COMMUNITY IDENTITY: A SENSE OF PLACE IN FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

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COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND SENSE OF PLACE IN FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

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ABSTRACT

Autobiographical narratives of shared experience are explored in a narrative qualitative approach regarding people who have come to Fairbanks, Alaska and decided to stay. Six co-researchers shared their lived experience regarding what influenced their staying in Alaska and resulting changes to their identity. This research is based on a Communication perspective, in particular, adopting Costructionism as epistemology for this study. Social Construction of Reality is the theoretical basis for a discussion of social construction of identity, social construction of community, and social construction of sense of place. This study focuses on the experience of changes in the co-researchers’ identity through communicative interaction with other community members.
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1 Quest for Identity

1.1.1 Crying Little Girl

I heard a little girl crying as I was bullied by my new school mates when I transferred into a new school. I heard a little girl crying when I was shunned by my classmates in high school. I heard a little girl crying when I argued with my father who forced me not to participate in anti-government demonstrations. I heard a little girl crying when I waited for the subway train which was always jammed full of people.

Since second grade, I have always felt that something was missing in my life. During that period of my life, I read a story titled The Queen of the Snow. In the story, a little girl, Kate, had to go on a journey to look for a magical healing potion for her friend K. Even now I remember the beginning lines of the story vividly. That story began with Kate and K. Kate and K were best friends until the broken pieces of devil’s glass came into K’s eyes accidentally. K became a totally strange person who behaved very differently than before. K began to destroy neighbor’s windows, bullied animals, spoke bad words even to Kate. Somebody told Kate the only medication to cure K was in the land of snow and ice far, far away. That’s how Kate’s long and harsh quest began.

I have experienced much difficulty in my interactions with classmates since the second grade. I was perceived as different because I far surpassed my peers in academic achievement, and worst of all, I did not know how to socialize well enough to be a team member, especially by the Korean school norms. I was estranged from my father during
the time I attended college. He was the only person who understood me. I should have listened to him when he begged me not to get involved in political demonstrations because he was right when he addressed the potential negative effect to my academic life. My relatives were very disappointed when I did not become a doctor or a lawyer as they had expected. I regretted causing them such great disappointment. I had difficulties getting along with my colleagues, particularly with males when I worked as a teacher. I was too assertive and insisted on equality with male colleagues. To add to these difficulties, I hated commuting on a mass transit system every day to a city of 10 million people.

1.1.2 Somewhere, Some Place

. . . belief that somewhere, only not right here, not right now, perhaps just over there some place, in another country, in another life-style, in another social class, perhaps, there is a genuine society. (Klapp, 1969, p. 155)

I began looking for a shelter or an oasis from all the burdens of human relationships during my years in Korea. Stories of journeys and adventures gave me an aspiration and a longing for an ideal world. During my university days, I began traveling to various locations within Korea. I began traveling abroad after my graduation. Traveling abroad as an anonymous stranger gave me a liberated feeling, free from all the restrictions in my real life. However, it was only a temporary illusion and I knew that very well. As a result, I found a hobby to provide focus and goals in my life. Hiking became a great savior and comfort to me, which protected me from the stress I experienced in my interaction with other people and city life. I always felt something
was wrong even though traveling abroad and hiking relieved my stress in my everyday living environment. I felt as if I did not fit where I was; it was either something inherent in myself or in my community of origin that caused my uncertainty. My feeling of not belonging triggered my dream; someday, somewhere, I would find a home where I could be myself without worrying how the people who surround me consider me. I had a fantasy; someday, somewhere, I might find a place where I could feel satisfied and fit in comfortably.

1.1.3 Base Camp

This is my fourth year in Fairbanks, Alaska. I am a resident of Alaska. More specifically, I am a community member of Fairbanks, Alaska. Now I place emphasis on the city name of Fairbanks whenever I explain where I live, even to people who have no idea about Alaska, let alone Fairbanks. When I bought an airline ticket from my old friendly travel agent, he asked me many times if my destination was Anchorage. Finally, he asked me if I was sure that Fairbanks was in Alaska and asked me to repeat the spelling of Fairbanks. Currently I am very pleased to say that Fairbanks, Alaska is my home. It is not a fictional city such as Cicely, Alaska in the television drama, Northern Exposure.

