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Initial impressions: An autoethnographic narrative of a Filipino family lost and found, inside and out

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Abstract

Around 65% of Filipino-Americans were born in the Philippines and moved to the United States, leaving family behind (Tuason et al., 2007). Most cases of long-distance separation stem from economic reasons, with family members remaining close and often sending support back to the Philippines (Tuason et al., 2007; Wang, 2010). This study examines identity and family belonging according to the story of three women whose trip to the Philippines reunites members of a family separated between there and the United States. One woman emigrated as the bride of an American soldier; the second woman is her daughter, born in the U.S., who has never met her Filipino relatives; and the third woman is the daughter's best friend and the author of this research study.

Keywords: narrative, auto-ethnography, geographically separated families, Philippines, friendship, identity, culture, interpersonal relationships, half-sibling, immigrant.

Initial impressions: An autoethnographic narrative of a Filipino family lost and found, inside and out

Finally, we have landed in Manila, and there go my nerves!

It's dark. I am exhausted from my 23-hour flight. Everyone in the airport is staring at me. I realize that my long blond hair must make me stick out like a sore thumb.

Where are we? Who is picking us up? I can't understand a word Francesca's mom is saying on the phone, but judging by her loud and direct tone of voice, I wonder if we've landed at the wrong airport. I don't usually get this nervous when I travel, but there are so many unknowns on this trip. Maybe I should have asked Chesca's mother more about the logistics, but I didn't. And here I am.

At least I'm with my best friend and her Mom, who knows grew up in the Philippines. I don't think I could ever travel here alone, and I've been here for only five minutes.

It is so hot here! Does it ever cool down?

A large 70's style van just pulled up. Is this our ride? The windows are tinted so I can't see inside. Chesca's Mom is motioning us over to the van. This must be our "welcome wagon."

Chesca's brother, his wife and five kids jump out of the van. Being bombarded with hugs and kisses from all of the kids is making me feel welcome and much more at ease. How many people are here to pick us up?! There is an older couple here, as well. I'm not sure who they are. Should I hug them, too? I'm not even sure if they know who I am. I guess I should just get in the van and enjoy the ride. I'm so happy to finally be here!

Are those red velour seats and bobble head dogs on the dashboard?



Fig. 1. Street scene, Manila.

Everything happens for a reason.

I try never to turn down the opportunity for a trip. Especially an international trip. At 28 and single, I assign a top priority to travelling. So, when my best friend of 11 years, Chesca, asked me to travel with her and her Mom to the Philippines for a week, I didn't hesitate one bit. This is a trip we've talked about since we were teenagers. The reason for the trip is partly for pleasure, and partly for Chesca (as I call her) to meet her, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and other extended family for the first time in her life. That includes perhaps most importantly her half-brother. I could not turn down the invitation, because I would love to see the other side of the world – but also I knew that this would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience to share with my very best friend, and I knew I would regret it if I missed out. I want to be there for her because I know it will be emotional and special, and I know sharing it with her and her Mom will make me feel even more like part of their family. So we get our passports and book our flights and started packing. I leave my suitcase open on my bedroom floor for three months before our

November departure. It's something I do. It is one way I build my excitement with a big trip on the horizon. And this trip is the biggest trip of my life.

My suitcase lies open on my floor for a trip that I am not planning or researching or over-thinking. The planning isn't up to me this time. But I am building my excitement anyway.

Still, I am a bit nervous at the same time. I am intimidated by how far we are going, I mean we're going to the other side of the world! And how vulnerable I will be in a country where I don't speak the language (Tagalog) other than a few general phrases. I really have no idea what to expect but try to envision it a lot. The best part about the three months before we leave for the Philippines is the amount of time Chesca and I are spending together. We had recently moved out of our shared apartment, and it was the first time since college we were not roommates. The regularity of our weeknight dinner-and-wine dates had dwindled, what with me being in school and her being in a new relationship. Now our weekly dates are back, as we get together to talk about the itinerary, re-organize our suitcases, and familiarize ourselves with where in the Philippines we will visit and which of her family members we will be meet. We fantasize about white sand beaches, clear blue bodies of water, warm tropical breezes, and summer tans. We e-mail back and forth and call and text every day. We are excited for the trip, and I am thrilled we have such a good reason to spend so much time together.

Franchesca: I can only imagine what to expect when traveling to a foreign country, especially for the sole purpose of meeting family for the first time in my 25 years. When my mother asked if I wanted to accompany her on a trip to her home country, the Philippines, I was thrilled. She often shares stories from her childhood describing her living conditions and a culture that I cannot even begin to understand. Now was my chance, and I knew just the girl to invite to share it: my best friend, Meghann. I need someone there who will be able to relate to being in such unfamiliar surroundings. Did I mention that this trip marked the first time that I'll meet my 32-year-

old brother, Alton? Did I also mention that I only found out a few years ago that I even had a brother? How could I have a brother I did not know about for the greater portion of my life? Let me explain about my family. My mother grew up in the Philippines with her parents and siblings. They had very little money and very little knowledge of the world beyond their own. At 19, my mother gave birth to my brother Alton, whose father promptly left them. My dad was a Marine who came into the picture when he was stationed in the Philippines. She left my brother in my grandfather's care and moved to the United States to pursue a better life. In the United States, my sister came along, and then I did.



Figure 2. Selfie, with Chesca (left).

Autoethnography

Autoethnography as a methodology can seem like the research equivalent of a “selfie” to an art photographer, but as may be the case with certain photographs, informed reflection can turn it into something else.

According to Goodall (2000), “writing that rhetorically enables intimacy in the study of culture” (p. 14), or what he calls “the new ethnography,” is a methodology many sceptical researchers are still trying to understand in terms of its implications and benefits. Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to this kind of writing as “autoethnography,” a:

genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth auto-ethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations (p. 739).

Autoethnographic methodology breaks the mold of most structured research methods by relating lived experience to culture and emotion. Emotion is the key to evoking a lived experience rather than just a

reading experience. Autoethnography is the only research methodology that can articulate the accurate experience of emotion in human experience (Ellis, 2004). Living the emotion is the only way to collect that data.

Scholars who write autoethnographies use their own experiences upon which to build reflections, grounded in experience, that deliver their interpretation of experience in a way that evokes emotion (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, 2007; Bochner, 1997; Bochner, 2012; Chawla, 2008). Advocates for this methodology like Carolyn Ellis (2004) and H.L. Goodall, Jr. (2000) guide researchers who follow in their footsteps by providing writing exercises that encourage autoethnographers to enhance the detail and evocative qualities of their observations to gain insight. Key words such as “engage,” “participatory,” “intimate,” “culture,” “experience,” and “emotion” are used by researchers when they describe the use of ethnographic methodologies especially as opposed to other research methods (Goodall, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Tillman, 2009; Witteborn, S., Milburn, T., & Ho, E. Y. 2013; Chawla, 2008; Alexander, 2005; Trahar, 2009.) These researchers suggest that choosing to use ethnography as a research method allows them the opportunity to deliver findings in a way that engages their audience (Tillman, 2009), draws audiences in with emotion (Goodall, 2000), and makes their point by telling a story (Trahar, 2009). Researchers use this methodology to answer their research questions while simultaneously experiencing insight and a degree of self-realization.

