Negotiating Identities in the United States:
Female International Students' Identity Gaps and Management Strategies

Rita DANIELS
Western Washington University

Christine E. RITTENOUR
West Virginia University

Abstract: This study was designed to examine female international students' experience and correlates of personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps in the context of their communication within and surrounding school, work, and friendship. Findings of the study revealed that both types of identity gaps coincide with communication dissatisfaction, but that communication satisfaction is only uniquely, negatively predicted by the personal-relational identity gap. Neither type of identity gap significantly predicted educational satisfaction, yet participants' descriptions of the gaps and their means of managing the gaps yield insight to these quantitative trends. Four central qualitative themes emerged to describe how participants manage their personal-enacted identity gaps: "censoring," "pretending," "succumbing," and "being confident." For their personal-relational identity gaps, female international students report management strategies that we have organized around the themes of "direct openness," "humorous openness," "ignoring," and "succumbing."

Keywords: Identity gaps, female international students, negotiating identities

1. Introduction

Identity has been conceptualized as negotiated in communication (Ting-Toomey, 1999); co-created and developed in communication (Collier, 1997); created, maintained, and adapted in communication (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Warren, Jung & Krieger, 2005); and communicated through discourse and interaction (Mokros, 2003). It is possible to experience inconsistency in who we are to ourselves (personal identity), the self that we express (enacted identity), what our relationships are (relational identity), or what our groups are (communal identity); this is an *"identity gap"* (Hecht et al, 2005). Jung (2011) argued that the role of identity in communication has not received much scholarly attention and we assert that this oversight carries heavy consequences within the intercultural domain in which personal and social identification with culture(s) powerfully manifest through communication. In this study, we examine the types of identity gaps (i.e., personal-enacted and personal relational), their roles in female international students' communication satisfaction and educational satisfaction, and how these students manage the gaps.

Since 1950, the United States has recorded an increasing population of international students (Davis, 2003). The number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education

in the 2013/14 academic year was 886,052 (Institute of International Education, 2014). In the next academic year, the number increased to 974,926 (an increase of 88,874, Institute of International Education, 2015). According to the Institute of International Education (2015), international students contributed $30 billion to the U.S. economy in the 2014/15 academic year through tuition and living expenses, health insurance, books and supplies, transportation, and other expenditures. International student diversity also adds value in the form of different perspectives in U.S. classroom discussions, but it would be naïve to assume all international students' classroom communication is in accordance with how they see themselves and their place within their (co)cultures.

International students' accessed opportunities through a U.S. education coincide with unique challenges such as acculturative stress resulting from adjustment to cultural changes (Berry, 2006) and language barriers. Andrade (2006) reviewed how these students are lonely and homesick without their friends and family in close geographic proximity, and that these negative feelings are heightened when they are dissatisfied with the quality of their U.S. social networks. Perhaps these students are expected to assimilate in a sort of one-sided relationship in which their native culture-based identities may be neglected in favor of adopting American norms. Fox (1994) spoke to this within the teacher-student relationship when she asserted that English instructors' displeasure with international students' performance stemmed from their lack of understanding of the depth at which the students' cultures and identities influenced these students' writing, and was not due to the types of student incompetence the teachers had ethnocentrically assumed. Challenges within and outside of the classroom have been reported to result in less satisfaction in college experiences (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005).

Research on international students has primarily focused on experiences of Asian students (Claude & Joel, 2007; Yoon & Portman, 2004), the majority of the international student population in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2015). This focus runs the risk of avoiding within-social-group variations among international students that may make these students' identity negotiation more complex. In this study, we focus on one specific international group: female international students.. In the global wake of promoting female education, especially in developing countries, it is important not to lose sight of ways of enriching the experiences of females who travel abroad to study. The retention of female international students in the U.S. classroom should be of essential priority.

As we attempt to ultimately contribute to global efforts in female education, we recognize that female international students have multiple additional identities (e.g., socio-economic, nationality/ethnicity, age, religion, and sexuality) and so our goal is not to prime a specific within-group identity's salience but rather to get their responses to the identity gaps as they see them. In the current study, we conceptualize the "female international student" identity of our participants as a social category with which they self-identify and associate personal meaning. This goes beyond the fundamental categorization of international students as students enrolled in the university as non-citizens. We turn to Hecht's (1993) concept of identity gaps to better understand how these students negotiate their identities. Though identity gaps are not peculiar to international students or female international students for that matter, using this framework sheds light on the role that (communicated) identity plays in participants' perceived satisfaction with education and their interactions with Americans in the professional setting.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Identity Gaps

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) (Hecht, 1993) places communication as the manifestation of identity, such that who we are is our display of self to others and within our relationships. This communicated identity is organized into four layers: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht et al., 2005). The personal layer refers to an individual's self-image, self-cognition, self-concept, or self-view that provides an understanding to the definition of one's self either in particular situations or in general. Essentially, personal identity is that which the individual communicates intrapersonally to him/herself. The enacted layer is that which is communicated through behaviors and messages. Through this layer, the self is "shared' with others as an outward expression of oneself. While the locus of this layer is communication, the locus of the next layer is a relationship. This relational layer is co-created through roles and social interactions with other people, and is one in which two individuals are enveloped into a collective. The communal layer is the broader identity of a group such as a social network or a family, formed from common group characteristics. The four layers of identity help us to better understand our experiences of the social world (Witteborn, 2004). They do not exist in isolation but interpenetrate each other. CTI's layers of identity may be consistent and coherent, which leads to satisfaction, but this ideal circumstance is not always experienced.