Fairbanks is like finding a gold nugget. Among the thirty countries I have traveled so far, there were only two countries in which I would live, Switzerland or Nepal. Both of these places attracted me with the breath-taking beauty of mountains. When I came to Denali National Park for hiking, I had to acquire my backpacking supplies by visiting Fairbanks. It was a temporary base camp for my second hiking in Denali, 2001. Now,
after living three years in Fairbanks, I am a genuine, committed community member, which has become an important part of my identity. The more I live here, the more I love our community, which motivates me to become even more involved in community activities. In this community, I am healthy and enjoy hiking easily. I feel creative, enjoy various art activities, and I enjoy the warmth of human connection interacting with other community members. Now, my temporary base camp of three years ago has turned into my permanent base camp.

I may be completely saturated in admiration of the Fairbanks community. I can not believe how lucky I am in finding somewhere, some other place for my reality. Since I began living here, I have realized the importance of community culture and its affect on my identity. Prior to living here, I never felt the necessity or benefit of community at all. Of course, I was never motivated or involved in contributing to community, either.

Since living in Fairbanks, I have grown to love and feel attached to this community, which has transformed my identity. My relationships with the community and its members have changed. Through my personal experience, I began to be curious how community affects its members’ identity.

1.1.4 Research Question

Is my experience in the Fairbanks community unique? Does it apply only to me? How do other members’ experience Fairbanks in regarding these issues? These questions motivate me to explore other community members’ life experiences. Why did they come and stay here and choose to live in the Fairbanks community? How does the experience
of their living in Fairbanks, Alaska affect their identity? What makes them a Fairbanksan or Alaskan? How do they experience their identity as a community member?

1.2 Introduction to Alaska and Fairbanks

1.2.1 Introduction to Alaska

The name Alaska is derived from the Aleut word “Alyeska,” meaning “great land.” It has a nickname, “the last frontier.” Alaska attracted people during the decade of 1890-1900 who came for the gold rush. In the 1970s, oil pipe-line construction brought many workers. Alaska has been utilized as an important military presence and it still has many Army and Air Force bases in the state. (Gates, 2004; Gislason, n.d.; Alaska Office of Economic Development, n.d.)

Alaska is 2 1/2 times the size of Texas with the population size of Fort Worth. The temperature range is -80°F to +100°F. In the summer, it has almost 24 hours daylight and yet has just a few hours daylight in the winter. Alaska is famous for having the tallest mountain in North America; Denali.

1.2.2 Introduction to Fairbanks

Fairbanks is located in the heart of Alaska’s interior, on the banks of the Chena River in the Tanana Valley. The town was named after Charles W. Fairbanks, a senator from Indiana in 1901. Now Fairbanks is the 2nd largest city in Alaska, home to over 40 thousand people (85 thousand in North Star Borough). Temperatures have been recorded as low as -62 in mid-winter, and as high as 96 in summer. When the summer solstice arrives, there are more than 22 hours of daylight. At the winter solstice, there are just less than 3 hours of daylight. Fairbanks offers a diverse economy, including city, borough,
state, and federal government services. Tourism and mining also comprise a significant part of the economy. Including Eielson Air Force Base and Fort Wainwright personnel, over one one-third of the employment is in government services. The University of Alaska Fairbanks is also a major employer. These geographic, climatic, and historical characteristics of Fairbanks as a place affect the self/identity of the residents who live in this unique environment. My focus is on understanding the identity in this specific community; I need to explore the construction of self and identity thoroughly.
CHAPTER 2
Review of Literature

2.1 Self / Identity

Self and Identity may be one of the oldest subjects humans have studied and explored. Many disciplines have approached this subject from different perspectives. Psychology, Anthropology, Philosophy, and Sociology have investigated this topic from various vantage points. Recently, the Communication discipline has added fresh flavor and new insight to this old topic.

2.2 From the Perspective of the Communication Discipline

As with other disciplines, in the Communication discipline, George Herbert Mead’s views were influential to conceiving self-concept as “central to the conduct and interpretation of interpersonal communication” (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 8). Pearce and Cronen (1980) approached self as resource for communicative interactions. Moreover, Carbaugh (1990), Collier (1988), Philipsen (1987) have focused on developing the interactive processes of cultural identities, while Baxter (1994), Carbaugh (1988), Hecht (1993), Rawlins (1992) have discussed dialectical aspects between self and social relationships. Compared to the previous theories, recent theories and studies of identity tend to focus on complex, fluid, multi-layered, and dynamic interactional relations of each dimension. I will examine five of these recent theories.