Autoethnographers, as “new ethnographers,” reflect the ability of the methodology to connect the “personal to the cultural” (Trahar, 2009, p.5). For example, in *Poetic Arrivals and Departures: Bodying the Ethnographic Field in Verse*, Chawla (2008) states the method “erases the dividing line between the observer and the observed, between audience and performer, and between fact and fiction” (p. 15). Further, autoethnographic research supports the notion that “different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world – a multitude of ways of speaking, writing, valuing and believing – and that conventional ways of doing and thinking about research were narrow, limiting, and

parochial” (Ellis, 2010, p. 2). My use of this method in conducting my research reflects my desire to address multiple perceptions and a wide gaze upon my foreign travel experience.

Franchesca : Upon arrival, we were greeted by Tito, my mother’s brother Arturo, followed by my brother Alton and his family. I was so nervous to meet Alton. Our first encounter ended up being brief due to the all the excitement. On the drive to my cousin Arvie’s house where we would be staying, it was dark but I could see what was happening on the

streets of Manila-- groups of people sleeping on the sidewalks, people roaming the streets rummaging through the trash, young children staring helplessly at the car as we drove by. I know that similar conditions can be found in some areas of the United States, but observing the sad conditions of the people on the streets of Manila was certainly an eye opening experience for me.

My stomach drops as soon as our plane starts to descend. Landing in the Philippines feels like a dream. Even though the plane is freezing, I feel flushed and sweaty. Talk about mixed emotions! Every time I travel to a new country I get this surge of adrenaline. This is one of the best feelings in the world to me; it’s what I live for. But here I am, frozen in place, staring out of our tiny airplane window. I pictured Manila differently, more jungle-esque, but all I can see through the darkness are buildings on buildings. Manila is a HUGE city with a never-ending skyline Where are the trees and beaches? So caught up in my own feelings and thoughts, I realize I haven’t turned to see how Chesca and her Mom are reacting. The three of us are speechless. Actually it seems like everyone on the plane is silenced by the excitement of finally landing. Chesca and her Mom have big smiles on their faces, which heightens my excitement. It seemed like forever before we actually touch down.

This is really happening. RIGHT NOW! All of the nerves finally take over. We have landed in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, which is massive--12 million people in 16 cities make up the Metro Manila National Capital Region. A van stops. Kids tumble out, and I forget that I am nervous. They greet us with big smiles and hugs, even though none of them says a word, because they don’t understand English and are shy. Chesca’s brother Alton makes a beeline for her. He speaks some English, but still their Mom did most of the talking and translating for us. Altogether, Alton, his wife, their seven kids, and Chesca’s Aunt and Uncle have come to welcome us to the Philippines.



Fig. 3. At Cousin Arvie's home the first night.

I love this photo (Figure 3). As I look at it, I want to go back to this moment. This was only about three hours into our visit and I already felt like I had known these people my whole life. I instantly fell in love with Chesca's nieces and nephews.

Everyone is so excited, happy, affectionate and welcoming. Our interactions at the airport are so quick and the drive home so quiet, I'm still not sure how I am going to fit in with her family during the trip. But as soon as we arrive at Chesca's cousin Arvie's place, about an hour away, I feel much more relaxed. They have gone above and beyond to prepare for our trip. I didn't expect for our first night to end in eating from a spread of amazing food, lots of drinking, talking, hugging, picture-taking and laughing until the sun came up (literally). The WHOLE family, even the kids stay up all night socializing with us. Communicating isn't as hard as I had anticipated. With the help of Chesca's Mom's back-and-

forth translating, we laugh and hug and drink and eat until almost 3 a.m. It is heartwarming to see how overjoyed everyone in the family seems to have us as company; it bonds me to them.

Franchesca: I'll be honest; I did not enter into this adventure knowing exactly how many children my brother Alton had. I knew of Charese (10), Junior (5), and Charles (4), all children with his wife Cristina. Arvie's home was modest yet organized; she had put a lot of energy into the preparations for our arrival. I had hinted that one of my favorite Filipino dishes was *sinigang* (a sweet/sour soup served with bok choy and various other vegetables) over white rice, and of course Arvie had prepared this for us. We ate and spent the

evening getting to know each other, with my mother translating, of course.

The mood turned awkward when Alton brought up the idea of me taking my niece Charese home and raising her as my own child. As much as I would love for Charese to get a good education and make a better life for herself, I am by no means ready to be the primary caregiver for a child. Alton and Cristina seemed disappointed. They thought I would take her away to the U.S. But the awkward moment passed.



Fig. 4. Chesca's nieces and nephews. From left: Pipay, Jaycel, Charese, Princess, and Junior.

Alton has seven children. From the first day, they take a liking to us, and vice versa. They provide a kind of ease and comfort during our visit. They are always going out of their way to make us more comfortable and insist on helping us and guiding us and showing us how happy they are to have us around. They are the sweetest group of kids--so appreciative and loving. At some point every day, Chesca and I are attached at the hip to one of them.

Of all of Chesca's nieces and nephews, her five-year-old nephew Junior captures my heart. When it is time to eat, he sits beside me. When we are in the car, he falls asleep on my lap. When we cross the street, he holds my hand. I fall so in love with him, the thought of leaving breaks my heart. He is very shy, and says maybe 10 words during our trip -- including calling me Tita (Auntie). More than once I wonder if I can adopt him. I think, "Well, I'm single, I have a great job, and I can offer him a better life in the United States I can do it..." Chesca's had to bring me back down to solid ground on a few occasions, but the desire to take care of him is overwhelming. On several occasions I find myself reeling in the emotions I have about leaving him. I just can't help it.



Fig. 5. Selfie with Junior.

Franchesca: My mother did mention that Alton had recently reunited with two of his children, mothered by other women. My 12-year-old niece Princess was among the group that greeted us when we arrived, but we had to pick up her sister Jaycel (also 12) from a neighboring city called Dasmariñas. As the day got longer, I felt like indulging in some ice cream to counter the intense heat, but it did not take me long to realize that if I bought

myself an ice cream, I needed to buy an ice cream for *all* the kids, because no one else was going to buy one for them. If we planned to do anything in the Philippines, we were going to have to take the responsibility to pay for everyone else. I wonder if this is why my mother only goes back every five years; she needs to save that long so that she can save enough to provide for all of her relatives while she's there.



Fig. 6. Chesca's grandfather's grave.

On our first day, we drive to a small city to pick up Jaycel, Chesca's niece. We were unable to call her first to let her know we were on our way because not many people have telephones. Once we arrive outside her home, no one is able to track her down, and we have to leave without her. It is so crazy to me to think about how different that situation would have been in America. I think about all of the modes of communication we have. It's something I don't give much thought to in my day-to-day life, because I've never had to. Now, I can't stop thinking about all of the conveniences the American culture offers. Jaycel's sisters are heartbroken that we have to leave without her but we are on a time crunch. We are heading to Chesca's grandfather's grave and need to make it there before the sun goes down, because there is no lighting.

