

MAKING MEANING OF THE AMERICAN STUDENT – SPANISH HOST FAMILY EXPERIENCE

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NAFSA Bi-Regional Conference * October 2012 * San Juan, Puerto Rico

Motivations for Research

Theoretical Applications:

Address identified gap in literature; Explore internationalization vs. globalization

Practical Applications: For working with both host families and students

Personal Connection: Resonated with my experiences living with host family in Spain, also hosting exchange student



Connections to Research

- **As a study abroad student:** lived with host family in Spain
- **As a resident director:** worked directly with host families in Madrid
- **As an administrator:** designing programs with host family component
- **As a potential host mother:** learning opportunity for daughter



Describing American* Culture

- For those of you who are from the U.S., how would you describe American Culture?
- For those of you who are not from the U.S., how would you describe American culture?
- For those of you who have lived with host families abroad, how did your host family describe American culture (or how do you *think* they would describe it)?

Guiding Research Questions

- Within the American student-Spanish host family dynamic, what evidence of cultural transmission from student to host exists, if any?
- In what ways do host family members feel that the presence of American study abroad students has affected them?
- How do Spanish host families interpret and make meaning of their interactions with the U.S. students that they host?

Context & Methodology

- Research sites: Granada & Valencia, Spain
- Phenomenological, qualitative study
- Focus groups, interviews & observations with host families
- Student focus groups; interviews with resident directors in Spain, France; cultural informant



Participant Demographics

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics by Research Site (N=17)

| | Valencia | Granada |
|--------------|----------|---------|
| Female | 9 | 6 |
| Male | 2 | 0 |
| | | |
| Host Mother | 8 | 6 |
| Host Father | 1 | 0 |
| Host Sibling | 2 | 0 |

Table 4.2 Participant Descriptive Data (N=17)

| | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Range of Years Spent Hosting | 1-18 |
| Mean: Years Spent Hosting | 8.9 |
| Median: Years Spent Hosting | 11 |
| Mode: Years Spent Hosting | 12 (4 participants) |

Theoretical Framework



- **External culture:** easily observed elements
- **Internal culture:** deep culture, not readily observed, identified, understood
- Evidence of cultural transmission through hosting viewed along continuum

Surface-Level Cultural Transmission

Lifestyle Differences

Carolina: *“La forma de comportarse, la forma de vestir, la forma de comer, la forma de sentarse en un sofá. Yo te puedo hablar de lo que es cotidiano y familiar.... Hay mucha variación. Hay mucha variedad de cómo nosotros vivimos, cómo viven ellos...”*

“The way of behaving, the way of dressing, the way of eating, the way of sitting on a sofa. I can talk to you about what is everyday and familiar.... There is much variation. There is much variety in how we live, how they live...”

Food Practices

Irene: *“Ellas [las estudiantes] me explican que allí, en los EEUU, la costumbre es, no es disfrutar de una buena comida. Es comer por comer porque hay que comer. Me paro a esta hora para comer. Da igual, lo que sea: pum-pum-pum y ya está.”*

“They [the students] explain to me that there, in the U.S., the custom is not to enjoy a good meal. It is to eat in order to eat because one has to eat. I stop myself when it is time to eat. It doesn't matter: pum-pum-pum and that's it.”

Surface-Level Cultural Transmission

Values

Nuria: *“que son más bien anglosajonas. O sea, su libertad, su independencia, no tener por qué dar explicaciones, ‘pues me voy, entro, salgo’ y a mí me parece muy bien.”*

“that they [the students] are very much Anglo Saxon. Or rather, their freedom, their independence, not having to give explanations, ‘well I’m going, I’m coming in, I’m leaving’ and to me this seems very good.”

Religion*

Sauce: *“Yo soy católica y las he tenido de todo: católicas, protestantes, eh, tuve una mormona, eh, hebreas, judías, eh, de todo.”*

“I am Catholic and I have had everything: Catholics, Protestants, um, I had a Mormon, um, Hebrews, Jews, um, everything.”