First, Hecht, Jackson, and Ribeau (2003) put communication at the center of creating identity. They view communication as a socially constructed process that revolves around membership in a certain culture. They contend that communication is a
cultural process and that culture is a historically and socially emergent process, which people co-create and maintain as a function of identity. Hecht et al. argue that “people negotiate their identities when they come in contact with others” (p. 29). They also emphasize the pluralistic and overlapping aspects of identities. According to their research, core symbols and prescriptions are important because “people define themselves, their cultures, and their experiences through their beliefs and understandings as expressed in core symbols and through prescriptions about appropriate and effective behavior” (p. 34).

Hecht et al. (2003) also developed the Cultural Contracts Theory, which delineates the negotiation process in constructing identity. Hecht et al. assumed that all human beings have cultural contracts. According to them, “cultural contracts are necessary because when people interact their identities will overlap to greater or lesser extent, and contracts are needed to preserve, protect, and define the self” (p. 241). They argue that “there are varying degrees of cooperation and flexibility in this negotiation process out of which emerges a contract that specifies the rules and conditions for mutual identity management” (p. 241). They further claim that identities require affirmation, are constantly being exchanged, and are contractual. Depending on the degree to which identities have been personally and socially constructed and explored, they posited three types of cultural contracts: Ready-to-sign, Quasi-completed, and Co-created.

Second, Cupach and Imahori’s (2005) Identity Management Theory discusses how cultural identities are negotiated through development of an interpersonal relationship. This theory explains “competent identity management across the developmental stages of
a relationship,” (p. 196) limiting its application to dyads. This theory focuses on the relationship among competence, identity, cultural and relational identities, face, and facework.

Third, Ting-Toomey’s (2005) Identity Negotiation Theory explicates the desired identity outcomes as “the feeling of being understood, the feeling of being respected, and the feeling of being affirmative” (p. 228). According to Ting-Toomey, successful negotiation affects both parties who are involved in commutative interaction positively, which gives them the experience of “a high sense of identity satisfaction” (p. 228). The construct of identity satisfaction is an essential concept for this theory, which can be achieved by the communicators’ willingness and commitment with interlocutors.

Fourth, Collier’s (2005) approach on identity revolves around cultural identification, which is involved with social, structural representations such as racism, sexism, classism, and other ideologies. Collier elucidates the tensions between individual identity and identifications with cultural groups. These tensions occur between an individual’s uniqueness and identification with a cultural group in regard to its norms, ideologies, and practices. She indicates that “identifications are overlapping and problematic, and are negotiated through multiple discursive and dialectic tensions in personal relationships” (p. 252).

Finally, Hecht, Warren, Jung, and Kreiger’s (2005) Communication Theory of Identity covers a wide range and draws from “holism from Asian and African conceptions, polarity from the Greeks, harmony from African views, collectivism from Asian ideas, and the individual orientation from the Greek perspective” (p. 259). This
theory emphasizes the fluid, multilayered self and its interpenetrated dynamics. The four layers of identity are the personal, enacted, relational, and communal, which signifies a personal, a communication, a relationship, and a group level respectively. According to these scholars, the four identities, located differently, represent different aspects of an individual's identity, which sometimes match but sometimes are contradictory to each other. Further, the relationship can be more dynamic by the interpenetration of each other. In particular, the "communal layer" is characterized as the place where group members usually share common characteristics and have collective memories, which establish common group identities. These shared "common group characteristics and history function to form the contents of the group's identities" (p. 263).

These communication theories focus on the communication as the main locus of constructing various levels of identity. They also well describe the complex, fluid, multifaceted, interrelated aspects of different dimensions of identity. However, these theories are more created from the abstract theoretical perspective from researcher as an outsider. Thus, these theories are not sufficient for my study, in which I try to understand a more micro-level process of how identity is constructed from the perspective of the residents who experience in their daily life regarding this phenomenon.