After driving up a mountain for what seemed like hours, we arrive at Chesca's grandfather's grave. The graveyard is like nothing I have seen before. Hundreds of white concrete graves are stacked up over hills Chesca and her Mom approach the grave on their own. I stand nearby in silence for hours. I feel the emotion around me. The beauty of our surroundings and everyone's respectful silence pay

tribute to the importance Chesca's Mom feels in visiting and cleaning off her father's grave. She was so close to him.

I start to quietly entertain all of the kids who are getting restless. I don't want Chesca and her Mom to feel rushed. I know how important this is to both of them. Chesca's Mom instructs the grave cleaners to touch up the paint on the marker as she lights candles and kneels. While I try to keep the kids quiet, the other adults stand together praying silently a little ways off, I see Chesca's mom get emotional. I have never seen her get so emotional before. She sits next to her father's grave for hours crying and talking to Chesca. I wonder what she is telling her. I would love to know, but I feel like I need to give them space. I don't usually see the beauty in graveyards like some people do, but this graveyard is breathtakingly beautiful. Maybe it was the way the bright pink and orange sunset reflected off the white marble head stones inlaid with shimmery gold. When we leave it feels like a weight is lifted, like I can breathe better. The silence and emotion are overwhelming as we walk away. We are all exhausted by the time we get back to the car to go home for dinner.

Franchesca: We woke up even earlier than usual on the day we traveled to *Laiya, Batangas*, a popular tourist destination not far from Manila. As had become the daily tradition, my brother Alton woke up even earlier to fetch us some freshly baked, warm

***pandesal*. Pandesal is a sweet roll commonly eaten for breakfast with coffee, and it's one of the things that I miss the most about the Philippines. Also, Arvie makes the most amazing coffee, and as much as I've tried, I still cannot manage to duplicate it.**



Fig. 7. Chesca's family in Batangas.

Back row from left: Christina, Tito Arturo, Chesca, Chesca's mom, Alton. Front: Chesca's aunt.

Alton, his wife Cristina, their three children, Tito Arturo, and the three of us Americans head six hours away to a beach called Laiya Batangas. The drive is long and hot and crowded, but worth it. Mountains are the backdrop to the most beautiful water I've ever seen, and the perfect setting for a few relaxing days with the family. The beach is clean and cool, and everyone is instantly relaxed. During these few days at Laiya Batangas, I feel closest to Chesca's family, especially all of the kids.

The second night at the beach Chesca's Mom, Alton, Tito Arturo and I stay up all night talking, laughing and getting to know each other. By then they have picked up a few English phrases, and Franchesca and I are practicing a few phrases in Tagalog. Tonight is when I realized that the differences in our languages did not prove to be the barrier I had expected. I feel like I'm sitting with a group of friends or family members in the U.S. having a casual conversation.

I'm Italian, so I talk with my hands enough as it is, but even still I underestimated the important role gestures and body language play in communicating. We are able to bond with each other tonight. Alton says he wishes that they spoke more English or that we spoke more Tagalog. This is the one time during the trip when I feel frustrated with the language barrier because I want so badly to be able to articulate to him what I want to say. Instead, I ask Chesca's Mom to translate for me and tell him that I think we are all doing a really great job regardless of the language barrier. I hope that he feels the same way and want him to know that regardless of speaking two different languages, I feel just as close to him and at ease with our conversation. This night makes me realize I haven't yet been preoccupied with feeling a little insecure or confused because of a language barrier. In some ways I think maybe it has brought everyone closer as we try to teach each other phrases, it kind of becomes a joke among us. Chesca's Uncle Tito tries to teach us how to say "good morning" every day during breakfast. Every morning it takes us a minute to get it right, but everyone seems to appreciate seeing us try so hard.

If I thought the physical touch was never ending before, it is never more present than during the family reunion on Friday. Chesca's family members come from everywhere for the gathering. Of the more than 30 family members, only one speaks English. The rest of them greet us with big smiles and hugs or say something to her Mom that she translates. They are all very complimentary, and sweet. I recognize some of them from Facebook. Everyone is so nice and welcoming, and it is heartwarming to see the way the family really values their time together. There is a huge feast of food I've never seen or tasted before, and a Karaoke machine; I mean this is a big deal. By the end of the day I am thankful the reunion happened at the end of our trip because I am so exhausted. Not just physically from walking around talking to everyone, singing, dancing and drinking but emotionally and mentally, too.

I know it is emotional for Chesca because she doesn't cry often, but she is today. It is overwhelming for me, so I can only imagine how it feels to be meeting so many people she has been dying to meet for so long, but that she would be separated from again so soon. It really hits us that we

love being around this side of her family so much, but it won't get to happen as often as it should. I feel sympathetic for Chesca's mom, knowing how hard it must be to only see her son and grandchildren once every three years. I try to live in each moment during this trip to enjoy every bit of it, but it is hard not to focus on the reality: we have to leave. Neither of us makes it through the whole reunion. We find a quiet place to take a second to relax and end up falling asleep for the rest of the night. Really, it is very over stimulating. We are happy, tired, sad, emotional, confused and not the most sober.

Franchesca: This morning was full of preparations for the family reunion; my mother had arranged for a fully roasted pig to be delivered, as well as provided the funds for various other food preparations. Filipinos are big on karaoke so we brought in an advanced karaoke system for all to enjoy. This experience was emotional for my mom as

several of her siblings were in attendance that she had not seen in years. It was an overwhelming experience, I was meeting all of these relatives for the first time, all wanting to ask me questions but not able to effectively communicate given the language barrier. Overall, it was great just to see my mother in her original environment surrounded by her family.



Fig. 8 Family Reunion: Chesca, her uncles, Alton and me.

Challenges of co-constructed autoethnography

Not all researchers, even those partial to autoethnography, speak only about its benefits. Further, performing autoethnographic research exposes the researcher and the people with which they interact to uncomfortable or even hurtful attention. A few researchers join Chawla (2008) in noting the ethical implications and “the potential to misinterpret, misrepresent” (p. 3) an experience. Additionally, autoethnographers must worry about breaching the privacy of the people with whom they interact, while audiences must analyze for and reject malicious intent (Alexander, 2005; Li, 2008), the less desirable implications of autoethnographic research. These potential shortcomings of the methodology reinforce the researcher’s responsibility of remaining mindful of the subjects’ best interests, even when obtaining and delivering personal, and perhaps unfavorable, information. While raw and candid accounts of a subject’s life can make for a compelling narrative, protecting the subject should remain top-of-mind for autoethnographers and ethnographers, both.

Beyond the implications of collecting the data, composing the autoethnography can lead to difficulties in itself. In this case, I hoped to compose a co-constructed narrative with my traveling companion. But things did not turn out as I had planned. The trip itself was so intense that neither of us was able to keep journals as we had planned. Further, once we composed our journals and compared them, I found that I did not have enough from my co-researcher to co-construct a narrative in our two voices. So I have had to modify the form of my report from a co-constructed account to a more univocal narrative with quotations.

When proposing my research methodology, I intended to create a co-constructed narrative with Franchesca based on our candid reflections derived from our experiences. From our reflections, I hoped to deliver a collaborative piece in which we worked towards a common goal. However, the nature of qualitative research sometimes requires us to re-imagine our data and place it within a new structure that allows the rich content to be delivered in the best way. Although I had plans with regard to what I

thought I was going to find, the outcome of my research was not what I had expected; nevertheless, the project did lead to important takeaways and impactful learning outcomes. In order for me to use the form of a co-constructed narrative to deliver my research, both Francesca and I would have had to share a common experience from the same standpoint with a common goal in mind. In the end, we ended up having two different goals, derive from two different standpoints. The results did not reflect two sides of a similar experience because we ended up having two vastly different experiences. This is a significant learning outcome from my research for multiple reasons.