When experiencing inconsistency in who we are to ourselves (personal identity), the self that we express (enacted identity), what our relationships are (relational identity), or what our groups are (communal identity), this is an "identity gap" (Hecht et al., 2005). As Cognitive Dissonance Theory presumes, inconsistency in self and action corresponds with dissatisfaction (Festinger, 1957). CTI is similar in this vein, and is also similar to self-verification theory in its presumption that people strive to achieve consistency between their self-concept and others' appraisal of their self-concept such that when they do not succeed at this, they experience negative emotions (Giesler & Swann, 1999). With CTI proposing *communication as identity* (i.e., one and the same), the stress of not communicating as we are, is not just related to how we see ourselves; it *is* how we see ourselves. Consistent with the aforementioned barriers to international students' U.S. educational satisfaction, we expect a level of complexity in navigating multiple identities when a female international student has to live by roles and expectations different from what she has been socialized in her native culture, and the cultural expectations of the U.S. college classroom.

Previous studies have shown the prevalence of identity gaps among international students (Murray & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2013), first generation college students (Orbe, 2004), immigrants living in the U.S. (Jung & Hecht, 2008; Urban & Orbe, 2010), and within the grandparent-grandchild relationships (Kam & Hecht, 2009) as well as interracial relationships (Drummond & Orbe, 2009) and different cultural groups including African Americans (Hecht, Jackson & Ribeau, 2003; Orbe, 2003) and Jewish Americans (Golden, Niles, & Hecht, 2002; Hecht & Faulkner, 2000; Hecht, Jackson, Lindsley, Strauss & Johnson, 2001). In Murray and Kennedy-Lightsey' (2013) study, personal-relational and personal-communal identity gaps predicted

students' communication satisfaction and intentions to leave their university.

Studies have also examined the correlation between identity gaps and variables such as depression, educational satisfaction, communication satisfaction, perceived discrimination, and acculturation (e.g., Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007, Wadsworth, Hecht, Jung, 2008). International students' level of acculturation and perceived discrimination are known to predict their personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps (Jung et al., 2007). Personal-enacted identity was shown to be the mediator in the relationships among international students' discrimination, acculturation, and educational satisfaction (Wadsworth et al., 2008). With regard to college experience, first generation and international students perform better academically when the classroom or university communication culture is not extremely different from their native culture (Urban & Orbe, 2010), and so we presume that our sample will have similar consequences to identity gaps as those that will be reviewed in the following section on the relationship among identity gaps, communication satisfaction, and educational satisfaction.

2.2. Identity Gaps, Communication Satisfaction, and Educational Satisfaction

In order to meet social expectations in communication, an individual may control the expression of his or her authentic self and suffer psychological effects (Jack, 1999). This can be assessed by examining communication satisfaction, an emotional state indicating that one's internal standards have been met while interacting (Hecht, 1993). These internal standards may be uncertainty reduction, behavior reinforcement in communication, or fulfillment of expectations (Jung, 2011). Therefore, by applying these criteria to the expression of self and identity gaps, communication satisfaction can be explained. Students who experience these gaps do not have some of their internal standards met and will likely experience communication dissatisfaction (Goodboy, Martin & Bolkan, 2009; Jung, 2011). In an attempt for female international students to meet their internal standards while interacting with others, we expect a negative relationship between their identity gaps and communication satisfaction.

H1a: Female international students' personal-enacted identity gap will be related negatively with their communication satisfaction.

H1b: Female international students' personal-relational identity gap will be related negatively with their communication satisfaction.

As a result of students' separation from the shared identity with their peers and family back home, there is a sense of loss, loneliness, tension, uncertainty about societal norms, and loss of confidence (Klomegah, 2006; McClure, 2007). These challenges can be transferred to the classroom situation given that international students have to adapt to their new learning environments; satisfaction in an educational setting is linked to academic performance (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Students' expectations for classroom norms and behaviors can be violated because there is a discrepancy between their personal and enacted identities (Wadsworth et al., 2008). With non-U.S. status easily revealed through visual and vocal cues demonstrated during first impressions, international student status is a quickly salient identity in the U.S.

classroom. The likely differences in students' self-view and the self that others ascribe to them may emerge in the earliest classroom interactions before the students' own communication has entered the equation. Cultural expectancy violations could occur in student-to-student or student-to-teacher relationships. International students experience communication differently in the classroom than students of the host culture (Johnson, 1995). To further assess their educational satisfaction, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H2a: Female international students' personal-enacted identity gap will be related negatively with their educational satisfaction.

H2b: Female international students' personal-relational identity gap will be related negatively with their educational satisfaction.

The challenges international students face can impact on their educational satisfaction and can determine their retention in the U.S. educational system. Wadsworth et al.
(2008) noted that students who were high in educational satisfaction also experience communication satisfaction and enjoy their role as students. Therefore, the following hypothesis and research question were formulated to further the understanding of the relationship between female international students' communication satisfaction and educational satisfaction, and their management strategies for the identity gaps they experience, respectively:

H3: Female international students' communication satisfaction will be related positively to their educational satisfaction.