*recognition of religious differences combined with the *manifestation* of religious practices

Surface-Level Cultural Transmission

Politics

Aureli: *“Aunque [los estadounidenses] sean demócratas, pueden ser bastante de derechas y sí que tienen una visión distinta de lo que es la salud, los organismos de sanidad, los hospitales, y, eh, y los centros como públicos, ¿no?”*

“Although [the Americans] are democratic, they can be rather right wing and they do have a very distinct vision of what is health, health care organizations, hospitals, and, um, and the public institutions, right?”

Language

Roberto recalled how as a child he had been speaking Spanish like an American with an American accent:

“Sí, sí, es muy curioso. ¿¡Qué raro, no!? Y luego, lo rectificaba. [laugh] Y mis padres me decían, ‘Pero bueno, qué haces hablando así?’”

“Yes, yes, it is very strange. How weird, right?! And later, I rectified it. [laugh] And my parents were telling me, ‘Hey, what are you doing talking like that?’”

Deeper Level Meaning Making & Perceptions of American Culture

- **Patriotic:** Having sense of national pride, love for one's country
- **Goal Oriented:** Living to work; striving to be number one; opportunities to progress without limits
- **Modern:** Advanced re: research, industry; advanced, global approach to education; young country
- **Contradictory:** Having freedoms in some senses yet oppressed in others; liberal in some respects yet conservative in others
- **Respectful:** Respect for rules, for others in home; moralistic
- **Diverse:** Accepting of varied beliefs, tendencies, ethnicities; encompassing different ways of life; immigrants

Deeper Level Meaning Making & Perceptions of American Culture

Practical (18 references)

- Adapt easily
- Very practical, pragmatic
- Ordered
- Ability to focus & synthesize

Isabel: *“Vuestra cultura es mucho más ágil, mucho más fresca, más práctica. Lo que no sirve, fuera.”*

“Your culture is much more agile, much fresher, more practical. What doesn’t serve a purpose is thrown out.”

Deeper Level Meaning Making & Perceptions of American Culture

Independent (27 references)

- Individualistic
- Independent
- Mature
- Become independent from families early
- Self-sufficient

Raquel: “[*Los estudiantes*] van por la vida ya más sueltos. De muy jovencitos ya saben, se independizan, ya saben que no están tan cubiertos por los padres.”

“[The students] go about their lives more loosely. Since very young they already know, they become independent, they already know they are not covered by their parents.”



Implications for Practice

Knowing this about cultural transmission, and how one cultural group has made meaning of American culture, how can you apply this to your field of international education?

- Education Abroad
- International Students
- Campus & Community Programming
- Other??

Implications for Education Abroad

- Advisement of Students:
 - Who is a good candidate for host family living?
 - What to expect in a host family environment?
- Preparation of Students:
 - What cross cultural issues might encounter?
 - How do others perceive American culture?
 - What does it mean to represent American culture abroad?
- On-site Communication:
 - How to convey the “why” behind culturally based *choques* (clashes)?
 - What tools do students need to best manage *choques* effectively?
- Conveying the two-way nature of the relationship & students' contributions to the experience.
 - Less *transactional* and more *transformational*!

Implications for International Students

- Pre-departure preparation, on-site orientation related to understanding American culture beyond stereotypes, media
- On-going advisement as culture learning moves from surface to deep; as cultural adjustment moves from honeymoon to hostility
- Conveying two-way nature of relationship between student & host; students' contributions to the “hosting” experience
- Other ideas?

Implications for Campus & Community Programming

- Similar to implications for international students re: preparation, on-going advisement
- Training of local community hosts, e.g. organizations, host families, high school administrators
- Providing resources for community members with limited formal training in international education, yet a deep desire to facilitate intercultural exchange
- Other ideas??

Host Families & Internationalization

- Respondent comments supported conclusion that they respected cultural dissimilarities, a hallmark of internationalization.
- No evidence of loss of local culture, or change in national/regional identity
- Findings support premise that placing students in host families cultivates cultural understanding & appreciation while maintaining local structures & identities

Questions & Comments

“Profound change can arise from the power of relationships that cross national boundaries, political frameworks, media barriers, and socially-constructed world views – the power of firsthand experience with the shared humanity that exists in the face of difference as well as the difference that can underlie apparent similarity.”

Bond, Koont, and Stephenson (2005), p. 199



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