First, looking at common experiences from two perspectives is valuable because it offers two realities and characterizes the difference in our experiences. In our experiences, I felt as if I were seeing everything through a camera. Like I was one step removed. So, I was experiencing events and relationships in the flat two dimensions of a tourist snapshot, while Francesca was experiencing them as the tip of the iceberg of her family history, in the three dimensions of an artifact with an important backstory. Responding to the photographs of our trip, I see the literal surface level images, whereas Francesca sees not only the surface images, but also what lies behind them-- almost x-rays of the photos. She sees the bones of her relatives, the ghosts of her family's past. She is moved emotionally and psychically by the impact those things have on her experience visiting the Philippines now, and the visits effects that will influence her for the rest of her life. She had much more depth involved in her experience than I do. These two vastly different experiences emerge from our different standpoints as "tourist Meghann" and "family member Francesca." The differences between our experiences surprised me. I thought that we were such good friends that we shared perspectives—on everything. Further, I thought that I was so much a part of her family that I would be able to share the experience as if I really was family. So I thought that I had invited my best friend to co-construct the experience in an autoethnography about family. However, the autoethnography has revealed the experience to be about intimate friendship.

For example, Figure 1 shows a street in Manila. When I look at this photo I see it literally. I see kids running around playing, families together. I fantasize about how their lack of money and technology simplifies their lives and brings them closer. When Franchesca looks at this picture, however, she sees broken down buildings and difficult lives of poverty, she has a better appreciation of what's inside those buildings, and she wonders what life would have been life if her mother had not left her family behind and moved to the U.S. Would she live like this? She thinks about how the lack of money and technology impacts her family—both her family in the Philippines and her family in the U.S., since her mother saves up money to send back to her family. This photo reminds Franchesca of the hard lives her Filipino family lives, quite the opposite of the positive happy feelings of a simple Eden-esque existence it evokes for me. I explain the different interpretations to our standpoints: I see surface-level images from the perspective of a tourist that say all there is to say, while she sees through those surface images to the complicated day-to-day realities of her mother's former life, her grandfather's life, her brother's life, and the life she has escaped. She struggles with the real impact of poverty on both sides of her family; the struggle brings her stress and sadness. She sees more depth. She sees feels it deep down. She sees it in 3D. Our impressions, our understandings, differ significantly.

Another example of the way our perspectives differ occurs in the way we read Figure 7. I took this photo of Franchesca and her family during our short stay in Batangas. When I look at this photo, I see a happy family enjoying spending time together in a beautiful place. I noticed how close everyone sits together.

What Franchesca sees in Figure 7 evokes feelings of anger. Interestingly enough, the one family member who is positioned on her own in front of the rest of the family is the sources of most of the upset feelings. The woman positioned front and center, "where she thinks she belongs" according to Franchesca, is her aunt--her mom's half-sister. When Franchesca looked at this photo once we got home, she immediately went to the emotional place she inhabited that day. The photo stirred up the

same anger she was feeling as she sat behind the woman and looked over her shoulder, out at my camera. She admitted to thinking how poorly this woman treated her Mom, how she took advantage of her mom, and how she was acting “entitled.” The aunt invited herself—she simply assumed she could join us on our family getaway and that Franchesca’s Mom would pay for her hotel room and food. She expected to be taken care of by her American half-sister. So again, interpreting this photograph, I felt happy and relaxed and free remembering this day. Franchesca felt angry, upset and conflicted about how to manage and direct her feelings against her aunt. Nothing makes her angrier than when she thinks someone is taking advantage of her mother. This isn’t the first time I’ve noticed how protective Franchesca gets when people mistake her mom’s kindness for weakness. She has no tolerance for that, family or not.

It was almost as if, while I was in the Tourist Zone, Franchesca was in a Twilight Zone metaphorically speaking. I saw the physical bodies of the people in her family, but she saw the ghosts of the relationships each family member had fashioned and maintained with members of her nuclear family, past and present. During the trip I was unaware that Franchesca was in a completely different zone of experience than I was. I was focused on the moment, the positive aspects of novelty, the trip, a tourist point of view focused on familiarization rather than class relations and power relations—about which I did not know enough. On the other hand, Franchesca was focused on family history, relationships, and the tensions that lie between and among family members, including power, gender and class relations. Although we were physically together during every minute of the trip, we couldn’t have been further apart mentally.

The reality of our different perspectives and experiences became apparent when we reviewed photos of the trip together. The impact these visual artifacts have had on the way we have interpreted the trip in our reflections has been invaluable. I was able to clearly see Franchesca’s 3D perspective and compare it to my own interpretation of the photos. Foss’s (2005) theory of visual rhetoric can be applied

to explain the importance of the influence and impact the photos had on both of our reflections. Having photos included in my data added a degree of depth to my learning outcomes compared to the outcomes that would have emerged if I had not included them. These visuals are symbolic in their nature because they reflect both of our perspectives; surface level vs. more complicated underlying realities.

Reflections

Originally, when conducting this study, I was searching for answers to research questions such as:

- What cultural barriers might prevent family relationships from developing?
- How might family relationships motivate Franchesca to overcome cultural barriers in this situation?
- How might companions from the subject's home culture enhance or inhibit communication in new-found Filipino family relationships?

However, I have substituted a new research question:

RQ, as revised: How are my experiences and Franchesca's experiences of the common travel experience separate and different because of our separate and different histories?

While my original research questions and objectives for this paper focused more on cultural and communication barriers, what I learned focused on the differences in realities Franchesca and I experienced. We played such different roles, me as a tourist and Franchesca as a family member. It makes sense that the outcome of my research was more enlightening about us as individuals, and individuals within our friendship. Our individual roles and histories within the context of the trip resulted in two completely different travel experiences.

The revision of my research questions also shows an important shift in focus from intercultural communication concepts to impression management and rhetorical concepts. From my new research question came learning outcomes derived from realizing how much more impactful our individual histories were and how they influenced us during our trip. The shift in focus for my research questions also provides an example of how qualitative research requires flexibility to accommodate change.

Learning Outcomes

My interest in the research potential of this trip enhanced my enthusiasm to study the intercultural and language barriers, personal pasts, potential secrets, and potential for surprises that played a part in the perceptions both Franchesca and I shared before and after the trip, as well as in the reflections of our feelings about the experiences during and the trip. My learning outcomes stemmed from reflections that unveiled the outcomes in these research focuses.

The most important learning outcome from my research encompasses the nature of friendship rather than the nature of culture. In the beginning, I assumed Franchesca and I would be working towards the same goal during this project because also assumed many of our feelings about the experience would be the same. What I learned, however, was that even though we are intimate friends, we are not as alike as I thought. As similar as we try to be or think we might be, it's clear that the qualities we have in common are not what makes us friends. Friendship requires us to be different. Our *differences* are actually what balances us as friends and allows us to complement one another. The assumptions I made before and epiphanies that derived from my research have provided clarity around the nature of not only our friendship but friendship in general. I learned that it's important to know its fine to agree to disagree and to find value in our differences.