2.2.1 Cultural / Social Identity

Though all the different layers or dimensions of identity are interrelated, interconnected, and interpenetrated, some communication scholars tried shifting the locus of identity from an individual's psyche to a more relational, community interaction. Carbaugh (1996) contends the generally accepted idea, identity as a biological and
psychological entity, by pointing out the underlying presumption that the “primary site of identity is ‘in the individual’” (p. 23). He proposes shifting attention to an alternate site of identity in the social interactions between people in a specific social-cultural scene through communication practices. He defines social identity as “one’s cultural orientation and one’s position in the social structural arrangement of society” (p. 21). He argues that “idiom of cultural and social identity” is based on each member acting as a bearer of that group’s habits or customs or position of living, which is “contingent upon particular cultural orientations or social structural positions within the life of a society” (p. 22)

Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993) distinguish cultural identity from the individual and personal layer of identity. According to them, the former is described as the “subjective sense of belonging to or membership in a culture” whereas in the latter “identity implies a sense of self or personhood” (p. 41). Hecht et al. (1993) further state that cultural identity is a “perceived membership in a culture that is enacted in the appropriate and effective use of symbols and cultural narratives, similar interpretations and meanings, and common ancestry and traditions” (p. 41).

Allen (2004) also distinguishes social identity from personal identity, comparing the former, related to the perceptions of social group membership, whereas the latter covers the self as a sum of personality traits. She points out eight salient social categories that are significant to present U. S. American social organization: gender, race, social class, ability, sexuality, and age. She argues that “all identity is relational, and that human beings develop their social identities primarily through communication” (p. 11).
On the other hand, Orbe’s (1998) approach to cultural identity is more from the perspective of power dynamics. His Co-Cultural Communication Theory is informed and developed from Muted Groups Theory and Standpoint Theory. These theories share some common characteristics: identity is based on shared oppression; the priority of identity is based on shared oppression; and a strong alliance is formed among shared identity group members. These theories fundamentally regard identity as constructed and performed by categories.

Orbe (1998) attempts to integrate not only the monopolized perspective from the privileged groups, but also socially and historically muted and oppressed groups by assigning equal participation to co-creating social culture. He argues that “co-cultural theory may provide insight into scholarly inquiries that seek to acknowledge power disparity in interpersonal communication” (p. 134). He emphasized the importance of understating “the commonalities among groups without negating the differences between (and within) those groups” (p. 144).

Slightly differently, Goodykunst and Kim (2003) describe one’s social identity from the perspective of group membership and its power dynamics based on demographics, the roles one plays, membership in formal or informal organization, associations or vocations, or membership in stigmatized groups. They draw from Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity Theory to describe humans’ tendency to label self and others based on individual and group identity. This theory explicates that a person maintains his or her positive social identities by evaluating in-groups positively compared to out-groups. The value and emotional attachment to a specific group as a member is critical in
this comparison. On one hand, these in-group memberships and emotional attachments create pride and unification, on the other hand they sometimes cause stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and dominance toward out-group members, particularly when in-groups have more power than out-groups.

All of these theories are insightful in helping to understand the relationship between a dimension of individual, personal identity, and another dimension of cultural identity. They are also helpful to understand how different social factors and categories affect the members of a cultural group. However, these theories centralize sociological categories such as gender, oppression, and political goals as main driving forces in the creation of human identity. Thus, an emphasis on an outside power dynamic may misguide an individual to feel like a helpless follower to the unchangeable status quo instead of being an active co-creator in the process of ongoing, changeable cultural identity formation and reformation.

2.3 Social Construction of Reality and Self/Identity

There has been a long discussion regarding the origin of identity, whether it is innate in human beings as self-contained psychological entities, or if it is acquired after being born. Regarding this question, in the early 20th century, Mead argued that self is a socially constituted entity. Inspired by Mead’s concept of social self, Berger and Luckmann (1966) expanded the idea of the socially created human reality. In the seminal book by Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (1966), the term social construction has been established intelligibly. The basic concept of social
construction of reality is that human realities are constructed by the practices of specific contexts, with specific others, through communication.

Schutz (1970) said of Social construction of reality that:

The world of my daily life is by no means my private world but is from the outset and intersubjective one, shared with my fellow men [sic], experienced and interpreted by others: in brief, it is a world common to all of us. The unique biographical situation in which I find myself within the world at any moment of my existence is only to a very small extent of my own making. (p. 163)

Gergen (1994) is a main contributor to the development and the extension of this theory. Gergen identifies several assumptions for a social constructionist science in his seminal book, *Realities and Relationships*:

The terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are social artifacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people. . . . The degree to which a given account of world or self is sustained across time is not dependent on the objective validity of the account but on the vicissitudes of social process. . . . Language derives its significance in human affairs from the way in which it functions within patterns of relationship. . . . Existing forms of discourse evaluate patterns of cultural life; such evaluations give voice to other cultural enclaves. (pp. 48-54)

As Gergen and Shotter (1989) indicate, this frame of thought is useful in assuming that for investigating both the significance of the social world and the nature of the identities of those who inhabit it, because this allows us to think both are still in the
making, and still open to further change and development rather than assuming both are already fixed.