R1: How do female international students manage the experience of personal-enacted identity gap and personal-relational identity gap?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants were 91 female international students enrolled in college courses across universities in the United States. Their ages ranged from 18 to 28 years (M = 121.50, SD = 3.18). Twenty two participants identified as Black, 20 as Asian/Pacific Islander, 16 as White, 10 as Hispanic or Latino/a, and 23 participants did not indicate this information. The number of undergraduate students was 35; graduate students were 34; and 22 participants did not indicate this information. Participants were from a variety of countries; 22 from Asia (e.g., Japan, Singapore, and Thailand), 18 from Africa (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria), 12 from Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico), 11 from Europe (e.g., Spain, Russia, and Germany), and three from North America (e.g., Belize, Canada, and Bahamas). Twenty five participants did not report their country. Twenty two participants reported having been in the U.S. for less than a year, 36 reported a period of 1-5years, 11 reported 6-10 years, two reported above 10 years, and 20 participants did not provide this information. Participants reported on 40 male instructors

and 30 female instructors (the sex of 21 instructors was not reported). Ten of the instructors were reported to be Native American/American Indian, four Black, nine Asian/Pacific Islander, 42 White, five Hispanic or Latino/a, and the race/ethnicity of 21 instructors was not reported.

3.2. Procedure

Based on procedures approved by the researchers' university institutional review board, participants completed an online survey that was constructed using Qualtrics. The researchers forwarded cover letters of invitation to participate in the study, to administrators and directors of international student offices whose information was retrieved online, to forward to international students in their respective institutions. The link to the online survey was distributed on Facebook to recruit participants for the study. Snowball sampling method was also used for participant recruitment. Participants had to be female, from another country studying in the United States as an international student, and be 18 years old and above to qualify to participate in the study. The online survey comprised the Personal-Enacted Identity Gap Scale and the Personal-Relational Identity Gap Scale (Jung & Hecht, 2004), the Student Communication Satisfaction Scale (SCSS; Goodboy et al., 2009), and the Educational Satisfaction Scale (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Participants also responded to open-ended questions (See Appendix) requesting them to provide an example of situations in which they experienced personal-enacted identity gap and personal relational identity gap, and how they managed the situation.

3.3. Measures

Personal-enacted identity gap. The 11-item personal-enacted identity gap scale (Jung & Hecht, 2004) was used to measure the perception of personal-enacted identity gap. Items on the scale describe consistencies and inconsistencies between views of one's self and expressions of identity as female international students. Each item on the scale is rated a 7-point scale in the Likert format (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Sample items from the scale are: "When I communicate with my classmates/friends, they get to know "real me"" and "There is a difference between the real me and the impression I give my classmates/friends about me." The previous Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 11-item scale was 89 (Jung & Hecht). In this study, the obtained Cronbach alpha for the scale was 88 (M = 34.41, SD = 11.60).

Personal-relational identity gap. The 11-item personal-relational identity gap scale (Jung & Hecht, 2004) was used to measure the personal-relational identity gap. The items on the scale describe situations in which participants were ascribed characteristics that were either consistent or inconsistent with how they viewed themselves as female international students. Each item on the scale is rated a 7-point scale in the Likert format (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Sample items from the scale are: "I feel that my classmates/friends see me as I see myself" and "I feel my classmates/friends stereotype me." The previous Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 11-item scale was .86 (Jung & Hecht). In this study, the obtained Cronbach alpha for the scale was .82 (M = 43.03, SD = 9.97).

Communication satisfaction. The 8-item SCSS (Goodboy et al., 2009) was used to measure participants' communication satisfaction with the instructor they had for the smallest class

during the last semester. This scale was derived from Hecht's (1978) measure of communication satisfaction (i.e., Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory) to serve as a global measure of communication satisfaction with an instructor throughout the semester other than referencing a particular conversation (which is what Hecht's measure assesses). Given that much of student-teacher interaction is geared toward course or content (Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 2002), the SCSS assesses the communication expectations of students and their satisfied feelings in any classroom setting which is also course or content related (Goodboy et al., 2009). Each item on the scale is rated a 7-point scale in the Likert format (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Sample items on the SCSS are: "My communication with my teacher felt satisfying" and "My teacher makes an effort to satisfy the concerns I have." The previous Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the SCSS was .93 for the U.S. sample and .89 for the Chinese sample (Goodboy, Bolkan, Myers & Zhao, 2011). In this study, the obtained Cronbach alpha for the scale was .78 (M = 42.23, SD = 6.37).

Educational satisfaction. The 5-item educational satisfaction scale (Wadsworth et al., 2008) constructed from Plax, Kearney, and Downs (1986) and made applicable to students instead of teachers, was used to measure educational satisfaction. The adapted items on the scale reflect international students' educational satisfaction with educational experiences and communication in the U.S. classroom. Items that measure teachers' satisfaction with teaching in Plax et al.'s measure were adapted to reflect international students' satisfaction with the U.S. university experience. Likewise, items that measure teachers' satisfaction with students were adapted to reflect international students' satisfaction with their peers in the classroom setting, and response from the original scale were changed from satisfied/dissatisfied to a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Wadsworth et al.'s (2008) 5-item scale included two items that examined the students' satisfaction when communicating with others in their classes (e.g., ''I am generally comfortable when communicating with my instructors'') and three items that examined international students' satisfaction with attending an American university (e.g., ''If I had my life to live over again, I would come to the United States for university''). The Cronbach's alpha of the two subscales, satisfaction with peers in their classes and satisfaction with their overall educational experiences in the U.S. were .70 and .81, respectively (Wadsworth et al., 2008). In this study, the obtained Cronbach alpha for the two subscales, satisfaction with peers in their classes and satisfaction with their overall educational experiences in the U.S. were .86 (M = 6.27, SD = 2.65) and .50 (M = 12.25, SD = 2.04) respectively. The Cronbach alpha for the summed scale was .75 (M = 19.45, SD = 3.91).