Erving Goffman's sociology of impression management "sheds light upon processes of relationship building, identification and image construction" (Ihlen, O., van Ruler, B. & Fredriksson, M. 2009). Goffman's key concepts such as "impression management," "framing," "footing" and "face"

situate individuals within interactions to assign meaning to behaviors that occur during face-to-face interaction. These behaviors occur either frontstage, where “the part of the individual’s performance regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance,” or backstage, “a place where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted” (Ihlen et al. p. 122). Applying this theory allowed me to determine that my behavior placed me frontstage with the relatives in the Philippines. Franchesca’s behavior in the Philippines with her family members also placed her frontstage. However, she did not reveal her backstage feelings until we were home. When looking at how we intentionally managed our impressions with her family. Impression management “signifies that people use communication deliberately and strategically to create desired impressions of themselves” (Ihlen, et al. 2009, p.122). While frontstage, my desired impression with her family was for them to see how excited and thankful I was to be there and how grateful I was for how far out of their way they went to make me feel welcome. Franchesca felt the same, but had mixed emotions and deeper issues that were unveiled when we returned home.

Now I can see how my impression management was motivated by my desire to be included as a family member. On the other hand, much of what Franchesca was experiencing during the trip might have placed her and physically frontstage, but it placed her mentally backstage. Her feelings about certain situations, knowledge about the past and things she noticed along the way fostered a contradiction between how she presented herself to save face and maintain relationships compared to how she was feeling and what she was thinking. The tensions Franchesca felt between frontstage and backstage defined the differences between my experience and Franchesca’s. I spent my time at onstage, both mentally and physically whereas Franchesca’s experience included the struggle between the 3D mental backstage and a 3D physical space frontstage space. While onstage, I focused on surface-level relationships, how things looked, with regard both to aspects of the trip and my feelings. While backstage, Franchesca focused on the history of her family, the ghosts of her families past and her

feelings and perceptions of family members, while at the same time she had to manage her depth of knowledge with the events taking place on stage.

Neither Franchesca nor I needed impression management when it came to our interactions and relationships with the children. This is why our relationships with them developed so much more easily. There was no facework needed with them. Face is described by Ihlen (2009) as “the public self-image that individuals want to claim for themselves and a tool to describe social relations” (p.125). Facework is how we manage our self-image. Our interactions with the kids were so natural, like we understood one another without even talking. They had nothing to prove or hide from us and vice versa. It was an instant, unconditional love and it was most certainly a pleasantly surprising highlight of our trip.

On the other hand, each family member has a preordained place in the family relationship structure according to their gender, age, and social status. Franchesca and Alton have constructed assumptions about each other and their relationship, neither expressed their assumptions during their interactions in the Philippines outside of the awkward adoption discussion. During the trip, their positions in the family, cultural differences, social status differences and different feelings towards their mother, whether protective (Franchesca) or resentful (Alton), were managed by their desire to save face rather than allow those differences to contribute to even more separation than the geographic separation that already exists. During our trip none of the family member revealed even the slightest inkling of anything other than love and acceptance. It was not until the conclusion of our trip that those feelings were articulated by Franchesca and Alton, both separately to their mother. As revealed in our narrative, the importance of staying connected and building a relationship the family is anxious to have motivates all the family members to act (frontstage) as there are no barriers, whereas the truth of their feelings (backstage) will likely arise in future circumstances involving finances, privileges and the distance between Franchesca, her Mother and the Filipino family members that are so far away.

In the end, as much as I could empathize with Franchesca, I could take her place or share the same experience as I thought I would be able to. Rather than collaborating and using both of our voices to create a co-constructed narrative, I supplemented her voice with my own perspective and analysis. Rather than collaborating, our thoughts complemented one another and allowed to create a compelling narrative in two voices—but not equal voices. Although this was not the outcome I planned for my project, I am pleased with what it has become. Through the process of analyzing, contextualizing and reflecting on our thoughts and interpretation, I was able to learn about myself, the changing nature of research, friendship and the impact and importance of vastly different perspectives.

Ultimately, what has been so difficult for me to understand is that I am not a member of the family, no matter how close I am with Franchesca. My position is still one of an outsider. And no matter how close I am to her, I do not think about things in the same way as she does-- not only because of our individual characteristics or knowledge of the family's history, but because of everything that encompasses who we are. As much as I can feel nervous and excited and invested for my friend, I am not in her shoes. I have never experienced meeting family members for the first time in my adult life, because I was raised knowing all of them. I care for Franchesca's family and enjoy the time I spent with them, but I did not leave with the same burdens and sadness as she did. I left feeling happy about the relationships we made, I enjoyed the vacation, and I was ready to return to my reality. And my reality does not include many daily reminders of the hard lives of the people I know in the Philippines. My worries and the memories and thoughts that I have of the trip begin and end with the trip. They are not woven into the fabric of my life with depth and impact as are for my friend, Franchesca.

From the first moments of our time together with the family, I felt like an outsider. As I mentioned before, only a few of them knew who I was, and it took a while for others to warm up to me. There were times during the trip that I wanted to feel more involved, and other times that made me glad I was a bit separate. This was such an intimate and special event in Franchesca's life, and I loved

sharing every moment with her, but our experiences were different. Realizing this makes me sad for Franchesca, because I know how excited and positive she was before the trip and know how she stressed was by the things she learned and observed during the trip. Although I stand in her shoes and feel the intensity of what she felt and saw, I still played a role within the family dynamics; sharing the experience made me feel more like a family member than a friend. It was important for me to be there for her and experience it with her because I wanted her to feel comforted by my presence. Our friendship is so close and comfortable, that playing the role of her best friend provided a sense of security for both of us.

Emerging Themes

Upon concluding the creation of my narrative, I determined four main themes; communication barriers, interpersonal relationships and identity, physical and geographic proximity, and geographically separated families and culture.

Communication barriers. One of the many things this trip revealed for me was how people can communicate in so many ways. Before we went to the Philippines, I worried verbal communication—I did not speak their language. I did not consider all of the other ways that make it possible to understand and get to know one another. Because of the language barrier, we needed more than words to communicate at a deeper level, and so we relied on nonverbal communication, “all the messages that people transmit through means other than words” (Alberts, J., Nakayama, T., & Martin, J, 2012, p. 139). It didn’t take long for everyone to pick up on personalities, facial expressions, gestures, and so on. Nonverbal cues such as “the body, the face, voice qualities, vocalizations, [and] proxemics” (Alberts et al., 2012, p. 146) played a big role in how we expressed ourselves across languages and cultures. For example, it’s not necessarily the words Franchesca’s Uncle Arturo spoke to us, but his mannerisms and nonverbal cues that created my perception of his personality and helped me understand the his tone and intention.