Gergen (1994) centralizes the notions of meaning and relationship as a pivotal axis of creating human reality and identity. He posits “This view of meaning as derived from microsocial exchanges embedded within broad patterns of cultural life” (p. 53). According to him, this view lends to social constructionism’s “strong critical and pragmatic dimensions” (p. 53).

As a whole, the social constructionist school of thought contends that “self is socially constructed through various relational and linguistic processes” (Carbaugh, 1996. p. 7). Put differently, this perspective believes that identity arises out of interactions with other people in communication. Communication scholars in this camp cite socialization as one of the most influential processes in the formation of human identity. Socialization starts as soon as a person is born. The person, as a member of a group, begins immediately to be affected through constantly exchanging messages with multiple sources, including family members, teachers, peers, and the media. Through these interactions, a person is enculturated into social identity groups. Children also learn the hierarchies of identity, preferred aspects of identity, and the rules for interacting with members of other groups (Allen, 2004, p. 11-13).

As social constructionists emphasize, identity is constructed by communicative interaction or discourse. Harre and Gillett (1994) centralize the role of discourse in forming self. They assert that “a person’s unique sense of being is located and displayed discursively,” that is, selfhood is produced by discourse with relational others (p. 104).
According to them "selfhood is discursively produced for others by the use of the first person pronoun, and at the same time is discursively produced for ourselves" (p. 108). They posit that people’s joint determination of assigning signification and its history constitute core contents of individuals’ consciousness and perception. They elucidated the reciprocal process of becoming a person as intertwined with a person’s sociocultural interactions, which act to form identity. They describe the social process of forming identity as “once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations” (p. 173). According to them, individual consciousness also reacts to social structure, which maintains, modifies, or even reshapes it.

Shotter (1984) delves the inseparable relationship between human experience of reality and communication. He delineates the making of accounts through discourse, which constitutes a reciprocal loop in reality construction: “Communication determines how reality is experienced and the experience of reality affects communication” (p. 140).

Shotter (1989) argues that the construction of human reality is mediated by interaction with the other people through communication. He elaborates that language functions as a means for constructing a discursive reality. Shotter addresses the function of communication, which transforms the “vague and only partially structured events” into socially acceptable and linguistically recognized ones (p. 148). He emphasizes how the creating, maintaining, and changing of relationship and reality around us is done linguistically.

Shotter (1989) elucidates how an individual’s identity is constructed only by being addressed from the second personal pronoun ‘You’. He contends that
People are not eternal, unchanging entities in themselves (like isolate, indistinguishable atoms), but owe what stability and constancy, and uniqueness, they may appear to have- their identity- to the stability and constancy of certain aspects of the activities, practices, and procedures in which they can make their differences from those around them known and accountable. (p. 143)

Shotter (1989) argues further that “the way in which we are created as the individuals we are by the others around us” is essential to act and communicate in a situated context (p. 144). He emphasizes an individual is one who comes to know self as “a particular kind of person” by being addressed from “certain particular people” in a particular setting (p. 148).

Recent studies based on the social construction of identity can be found in the Communication discipline. These studies regard the state of development of this theory and its applicability. Richey and Brown, (2005, in press) discuss the social construction of the “emergent self” in their study regarding cancer survivorship and identity. They view self as a socially constructed entity, as does Deetz who claims human realities such as self are created, maintained, and transformed in communication. This concept of self emphasizes the “on-going, interactive human social process of communication which occurs at the dynamic intersections between one’s experience of self, one’s social interactions, and one’s situated cultural identity” (p. 4). Richey and Brown argue that “the becoming self emerges continuously and contextually, over time, within an ongoing sociocultural environment through the intersubjective interpretive framework of self as being” (p. 4). Through in-depth interviews, they create insight into the what and how of
reconstructing self-identity. They postulate the process of narrative construction of self, interpretation of the constructed self, and reconstruction of self, in relation to the world of social/cultural/gendered/interactions.

Allen (2004) also elucidates the process of how people classify and manufacture difference in organizations through communicative enactment. Allen criticizes that these "classifications designate social identity categories that we may assume to be natural and permanent" and explicates the notion that these "social identity categories are artificial and subject to change" (p. 188). According to her, human schemes to classify groups of people based on characteristics such as skin color, gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, and age have been varied and changed through history.