4. Data Analysis

Prior to tests of the hypotheses, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed among all variables (i.e., personal-enacted identity gap, personal-relational identity gap, communication satisfaction, and educational satisfaction). Communication satisfaction was computed as dependent variable, and the personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps were computed as independent variables in a multiple regression analysis to test H1a and H1b. Pearson product-moment correlations among personal-enacted identity gap, personal-relational identity gap, and educational satisfaction were used to test H2a and H2b. Pearson

product-moment correlation between communication satisfaction and educational satisfaction was used to test H3. To answer RQ1, responses from the open-ended questions were initially independently analyzed by the first author to identify themes on the strategies that female international students in the U.S. use in managing their personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps. Data were organized and interpreted with the assistance of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), NVivo 11 Pro for Windows (QSR International Inc., Cambridge, MA). Using an emic approach (Tracy, 2013), analytic memos and initial codes were created to organize the data based on recurrent responses. The second author reviewed initial codes for overlaps and discrepancies. To enhance interpretations, the researchers relied on expressions from participants to frame the themes.

5. Results

The first hypothesis (H1a and H1b) predicted that female international students' personal-enacted identity gap and personal-relational identity gap would be related negatively to their communication satisfaction. Results of a Pearson product-moment correlation support this relationship. Personal-enacted identity gap ($r = -.16$, $p = .17$) and personal-relational identity gap ($r = -.30$, $p = .01$) were negatively related with communication satisfaction. A multiple regression analysis was computed using personal-enacted identity gap and personal-relational identity gap as independent variables, and communication satisfaction as the dependent variable. The equation containing both identity gaps accounted for 9.4% of the variance in communication satisfaction ($F(2,62) = 3.20$, $p = .05$). However, a closer examination of the beta weights revealed that only personal-relational identity gap ($\beta = -.31$, $p = .05$) accounted for any unique variance in communication satisfaction.

The second hypothesis (H2a and H2b) predicted that female international students' personal-enacted identity gap and personal-relational identity gap will be related negatively with their educational satisfaction. Results of a Pearson product-moment correlation did not support this relationship. Personal-enacted identity gap ($r = .19$, $p = .57$) and personal-relational identity gap ($r = .26$, $p = .45$) were not negatively related with their educational satisfaction.

The third hypothesis predicted that female international students' communication satisfaction will be related positively to their educational satisfaction. Results of a Pearson product-moment correlation did not support this relationship. Communication satisfaction was not related to educational satisfaction ($r = .04$, $p = .91$).

Research question one focused on how female international students manage the experience of personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps. In soliciting for examples of situations in which participants experienced these gaps, they cited classroom conversations (as a result of language barrier), interpersonal relationships (e.g., friendships and romantic relationships), job interviews, and at the workplace. In the following section, we discuss themes used to characterize the management strategies female international students' use for their personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps.

5.1. Personal-Enacted Identity Gap Management Strategies

Four central themes emerged to describe how female international students manage theirpersonal-enacted identity gap: censoring, pretending, succumbing, and being confident.

Censoring. Given the different cultural backgrounds from which international students are coming from, English language is one of the challenges they have to overcome if English is not their first language. As one participant noted: "for me, the main reason I do not express my true self is the difficulty in the language. Sometimes, I cannot say what I mean specifically because of the language [English]… I am Brazilian." For any international student who may be fluent in English, having an accent may also raise the eyebrows of communication partners which can prompt some cultural expectations and stereotypes. For some, these challenges make them feel "there are two me; the 'me' leaving and integrating some aspect of American values, and the 'me' (may be real) when I am back in my home country." For others, it prevents them from expressing themselves: "In some situations when I'm not successful using English language, it makes me give up on expressing my opinions or explaining something. This can make people form misconceptions about me."

Pretending. First, female international students engage in behaviors that are acceptable and expected in the situations in which they find themselves so that they can fit in their new environment. One participant reported expressing her identity as a promiscuous girl so that she could engage in the conversations of her friends whereas another reported sometimes keeping the information about her sexuality to avoid conflicts with her classmates who are openly homophobic. Second, participants reported engaging in pretense as a way of fitting in one's new environment. For instance, a participant noted that "when my friends sometimes talk about unfamiliar topics, I pretend I knew exactly what they were talking about just to identify with them and fit in." Another participant reported, "I just express myself the way that people think I should… I know exactly who I am but I usually hide it." Third, remaining silent is a way of pretending to fit into one's new environment. For some, this silence is accompanied by stress within oneself: *"I just went along and stressed inside."* According to one participant,

> When I am speaking to my friends (especially the ones at school), I am very quiet because I feel I will say something that they do not want me to say because of my Christianity. I typically don't say anything because I feel they will get tired of me and leave me so I do what pleases them but it doesn't conflict with the laws or commands of God.