Although neither Francesca nor I speak Tagalog, physical touch, body language, gestures, facial expressions and the bonding and understanding of tone and personality picked up where words left off. We can confirm what Alberts, Nakayama and Martin (2012), say, that “Nonverbal communication ... influences how individuals interpret messages, especially those related to feelings, moods and attitudes” (p. 138). We often used nonverbal cues to support and enhance the information we were trying to get across to Francesca’s family members. Our interactions became easier and easier as the days went by. For example, by the time we were at the beach, I had come to learn through his facial expressions and body language that for the most part, what Francesca’s Uncle Arturo said was not to be taken seriously. It was also during our beach getaway that I noticed how much physical touch came into play. And I thought *my* family was affectionate! Without exaggeration, I was either hugging someone or watching someone else hug every five minutes during this trip. It was easy to see how quickly the feelings everyone had for one another overcame the language barriers about which I had been so concerned. I loved the fact that we all seemed to feel so bonded, just happy to be around each other. Initial interactions and those that developed throughout the experience were easy and natural. Facial expressions communicate more than perhaps any other nonverbal behavior. They are the primary channels for transmitting emotion and the eyes in particular, convey important messages regarding attraction and attention” (Alberts et al., 2012).

Neither Francesca nor I focused on frustrations that arose from the language barrier. Motivations to develop relationships in such a short period of time prevailed. Everyone felt their own sense of responsibility to ensure the family relationships developed. As Arnett et al. (2009) point out, “it is about a co-constituted communicative benchmark or standard that calls both parties to accountability for something that defines interpersonal communication” (p. 120). Everyone seemed to take equal accountability within their family roles to develop relationships, equally going out of their way to keep conversations going, include everyone, and get to know each other better. Mind you, our motivated

nonverbal communication was not perfect: we encountered trouble with context with words and gestures. My experience has led me to believe that context plays the biggest role in overcoming communication boundaries. It's easy to misinterpret the tone in which someone is relaying a message and words that translate as the same have meanings in different contexts according to different cultures.

Affection and physical touch played a big role in our relationships, especially with the kids. Alberts et al. (2012) state, "Even young children understand and use nonverbal communication" (p. 138), and that fact has never been as apparent to me as it was during our trip. We must have spent 75% of our time giving and receiving affection from all of Franchesca's sweet nieces and nephews. We were constantly hugging, holding hands or cuddling with one of them. They followed us around every second of every day. I interpreted their behavior to mean that they loved having us there. Aside from all of the affection they gave us, the children expressed themselves using one specific gesture I will never forget. In the Filipino culture, children show adults that they have respect and love for them by taking the adults hand and placing it on their own forehead. A few days into our visit, all of Franchesca's nieces and nephews would sporadically come up to us and perform this gesture. I was honored and heart warmed. We needed no words to understand the big meaning behind this small gesture.

Interpersonal relationships and identities. The connections, intimacy and affiliations between me as a family friend, Franchesca as a first-time visitor and Franchesca's Mom as a native daughter served as common ground for us during the visit. Our motivations to develop relationships were centered on one common interest: family. The geographical separation that otherwise stands between them was removed and replaced by physical proximity, a novelty that allowed everyone to feel at ease and happy about interacting, learning about one another and growing tighter bonds face-to-face.

When analyzing our reflections, I noticed that the topic of individual identity within the family emerged. According to Mulder (1991), "The value of roles and relationships in a family help shape and

define an individual's sense of self, fostering feelings of acceptance and belonging" (p.73) So, even though Franchesca's typical place is as an *absent* family member, it was evident how important her role as little sister, cousin, aunt, niece and daughter is within the family. Franchesca's reflections on having what she calls "little sister syndrome," that is, following her brother around, provides one example of the way she situated herself within a role that assumes or at least opens the way for feelings of family acceptance and belonging.

This study examines one family at the crossroads of cultures and relationships, at the conceptual intersection of socio-cultural (Kayode, 2013) and rhetorical (Foss, 2012) communication traditions, which lay the framework for researching interpersonal relationships identities within a family and friendship. My research findings situate relationships and individual identities within communication and lead me to a deeper understanding of one family's interaction. Franchesca, her mother, her half-brother, her cousins and other family members who were involved in the experience each are assigned and accept an individual identity within the family dynamics that give context to each of their relationships. Individual identities or identity perceptions within the family also contribute to behaviors. Perceived from the perspective from the family in the Philippines, Franchesca is positioned as an important, but absent family member. Perceived from Franchesca's position, Franchesca's brother, cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles are positioned as distant family members who desire a close relationship, but whose behavior and assumptions are influenced by the past. Franchesca's mom is positioned as the provider and the bridge between the two parts of the divided family. The history of the family and the impact our visit had on family dynamics may foster a change in the identities of several family members. For example, Franchesca knew she was going to the Philippines to meet her half-brother, but she wasn't sure how the relationship would develop. Before the trip, she self-identified as somewhat of an outcast. Now she proudly proclaims her "little sister syndrome" and self-identifies as a close little sister who looks up to her older brother.

Proximity and distance. When thinking about interpersonal relationships and identity in planning for this project, I thought about how distance must play a role. However, rather than assigning it a universally negative role, Arnett, et al. (2009) assign distance some positive functions, defining it not according to geography, but rather according to communication, as “interpersonal space that nourishes the very thing that keeps persons together interpersonally – relationship” (p. 121). In our situation, closing the geographical distance made us feel a sense of personal closeness, which importantly contributed to the mental closeness we felt with the family members during our time together. Arnett et al. (2009) further reveal that, “Distance provides necessary space for each communicative partner to contribute to the relationship” (p. 121). The positive function of distance becomes important because there was such a great geographic distance between Franchesca and her family before and now after our visit. Beforehand, the distance played a big role because it prevented communication; their relationships were based on minimal communication through Facebook. Additionally, their perceptions stemmed from what they knew about one another and the history of the family from Chesca’s Mom’s perspective. Now that they have met in person and have a relationship on their own terms distance plays a role in how they will manage the future of their relationship.

To keep most kinds of families connected takes great effort, and to keep those separated by differing histories and geographic distance takes even more effort (Jaffe & Aidman, 1998). However, even the geographic distance might be a benefit because it’s a motivating factor that dilutes the tension that stems from vastly different living arrangements, realities, struggles and privileges. Family members are not faced with these tensions on a day to day basis and therefore do not allow them to disrupt the growth and maintenance of their relationships. For example, although both Franchesca and Alton have issues with one another in relation to their mother, the emotional and physical proximity and distance between them motivates them to ignore these issues. Conversely, if they were closer, these issues would have more of an opportunity to surface and cause friction between them.

Interpersonal responsibility plays a role in maintaining their relationships as well. According to Arnett et al. (2009) Interpersonal responsibility “Begins with each person’s commitment to active care for the interpersonal relationship, owned by neither and nurtured with or without the support of the other” (p.121). Both Franchesca and her family members have interpersonal responsibility within their relationships. How they manage those responsibilities through the distance and time lapse between face-to-face visits will determine the closeness and depth of their relationships moving forward.

