to study abroad returnees, as well as sojourners or expats returning to the states. While this study has opened questioning into the potential causes of reverse culture shock, future research can further unpack the source and ways to combat its symptoms.
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Appendix 1 (Survey)

Major

Short answer text

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer to the answer

When did you study abroad?

- Summer 2015
- Fall 2015
- Winter 2016
- Currently Studying Abroad

How long did you study abroad?

- 1-3 weeks
- 3-10 weeks
- 10-15 weeks
- 15-20 weeks
- 5+ months
- 1+ year

Where did you study abroad?

Short answer text
Journals & Blogs

This section will ask you about your journaling or blogging habits while studying abroad.

Did you keep a personal journal while abroad? A journal is a physical, handwritten account by an individual.

- Yes
- No (If "No", please proceed to question #10)

If Yes, how frequently did you write?

- Once a day
- Once a week
- A few a times a week
- Once a month
- A few times a month
- Once every few months
- Other

In regards to duration, did you journal...

- Only in the beginning
- Only at the end
- Only in the middle
Effects of Intrapersonal Communication on Reverse Culture Shock

Why did you keep a journal?

Who, besides yourself, viewed your journal?

What types of topics did you journal about?

In your entries, how positive did you depict your host country?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all positive ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very positive

In your entries, how positive did you depict your home country?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all positive ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very positive

T/F: I kept a journal to reflect on my personal experiences while abroad.

○ True
○ False

Did you keep an online blog while abroad?

○ Yes
○ No (if "No", please proceed to the final section by clicking "Next" at the bottom of the page)
Was your blog's settings on private or public?

- [ ] Private
- [ ] Public

If Yes, how often did you write?

- [ ] Once a day
- [ ] Once a week
- [ ] A few times a week
- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] A few times a month
- [ ] Once every few months
- [ ] Other

Why did you keep a blog?

Long answer text

Who, besides, yourself, viewed your blog?

Short answer text

What topics did you blog about?

Long answer text

In your entries, how positive did you depict your host country?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all positive [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Very positive
In your entries, how positive did you depict your home country?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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<th>Very positive</th>
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T/F: I kept a blog to reflect on my personal experiences abroad.

○ True
○ False
Appendix 2 (Re-Entry Survey)

Re-entry Survey

The following section is a Re-Entry Survey taken from John S. Setter and Debra Waddell in the Department of Communication at California State University, Fullerton. To the best of your ability, think back to when you first returned from studying abroad. Answer the following questions based on your feelings at the time.

1- Strongly Disagree
2- Moderately Disagree
3- Slightly Disagree
4- Neutral
5- Slightly agree
6- Moderately agree
7- Strongly agree

When I returned, people did not seem that much interested in my experiences abroad

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Life was more exciting in the host culture

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My friends seem to have changed since I have been gone

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When I returned home I felt really depressed

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Effects of Intrapersonal Communication on Reverse Culture Shock

I had difficulty adjusting to my home culture after returning from abroad

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

Since I have been abroad I have become more critical of my home culture’s values

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

I miss the foreign culture where I stayed

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

I had a lot of contact with members of the host culture

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

I feel like I have changed a lot because of my experiences abroad

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

When I returned home I felt generally alienated

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree
My friends and I have grown in separate directions since I have returned

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree
Strongly Agree

Life in my home culture is boring after the excitement of living abroad

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree
Strongly Agree

I miss my friends that I made in the host culture

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree
Strongly Agree

Since I have been abroad I have become more critical of my host cultures' government

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree
Strongly Agree

My friends and family have pressured me to "fit in" upon returning home

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree
Strongly Agree

The values and beliefs of the host country are very different from those of my home culture

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Strongly Disagree
Strongly Agree