Succumbing. In an attempt to manage their personal-enacted identity gap, female international students learn to let go and not interpret their experience or react. Whereas some walk away, others accept the situation and move on. One participant presents the argument that a foreigner has to learn to adapt.

> I learned that Spanish and American cultures are different so I just have to deal with it the most possible respectful way. At the end of it, I am the one in a foreign country and this is their country.

In spite of letting go, participants who felt constrained by the English language hoped to find the appropriate words to express themselves and to be understood. A participant added that she does not discuss important things with people who do not know much about other cultures and countries whereas another noted that she shares information in small portions with people with whom she often communicates.

Being confident. Some female international students employed confidence as a strategy to manage their personal-enacted identity gap. They noted having discovered that a respectful discussion is much more effective in communicating their ideas because people tend to be defensive. For one participant, during a group discussion in class, she managed to gather courage and talk to a few of the group members after various meetings only to realize that she could relate with her classmates and not be timid. According to another participant, "I try to be more patient and also learn more information so that I am confident enough." Taking pride in one's experiences was also noted as a way of feeling confident about oneself as one participant reported "I have learned to be more confident and proud of my experiences as an international student getting acclimated with a new culture and I have begun to express myself in a way that reflects who I really am." Though previous research and findings of this study have shown the potential negative effects of identity gaps, the last participant's management strategy reflects otherwise. Having experienced personal-enacted identity gap, the participant is able to deal with the gap and benefit from being confident and presenting oneself without an alteration.

5.2. Personal-Relational Identity Gap Management Strategies

Four central themes emerged to describe how female international students manage their personal-relational identity gaps: direct openness, humorous openness, ignoring, and succumbing.

Direct openness. For some female international students, engaging in a conversation with their communication partner about their experience of an identity gap is their management strategy. According to one participant, she keeps telling communication partners "I am unpredictable and I am not who you always think I am. Stop assuming to know me." Another participant wrote: "I keep admonishing them that I really mean what I say and that I am not trying to be funny, ridiculous, or anything." In the conversation about the experience of personal-relational identity gap, one participant noted that she makes a continuous effort to talk about her culture and country, and she is open to new friendships.

Humorous openness. Using humorous openness is another way participants directly reported managing their personal-relational identity gap. According to one participant: "I often make fun of it with them and make fun of it myself." Whereas some think to be perceived differently in your relationship with people is funny because they are totally different, others are concerned because even though they find it funny, sometimes, people cross the line and it does not become funny anymore. Inasmuch as identity gaps can have a negative effect because of the wrong impression created, sometimes they have a positive effect because in the experience of a personal relational identity gap, others' perception of yourself may be positive and not as negative as you may perceive of yourself. As another participant noted: "I smiled because it felt good to be perceived as more serious than I am."

Ignoring. Many participants reported not paying attention or ignoring situations in which they feel that there is a discrepancy between their personal and relational identities. In using this strategy, participants indicated how important it was for them to be respectful. The following are a selection of participants' views:

> I just ignore them. It is my relationship not theirs.
> Anytime they invite me out for unnecessary programs, I turn them down in a very polite manner so no one gets offended.

> Don't pay attention.

> I don't do anything. It doesn't bother me. People who really want to know you approach you and ask real questions.

Inasmuch as participants make a conscious effort not to be affected by the personal-relational identity gap that they experience, they are also mindful not to mar their relationships as a result of managing their identity. Additionally, peer support from other international students and self-motivation are worth having while dealing with one's personal-relational identity gap, as one participant noted: "I encourage myself. I know who I am and my capabilities. I have support from my peers who are also international students."

Succumbing. Female international students do recognize the fact that their enrollment in college in a different culture also means having to keep up with the difference in the educational system and so for some, they are more focused on their academic performance. As explained by a participant, "I can't do much [concerning people's wrong perception of her] except keep working hard." Another participant explained, "I just let people think whatever they want because my dad says I should just worry about what my family thinks about me (they love me)." Another female international student reported: "I hide myself to comply with the image that others think of me." Succumbing to the perception others have of you when you relate with them can be detrimental to one's self-concept. One participant noted:

> I tried to be like everybody else here. Follow the rules of being an American female student. It was nice in the beginning but soon I didn't like myself anymore.

For other participants, another way of succumbing is to perceive their personal-relational identity gap as a way of rediscovering their identity. As one participant reported:

> I have been changing a lot over the last two years [since she relocated to the U.S. as a female international student]. I call it growing up. I found myself. I have been called weird a lot. I get that I am not American, and I do not behave according to most standards here. But I do not think I am weird; different, yes.

6. Discussion

This study was designed to further the understanding of the role of personal-enacted and enacted-relational identity gaps in female international students' communication satisfaction and educational satisfaction within and surrounding school, work, and friendship in the U.S.; and how these students manage the gaps. Though we do not presume our findings to be generalizable to all female international students in the U.S., these results give some insight on the within-group differences of international students. The responses represent voices of a specific group of international students (i.e., females) and explicate the uniqueness and commonalities of their experiences as members of a larger population. Irrespective of participants' diverse backgrounds, their responses convey the similarities in their lived experiences and simultaneously reveal a variety of ways each person manages the identity gaps.