Due to the distance, the family mode of communication before they met is now how they will continue to manage the relationships they are trying to maintain. When economic or other reasons separate family members, the growth and personalization of communications technology has allowed family members to maintain and grow relationships from a distance. As Jaffe and Aidman (1998) found, long-distance communication among separated family members lessens “anxiety that the intimacy of relationships with those left behind will deteriorate because of limitations of communication” (p. 180). Bishop and Meitzner (2011) found tools online that offer tips to families separated by long distances such as establishing regular routines for staying connected, taking initiative, and working on maintaining relationships satisfaction. Social media and e-mail allow families to set those routines and execute them conveniently and personally. The ability to keep in touch with distant family members frequently, and as personally as technology allows, provides convenience, especially for Filipinos. Scholars underscore the cultural importance of their close family ties (Wang, 2010; Mulder, 1991; Tuason,, Taylor, Rollings, Harris, & Martin, 2007). According to Wang (2010), “For a Filipino, the family is the source of one’s personal identity and of emotional and material support; it also is the focus of one’s primary duty and commitment” (p. 8). With such an emphasis on the importance of family, Filipino families who are separated geographically will likely make communication and long-distance relationship maintenance a priority. Staying connected benefits them culturally by allowing them to meet cultural expectations, as

well as contributing to both the overall happiness and security of the family and that of themselves as individuals as well.

Geographically separated families and culture. Much of the existing literature on geographically separated families attributes separation to deployment (Pisano, 2010), divorce (Gindes, 1998), immigration (Nazario, 2013) and migrant workers who leave home to support their families (Santos, 2014). Studies explore the impact of family separation in relation to the driving force that separates them. However, not many researchers focus their studies on families separating for cultural reasons such as returning to their homelands and/or family left behind. My study was centered on a family separated geographically and culturally with one family member as the connector between the two; Franchesca's Mom.

Of the above studies only few focused on mothers who are separated from their families geographically, such as CBS News special *From Amazon to Garden State* (Hartman, 2014). My research contributes to the literature by filling this gap, the story of a mother's return to her homeland with a new family member, her daughter. This study demonstrates the tensions and stresses that exist between the family members due to distance and cultural differences. It adds a dimension of complication that impacts the relationships between family members in the United States and the Philippines. While on our trip, I thought a lot about how the situation looked from Alton, Franchesca's half-brother, point of view. He knew his Mom before she came to live in the U.S. When she came to visit, he saw the same Mom in a culture with which they are both familiar. This time, however, she brought Franchesca; therefore, the difference in culture was more apparent and in-his-face. Further, He watched firsthand the way she interacts with Franchesca and saw how close their relationship is. He could not help but be aware that, unlike him, Franchesca grew up with her own Mother and in a much more privileged social situation than Alton. I found it interesting to witness how the geographic

separation and vastly different cultures at the same time created tensions and motivations in the one family.

Research touches on the impact family separation has on children (Michielin & Mulder, 2007). Although Franchesca and Alton are no longer children, the geographic separation of Alton from his mother Mom and Franchesca from her extended family have influenced their lives. Mulder (1991) finds that children who had the chance to be re-united with their families were excited and eager when the opportunity presented itself. It can confirm that this family's eagerness to meet and build relationships was more impactful than the tensions between them that could have stopped them from both meeting and building relationships.

Both Franchesca and I wrote about traces of fascination with the Filipino culture in our journal entries. Her degree of interest is heightened by her desire to be more involved and knowledgeable about the culture in which her mother was raised and where her close family members currently live. Chesca has always been intrigued by the Filipino culture and was always eager to learn what her Mom taught her about its expression in traditions such as the food. Embracing the culture felt natural to me, too. Sharing new experiences and learning new things beside Franchesca and her Mom aided in the comfort I felt. Specifically in situations such as the family reunion, visiting Franchesca's grandfathers grave, trying new foods, and participating in family traditions.

Research complications, limitations, and benefits

Time was the biggest limitation for my study. One week was just enough time for us to get acclimated, spend a few days with the physical and mental energy we needed in order to really experience the trip and then before we knew it, we were preparing to leave. If we had spent a few weeks or a month, instead, we would have been able to add much more depth to the reflections because we would have had more time to experience and re-experience activities and then dive into our feelings. We barely had time to rest, let alone process what was going on in our surroundings, because

so many family events were scheduled within our one-week visit. Franchesca and I agree that the trip was equally as over-stimulating as it was wonderful, not necessarily in a bad way, but in ways that left us feeling mentally and physically drained by the end of each day. Our exhaustion diverted our attention away from recording as much in our journals as I had hoped.

Further, the Philippines is not a realistic distance for frequent visits, so whatever we were able to gather and remember from one week became the data I was able to collect. Once we left Manila, we left, and what we had is what we had. That is, with one enhancement—Facebook posts. Although we both wrote in our journals about the events of each day, including how we felt and how our interactions impacted us, we seemed not to have experienced all that much. I would be interested to see how my reflections would be deepened by more frequent visits. This limitation leaves me asking the question, “Is Facebook a rich enough platform to maintain these relationships?” It’s easy to say, “Keep in touch,” and “See you soon,” but returning to the American reality of our busy work and social schedules prevents us from making Facebook visits a priority. Financial reasons stand between us and frequent face-to-face visits.

Our last day in the Philippines is bittersweet. I miss home; I’m ready for my bed, a real shower, and American food. The whole family takes us to the airport a little early so we don’t have to rush to say goodbye. They walk us, as far as they could in the airport. Saying goodbye is hard to do and even harder to watch, especially the goodbye between Chesca and her brother. They have grown so close over the past week, and in the 11 years of our friendship I have never seen her so sad. As hard as it was to leave, I feel happy to have experienced such a special time. I am happy for myself for learning so much and allowing myself to feel and live in every moment during our trip. I know we would be back, and I am so happy for Chesca for finally meeting people she already had such love for. I am happy for Chesca’s Mom, too. Seeing her at home.

Franchesca : I tackle this particular day with a heavy heart. I knew that we had to fly back to Charlotte when I was just starting to get to know my family. I did not want to leave the children, who crave affection and lack so many of the luxuries that we take for granted in our home country. We load everyone into the van my mother had rented for our trip, including

all the children. They want to be able to say goodbye and wish us a safe trip. As we said goodbye to everyone, it was nearly impossible to maintain my emotions and of course I lost control and start crying uncontrollably. It's amazing to think how all these people managed to impact my life so immensely over a short period of time.



*Fig. 9: Alton, Christina (his wife) and their children.
From left: Josh, Jaycel, Charese, Charles, Christina, Alton and Junior.*

Am I too tired to feel sad that we're leaving, or am I not as sad as I think I should be? We have been sitting here in the airport for almost two hours because we arrived super early. The whole family is here to see us off. It's nice to have these last few moments with the kids, but I must admit I'm exhausted. I can tell Chesca is sad about leaving. She gets really quiet when she's upset and I haven't heard her say much in the past hour. I wonder what actually saying goodbye is going to be like. This seems like more of a rip the band-aid off type of moment, but we're all sitting here watching the minutes tick by.

One hour until take-off, that's our cue. Were all making our way over to check-in where we'll say goodbye. I'm really nervous, not for me but for Chesca. I know how uncomfortable she's feeling right

now, and it's rubbing off on me. Junior is holding my right hand and Charese his holding my left. She keeps squeezing it to get my attention and winking at me when I look at her. This isn't helping. I can feel the tears welling up as we approach the area where guests are not allowed. I turn away from Junior. I'm saving that goodbye for last. I get so caught up in hugging Chesca's brother and sister-in-law goodbye, I don't notice her failed attempt to hold in her emotions as she usually does so gracefully. She is sobbing. I've never felt so heartbroken for her. I can't watch her cry anymore. I turn to junior and swoop him in my arms. This might be the most delayed goodbye I've ever had. I don't want to let go. I distract myself by moving Chesca towards the check-in.