Allen (2004) clarifies that all these social identities are constructed through human communication. According to her, the role of communication comprises "discourse and discursive practices that produce, interpret, and share meaning about social identity groups" (p. 190). The double-edged function of communication affects the dynamics of social identities, which can change or reinforce the mainstream concept of social identity groups.

2.4 Community and Identity

The fundamental theoretical basis of this research is the social construction of reality and social construction of identity as specified in the previous section. I will now review the literature regarding community because my research questions directly relate to the concept of community and its affect on its members' social and personal identity.
So far, Sociology has the most extensive research regarding community. According to Effrat (1974), sociological research on community has four main traditions: the complete territorial community, the community of limited liability, community as society, and personal community. The complete territorial community category has been examined on topics such as community as microcosm (1920s), human ecology (1920s and 1930s), the rural-urban continuum (1940s), power analysis, and mass society and the decline of community (mid 1950s and early 1960s). The category of community of limited liability covers topics such as identification of variables influencing people’s local facilities, exposition of the content of the urban neighbor, and description of the nature of social organization in neighborhood and district communities. The category of personal community examines the area of informal participation in voluntary organizations and interaction with friends and social networks (pp. 5-20).

The definition of community also varies and can be defined simply using the traditional definition that refers to the people and places that constitute a locale or through the highly contested definition that employs multiple meanings. Effrat (1974) categorizes three main conceptions of defining community among North Americans and Britons: community as solidarity institutions, community as “primary” interaction, and community as institutionally distinct groups (p. 2-4). He argues that “community as solidarity institution is characterized by focusing on the rules and roles common to all communal institutions” whereas “community as institutionally distinct groups focuses on looking at the institutional and social structure of grouping of people called a
community" (p. 2). According to Effrat, community as primary interaction refers to "interpersonal interaction characterized by informal, primary relationships" (p. 5).

The boundary of a community can also vary. The boundary of community is from a small sized specific group or a particular building to very wide and expanded group such as Transnational (Cronin, 1999) and Human Community (Etzioni, 1993). The criteria of boundaries can be, for instance, nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, geographical location, hobbies, technology, or philosophical orientation. Milburn (2004) contends that "one community may encompass another or many others," and argues the necessity of recognizing "seemingly fluid boundaries" (p. 435) by paying attention to communication that underlies their formation and dissolution.

Communication scholars put a different focus on their research of community. Cronin (1999) focuses on the commonality of the premise of communities, which is based on "some degree of group cohesion and a shared sense of self" (p. 4). He also points out the composition of community may be either "tightly knit" or "loosely constructed," and can "consist of individuals or corporate entities" (p. 4). His definition of community is "a collectivity of political actors organized on the basis of a common good and a shared sense of self, giving its members a positive stake in building and maintaining internal relationships" (p. 4).

Kanter (1972) focuses on commitment as an essential aspect of community. According to Kanter, commitment functions by linking "self-interest to social requirements," (p. 66) which is essential for the survival of a community. He further describes three major aspects of commitments to social system as "retention of members,
group cohesiveness, and social control" (p. 67). He elucidates a person’s orientation to a community with respect to “emotional attachment to the people” and “to the moral compellingness of the norms and beliefs” (p. 68) of the community. Kanter clarifies the meaning of the search of community as:

> A quest for direction and purpose in a collective anchoring of the individual life.
> Investment of self in a community, acceptance of its authority and willingness to support its values, is dependent in part on the extent to which group life can offer identity, personal meaning, and the opportunity to grow . . . (p. 73)

Etzioni (1993) focuses on morality as a community affair. He articulates the necessity of “reinforcement for our moral inclinations” (p. 31), which strengthens and ties human beings as fellows in a community. He iterates the role of morality as an individual’s commitments and conscience, which are introduced and sustained by a community.

Heath and Frey (2004) focus on the perspective of collaboration. Heath and Frey categorize four kinds in community collaboration: individual representatives, group, stakeholder organizations, and the community. In particular, Heath and Frey compare short-term business organizational collaborations with community collaborations. They find the latter’s characteristics long-term stable support, voluntary participation, created trust, integrity, ownership, and true consensus. In sum, they elucidate the pivotal role of communication for collaboration. The authors contend that more understanding of the relationship between communication and community-building will provide more knowledge of community collaboration.
On the other hand, Cuba's (1987) research on the local community of Anchorage, Alaska shows the combined approach of the sociological and the communication perspectives. His study shows the characteristics of the Anchorage community from a historical, political, and economic background as well as explicating the self-concept of "Becoming Alaskan" from a reorientation of language, space, and time.