Findings of the study revealed that, as predicted, the discrepancy between how female international students perceive themselves and how they express themselves in a different manner while interacting with others was negatively related with communication satisfaction. This finding confirms the established negative relationship between identity gaps and communication satisfaction (e.g., Jung, 2011). Satisfaction is a key outcome of communication that indicates one's internal standards are met because uncertainty is reduced or a behavior is reinforced. This power of affirming/disconfirming communication exchanges coincides with evidence that the suppression of one's authentic self in order to meet social standards or survive in a social situation leads to adverse psychological outcomes (e.g., Duarte & Thompson, 1999; Jack, 1999).

The strength of the relationship between personal-enacted identity gap and communication satisfaction, and personal-relational identity gap and communication satisfaction differed especially for the latter which accounted for some unique variance in communication satisfaction (β = -.31, p = .05) whereas personal-enacted identity gap (β = .01, p = .95) did not. This finding makes intuitive sense considering the fact that data from the open-ended questions suggest that female international students engage in behaviors that may increase their personal-enacted identity gap while they manage their personal-relational identity gap (i.e., ignoring and succumbing). This dynamic is also suggestive of females' perceived interest in maintaining relationships as it appears that participants' identity as perceived by others during communication is of ultimate concern rather than how they enact different identities from the real self. This ultimate concern is evident in explaining 9.4% of the variance in communication satisfaction among our participants.

One participant indicated that her strategy for managing her personal-relational identity gap was to ignore her acquaintances to protect her relationship: "I just ignore them. It is my relationship not theirs. Anytime they invite me out for unnecessary programs, I turn them down in a very polite manner so no one gets offended." It is possible participants are primed by stereotypes to maintain their relationships, or receive support from their social networks to be empowered with management strategies to deal with these identity gaps that in the long run have positive effects on their academic success. In the absence of social networks or otherwise, female international students may simply have a "going along to get along" management strategy to achieve the success for which they have left their home countries.

These findings raise questions as to whether female international students would report experiencing personal-relational identity gap more than any other gap (e.g., personal-communal identity gap) if they have socialized, perceived, or rather stereotypical tendency for developing and maintaining relationships. Participants reference the experience of the identity gap with regards to the fact that they are not of the dominant culture, which is not hard to tell by the simple virtue of the fact that they are international students. Hence, for an international student, the issue of being foreign (i.e., of a different culture other than that of the dominant one) trumps over the expectations of any other social identity for that matter. According to Yeh and Drost (2002), students who are not of the dominant culture suffer the attribution of powerful unspoken stereotypes about their identity and will have to negotiate multiple identities.

An enacted identity is relatively recognized quickly in communication because it is a communication behavior but a relational identity is formed over a period of time and involves a speculative process of interpreting and determining another's identity (Jung, 2011). In comparing these two identities, one would expect that given that relational identity is formed over a period of time and individuals have many instances to refer to buttress their perception of another person's relational identity, it may be difficult to convince a formed perception and hence, personal-relational identity gaps should be of much concern. Also, we may not necessarily have control over another person's interpretation of our behavior unlike the personal control we have over our enacted identity. As a result, the relationship between personal-enacted identity gap and communication satisfaction could be negative though not significant whereas there is significant negative relationship between personal-relational identity gap and communication satisfaction.

According to Jung (2011), one tends to have less communication satisfaction when he or she experiences greater personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps with enacted-relational identity gap having the strongest effect. Jung (2011) found that the three identity gaps mediate the effect of assertiveness and communication apprehension on communication satisfaction. It is therefore plausible that the relationship between personal-enacted identity and communication satisfaction for female international students is one that is dependent on personal traits (e.g., concern for expression of self – personal identity). Ryan and Anas (2006) found that a personal-enacted identity gap is influenced by an individual's personal trait.

Notably, findings of the study neither support a relationship between female international students' personal-enacted identity gap and educational satisfaction nor a relationship between communication satisfaction and educational satisfaction. International students from all over the world travel to the United States to acquire better educational and professional experiences than their home countries can offer (Jung et al., 2007). This educational experience is one that is held dearly to international students and demands hard work while they get accustomed to the U.S. educational system and culture. They have to deal with stereotyping, prejudice, language barrier, homesickness, culture shock, and limited social skills, but perhaps, they are able to restrict these challenges from interfering with their educational satisfaction and/or refuse to acknowledge the interference. Put differently, as a result of their heightened expectation (compared to U.S. students in the U.S. classroom) that skill and knowledge acquisition – and not relationships and people's perception of them – are paramount, and that come with hard

work, female international students are less hindered in this particular gap's regard.

Additionally, though we did not request participants' information on their fields of study, university, and location in the U.S., it is possible that these conditions may explain the absence of a relationship between female international students' personal-enacted identity gap and educational satisfaction; and between communication satisfaction and educational satisfaction. For instance, research has shown that when women persist in nontraditional majors, they are more likely to attain greater sense of belonging and identity compatibility (Rosenthal, London, Levy & Lobel, 2011).

Finally, prior research has found effects of identity gaps on the depression levels among a sample of Korean Americans (Jung & Hecht, 2008). Korean immigrants have been reported to have relatively low acculturation levels to other minority groups' cultures and the American culture (Oh, Koeske & Sales, 2002). Korean immigrants also have a limited English proficiency (Tang, Shimizu & Chen, 2006). Given that much research attention has been focused on Asian international students (e.g., Korean students), it is possible that the effect of identity gaps are greater for some particular groups of international students than others. We would assume that Korean students would have greater identity gaps given their relatively low acculturation levels than African international students, for example. In conclusion, findings of this study are suggestive of potential within-group differences (e.g., what constitutes international students' identity gaps based on their race/ethnicity, country/language of origin, length of stay in the U.S., field of study, and level of education) that help us to further understand the experiences of international students in the United States. Future research should explore these areas.