The whole family is watching us walk away.

I turn to Chesca as she buries her face in her hands and cries. My heart breaks for her. She's always been the strong one in these types of situations, but it's my turn this time. I wrap my arms around her as the family walks away.

Researchers who use ethnographic research methods deliver their findings in many ways and often choose to do so in the form of narratives (Trahar, 2009). Although writing a story (Ellis, 2004), a poem (Chawla, 2008), or personal reflection (Bochner, 1997) seem polar opposites to the form scholars might expect of articles based on structured methodologies, such narrative forms have been used most often (see Ellis, 2004; Bochner, 1997, 2012; Taylor et al., 2007; Josselson, 1996; Trahar, 2009; Atkinson et al., 2006) by communication scholars, educational researchers, psychologists and nursing researchers, for example, to offer compelling accounts of first-hand experiences. Narratives allow researchers to reveal social worlds through the eyes of their subject (or "character") (Hall & Powell, 2011) and "strive to preserve the complexity of what it means to be human and to locate its observations of people and phenomena in society, history and time" (Josselson, 2006, p. 3), using the observations to deliver research through storytelling that is compelling, engaging and informative. Through the process of writing a narrative I was able to illustrate my experience and therefore uncover and understand

important learning outcomes. The learning outcomes that I identified derived from both the social world within our experience and the social world that makes up our friendship. The learning outcomes within both worlds revealed important facts about perception, individual differences, visual stimulation and which are relatable to the main themes of my research; culture, interpersonal relationships and identity, communication barriers and distance.

Narrative storytelling paints a picture, prompts emotion and marries experience with culture, allowing readers to become engaged. Being engaged allows an audience to experience research findings alongside the researcher and his or her subjects. There were so many important feelings and reflections that Francesca and I experienced during our trip that were necessary for me to analyze through writing about them. This allows my readers to go through the motions and feelings with me which result in a deeper understanding of my research findings. Developing a narrative to report qualitative research has become a trend among social sciences (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Riessman, 2007; Bochner, 2012) and I can see why. Creating a narrative to deliver my research findings allowed me to use multiple voices and perspectives to illustrate the details and theories around the learning outcomes of our experience while keeping my audience in the moment with me.

Narrative inquiry is defined as “a form of qualitative research that involves the gathering of narratives -- written, oral, visual – focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide insight that (befits) the complexity of human lives” (Josselson, 2006, p.4). Researchers reflect on using narratives to write both about their own lives and the lives of others (Josselson, 1996; Bochner, 1997, 2012; Hall & Powell, 2011). For me, using written, oral and visual data allowed me to distinguish important differences between my hypotheses and research findings. Using photography and written journaling to record the details of our experience also helped connect our personal reflections to our cultural and communication experiences. It prompted me to analyze the

meanings Francesca and I gave to our experiences which led to the discovery of impactful and surprising research outcomes.

Aligning with the ethnographic methodology that lays the developmental framework, narrative form serves to “show how storytelling works to build a continuous life of experience, linking the past to the future from the standpoint of the present; to problematize the process of assigning meaning to memories via language; to draw attention to the significance of institutional depression in universities; and to blur the line between theory and story” (Bochner, 1997, p. 418) putting the onus on researchers to connect their insights. For a researcher who chooses to deliver field work in the form of a narrative, this means being intentional about collecting as many detailed accounts of the experience to inform their written, oral or visual narrative. Although I was able to arrive at impactful conclusions through developing a narrative, I believe a few limitations from my research leave potential for growth. The time constraint and distance are short term limitations but also offer potential for extending research in the future. For example, I could continue developing the themes and learning outcomes of my research to include important pieces on how my themes present themselves as obstacles or motivations for relationships that have been built and now need to be maintained. Future trips to the Philippines and analyzing the way connections are maintained and by whom could reveal more depths to my research.

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Appendix 2: Methodology and Phase Review

Phase I – Collecting the Data

As planned, Franchesca and I collected our data over three weeks, starting with the week before we traveled to the Philippines and ending a week afterward. We started to write journals about our expectations in the week before we traveled and continued keeping our journals during the one week during our stay in the Philippines. Upon our return we reflected upon the trip in our journals the week afterward.

Franchesca was successfully able to candidly reflect all emotions, thoughts, reflections and knowledge pertaining to the trip and family visits. I also kept a detailed journal recording the all emotions, thoughts, reflections and knowledge pertaining to the trip and family visits from my own perspective over the same time period. These journals served as space where we were able to record all information needed to support and contribute to my research and assist in constructing our narratives.

I was also able to use my phone (iPhone 4s) to take photos and videos while we were there that Franchesca and I reviewed and analyzed to further re-cap our experience and to help when we illustrated our narratives.

Phase II – Reviewing and interpreting the data

Phase 2 occurred in three parts upon our return:

1. As noted by Carolyn Ellis (2010), “in telling about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences” (p. 3); therefore, Franchesca and I examined our journals individually and wrote individual narratives.
2. We then examined our narratives together.
3. Lastly we reviewed and recorded reflections according to our experiences as prompted by our compiled visual data (photographs and videos.)
 - a. Franchesca reviewed her journal for themes and patterns, and I did the same with my own journal.
 - b. Once we identified themes and patterns, we each wrote our own individual narrative.
 - c. We then shared our narratives with each other, exploring the relationships between the two experiences;
 - d. Lastly we reviewed photos together, again documenting feelings, thoughts, themes and reflections that emerged.

Phase III. – Co-constructing the Narrative

Upon reviewing all written and visual content from the three-week data collection period, Franchesca and I were able to successfully co-create a narrative. Keeping an open mind during the trip and recording our most intimate thoughts allowed us to give meaning to our memories. I think our verbal and written meaning that we gave our memories added depth to the trip. Our candid thoughts allowed me to determine themes that aided in answering my proposed research questions and situated this unique experience within important conversations revolving around cultural and communication boundaries that play a part in the new and growing relationships between geographically separated families.

Appendix 3: IRB Protocol Approval



October 22, 2014

Meghann Goddard
Knight School of Communication

RESEARCH PROTOCOL APPROVAL, IRB FILE # 10-14-KSOC-00103

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your research request:

Initial impressions: A conconstructed narrative of a Filipino family lost and found, inside and out

Your protocol (10/7/2014); Informed consent form, Focus group questions, Questionnaire; and Recruitment materials were approved for use within the facilities of Queens University of Charlotte. The Board determined your study poses minimal risk to subjects and meets the criteria for an exempt application. If you plan to use the protocol outside of Queens University of Charlotte, you may need to submit it to the IRB at that institution for approval.

This approval expires one year minus one day from date above. Before your study expires, you must submit a notice of completion or a request for extension. You are required to report any changes to the research study to the IRB for approval prior to implementation. This form can be found on the IRB site on MyQueens and should be sent to irb@queens.edu.

If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please use the IRB file number when referencing your case.

Sincerely,

Laree Schoolmeesters

Laree Schoolmeesters, PhD, RN, CNL
Chair, IRB