References

Andrade, Maureen S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education, 5,* 131-154. doi:10.1177/14752 40906065589

Berry, John W. (2006). Stress perspectives on acculturation. In D. L. Sam & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (pp. 43-57). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brougham, Ruby R.; Zail, Christy M.; Mendoza, Celeste M. & Miller, Janine R. (2009). Stress, sex differences, and coping strategies among college students. *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues, 28*, 85-97. doi:10.1007/ s12144-009-9047-0

Claude, Bonazzo & Joel, Wong Y. (2007). Japanese international female students' experience of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. *College Student Journal, 41,* 631-639.

Collier, Marcus J. (1997). Cultural identity and intercultural communication. In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (8th ed., pp. 36-44). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Davis, Todd M. (2003). *Open doors 2002/2003: Report on international college students' exchange*. New York: Institute of International Education.

Drummond, Darlene K. & Orbe, Mark P. (2009). "Who are you trying to be?": Identity gaps

within intraracial encounters. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 10,* 81-87. doi:10.1080/17459430903236098

Duarte, Linda M. & Thompson, Janice M. (1999). Sex differences in self-silencing. *Psychological Reports, 85,* 145-161. doi:10.2466/pr0.1999.85.1.145

Festinger, Leon. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fox, Helen. (1994). *Listening to the world: Cultural issues in academic writing.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Giesler, Brian R. & Swann, William B. Jr. (1999). Striving for confirmation: The role of self-verification in depression. In T. Joiner & J. C. Coyne (Eds.), *The interactional nature of depression* (pp. 189-218). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Golden, Doug R.; Niles, T.A. & Hecht, Michael L. (2002). Jewish American identity. In J. N. Martin, T. K. Nakayama, & L. A. Flores (Eds.), *Readings in intercultural communication: Experiences and contexts* (pp. 44-52). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Goodboy, Alan K.; Bolkan, San; Myers, Scott A. & Zhao, Xing (2011). Student use of relational and influence messages in response to perceived instructor power use in American and Chinese college classrooms. *Communication Education, 60,* 191-209. doi:10.1080/03634 523.2010.502970

Goodboy, Alan K.; Martin, Matthew M. & Bolkan, San (2009). The development and validation of the student communication satisfaction scale. *Communication Education, 58,* 372-396. doi:10.1080/03634520902755441

Hankin, Benjamin L.; Mermelstein, Robin & Roesch, Linda (2007). Sex differences in adolescent depression: Stress exposure and reactivity models. *Child Development, 78*, 279-295. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.00997.x

Hecht, Michael L. (1978). The conceptualization and measurement of interpersonal com-municationsatisfaction. *Human Communication Research, 4*, 25-264. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1978.tb00614.x

Hecht, Michael L. (1993). 2002- a research odyssey: Towards the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communication Monographs, 60*, 76-82. doi:10.1080/03637759309376297

Hecht, Michael L. & Faulkner, Sandra L. (2000). Sometimes Jewish, sometimes not: The closeting of Jewish American identity. *Communication Studies, 51*, 372-287. doi:10.1080/10510970009388532

Hecht, Michael L.; Jackson II, Ronald L.; Lindsley, Sheryl L.; Strauss, Susan & Johnson, Karen E. (2001). Language and ethnicity: Layering identities as frames. In H. Giles & W. P. Robinson (Eds.), *The new handbook of language and social psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 429-450). New York: Wiley.

Hecht, Michael L.; Jackson II, Ronald L. & Ribeau, Sidney A. (2003). *African American communication: Exploring identity and culture*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hecht, Michael; Warren Jr., Ron; Jung, Eura & Krieger, Janice L. (2005). The communication theory of identity: Development, theoretical perspectives, and future directions. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 257-278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Institute of International Education (2014). *Open Doors 2014: International students in the United States and study abroad by American students are at all-time high*. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2014/2014-11-17-Open-Doors-Data#.V3qLXzX2uSp

Institute of International Education (2015). *Open doors 2015: Open Doors 2015: International students in the U.S. up ten percent to nearly one million; study abroad by American students picks up momentum*. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2015/2015-11-16-Open-Doors-Data

Jack, Dana C. (1999). Silencing the self: Inner dialogue and outer realities. In T. Joiner & J. C. Coyne (Eds.), *Interactional nature of depression* (pp. 221-246). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Johnson, Karen E. (1995). *Understanding communication in second language classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jung, Eura (2011). Identity gap: Mediator between communication input and output variables. *Communication Quarterly, 59*, 315-338. doi:10.1080/01463373.2011.583501

Jung, Eura & Hecht, Michael L. (2004). Elaborating the communication theory of identity: Identity gaps and communication outcomes. *Communication Quarterly, 52*, 265-283. doi:10.1080/01463370409370197

Jung, Eura & Hecht, Michael L. (2008). Identity gaps and level of depression among Korean American immigrants. *Health Communication, 23*, 313-325. doi:10.1080/10410230802229688

Jung, Eura; Hecht, Michael L. & Wadsworth, Brooke Chapman (2007). The role of identity in international students' psychological well-being in the United States: A model of depression level, identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 31,* 605-624. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2007.04.001

Kam, Jennifer A. & Hecht, Michael L. (2009). Investigating the role of identity gaps among communicative and relational outcomes within the grandparent-grandchild relationship: The young-adult grandchildren's perspective. *Western Journal of Communication, 73,* 456-480. doi:10.1080/10570310903279067

Klomegah, Roger Y. (2006). Social factors relating to alienation experienced by international students in the United States. *College Student Journal, 40*, 303-315.

Martin, Matthew M.; Myers, Scott A. & Mottet, Timothy P. (2002). Student motives for communicating in the college classroom. In J. L. Chesebro & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Communication for teachers* (pp. 35-46). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

McClure, Joanne W. (2007). International graduates' cross-cultural adjustment: Experiences, coping strategies, and suggested programmatic responses. *Teaching in Higher Education, 12*, 199-217. doi:10.1080/13562510701191976

Mokros, Hartmut B. (2003). A constitutive approach to identity. In H. B. Mokros (Ed.), *Identity matters* (pp. 3-28). Creskill, NJ: Hampton.

Murray, Candace L. & Kennedy-Lightsey, Carrie D. (2013). Should I stay or go?: Student identity gaps, feelings, and intent to leave. *Communication Research Reports, 3,* 96-105. doi:10.1080/08824096.2012.762894

Oh, Yunjin; Koeske, Gary F. & Sales, Esther (2002). Acculturation, stress, and depressive

symptoms among Korean immigrants in the United States. *Journal of Social Psychology, 142,* 511-526. doi:10.080/00224540209603915

Orbe, Mark. (2003). African American first generation college student communicative experiences. *Electronic Journal of Communication/La Revue Electronique de Communication*, *13*(2/3).

Orbe, Mark P. (2004). Negotiating multiple identities within multiple frames: An analysis of first-generation college students. *Communication Education, 53,* 131-149. doi:10.10/0363452041000168240

Plax, Timothy G.; Kearney, Patricia & Downs, Timothy M. (1986). Communicating control in the classroom and satisfaction with teaching and students. *Communication Education, 35*, 379-388. doi:10.1080/03634528609388362

Rosenthal, Lisa; London, Bonita; Levy, Sheri B. & Lobel, Marci (2011). The roles of perceived identity compatibility and social support for women in a single-sex STEM program at a co-educational university. *Sex Roles, 65,* 725-736. doi:10.1007/s11199-011-9945-0

Ryan, Ellen B.; Anas, Ann P. & Friedman, Daniela B. (2006). Evaluations of older adult assertiveness in problematic clinical encounters. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 25,* 129-145. doi:10.1177/0261927X062866666350

Tang, Hao; Shimizu, Robin & Chen, Moon S. (2006). English language proficiency and smoking prevalence among California's Asian Americans. *Cancer, 104,* 2982-2988.

Ting-Toomey, Stella (1999). *Communicating across cultures*. New York: Guilford Press.

Tracy, Sarah J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Urban, Ewa L. & Orbe, Mark P. (2010). Identity gaps of contemporary U.S. immigrants: Acknowledging divergent communicative experiences. *Communication Studies, 61,* 304-320. doi:10.1080/10510971003757147

Witteborn, Saskia. (2004). Of being an Arab woman before and after September 11: The enactment of communal identities in talk. Howard Journal of Communications, 15, 83-98. doi:10.1080/10646170490448312

Wadsworth, Brooke Chapman; Hecht, Michael L. & Jung, Eura. (2008). The role of identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation in international students' educational satisfaction in American classrooms. Communication Education, 57, 64-87. doi:10.1080/03634520701668407

Yeh, Christine J. & Drost, Christopher. (2002). Bridging identities among ethnic minority youth in schools. New York, NY : ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.

Yoon, Eunju & Portman, Tarrell A. A. (2004). Critical issues of literature on counseling international students. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 32, 33-44. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1912.2004.tb00359.x

Zhao, Chun-Mei; Kuh, George D. & Carini, Robert M. (2005). A comparison of international student and American student engagement in effective educational practices. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*, 209-231. doi:10.1353/jhe.2005.0018

Appendix - Open-ended Questionnaire

1. Using the space provided below, please describe a situation where you experienced any inconsistency in who you are and the self you express.
2. Given the experience you shared above, how did you cope with the situation?
3. Using the space provided below, please describe a situation in which you were ascribed characteristics that are inconsistent with whom you are.
4. Given the experience you shared above, how did you cope with the situation?

Author Note

Rita Daniels is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Western Washington University, USA. Her research emphases are Intergroup Communication (specifically, issues related to gender and cultural identities) and Organizational Communication. Her publications include Transformational leadership in the Ghanaian university classroom (*International Communication Studies, 2014*), and Framing analysis of Syria's 8/21/13 use of chemical weapons (*Ohio Journal of Communication*, 2017).

Christine E. Rittenour is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies; Coordinator, M.A. Theory and Research Program; and Faculty Associate, Women's and Gender Studies at West Virginia University. She researches the links between communication and identity, exploring the ways that communication reflects and affects various social (e.g., ethnicity, age), structural (e.g., in-law relationships), and value-based identities (e.g., feminism, generativity).