Most of the above mentioned scholars put the focus on community as a primacy, then investigate the common norms, customs, and behavioral patterns mediated by communication. On the other hand, Philipsen's concept of *speech community* puts communication, particularly speech, as the axis of a community. Philipsen (1976) defines speech community as "the attention paid to participants' use of, and meaning attributed to, the spaces and places they frequent" (cited in Milburn, 2004, p. 421). He also emphasizes the commonality of a culture in a speech community, which transcends the experience of any individuals who may never meet and yet partake of a common spoken culture. These common aspects of culture are symbols, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to social communication. He argues that "a cultural code of speaking, then, consists of a socially constructed and historically transmitted system of symbols and meaning pertaining to communication" (p. 8). He insists that personal identity, social reality, and social action are constituted in-created, negotiated, and transformed, as well as reflected in—the communicative conduct of which speaking is a part" (p. 15).

Philipsen (1987) proposes that cultural communication is composed of *conversation, code, and community*. Conversation includes ritual exchanges between persons in particular contexts. Code is a broad system of beliefs, values, and images of
the ideal that is reflected in language patterns. Community is a grouping of personas whose commonality is derived from a shared speaking identity and setting. Philipsen (1992) asserts that a distinctive community culture is inextricably woven into distinctive speaking characteristics or a speech code. According to him, this common speech provides a “vital coordinative function in social life” (p. 139). He reiterates that speech codes imply “for understanding how, in general and in particular speech communities, the process of living and acting together is accomplished communicatively” (p. 139). He further elaborates how the communal function of communication serves to create a sense of shared identity for interlocutors. From his empirical studies, he exemplifies how an individual expresses a sense of membership or communal identity very differently using different speech codes, depending on the affiliated community.

Carbaugh (1996) supports Philipsen’s perspective. Carbaugh argues that “communication activates culture and does so through situated communication practices, with social identity being immanent in those actual practices” (p. 16). In accord with Carbaugh, Milburn (2004) explicates the concept of Speech Communication as:

Locations are described as containing communicative action or fostering particular modes of being a member . . . Participants consider themselves members of a ‘community’ that they label as such . . . participants may also use labels for their distinct communicative practices and for persons whom they deem outsiders . . . coded practices are what forms a community, regardless of geographic region, shared space, or label . . . Conversational participants may use a code from any number of communities in which they are apart. However, the use of any such
code helps interactants to recognize particular speech community membership(s)…speech communities form part of a system of meanings that can be used to evaluate any particular action. (p. 434)

Current communication studies also show several different approaches to community besides the aforementioned ones: online community, facilitating communication within community, visual images of community, personal mediated devices and its users’ community, mobile based community, sports community (Kalbfleisch, 2004), but these have no direct value for this discussion.

2.5 Nature (Sense of Place) and Identity

One of the unique factors of the Fairbanks community is its embedding natural environment. The community of Fairbanks is located in the middle of Interior Alaska. The community members directly or indirectly influence nature and also are influenced by nature. I will now to review the relationship of nature and human identity.

According to Fine (1992), there are three categories of viewing nature in the Western world so far. The first is nature as resource, also described as imperial vision, which regards nature as natural resources based on the assumption that “humans have legitimate right to dominate nature and to make choices as to its place and boundaries” (p. 157). The second is a protectionist vision, emphasizing saving nature from humans, which views nature as a special realm-authentic and uncontaminated-thus, “even smallest transformation (by human, sic) is inappropriate” (p. 158). Fine’s third category is an “organic vision,” (p. 158) that regards human beings as part of an organic whole with nature rather than as a separate entity.
Fine (1992) elaborates that the closer human involvement in nature, the more we create attachment, subjectivity, evaluation, symbolic meaning, interpretation, transfiguration, personification, and knowledge in nature. He clarifies that “knowability is subjectively constructed rather than grounded in ‘fact’” (p. 163). He explicates how cyclically all these human social constructions of nature “emerge and change over time, affect our experience of ‘nature,’ and influence what we are willing to countenance being done to our planet” (p. 157). According to him, narration is essential in mediating the lived experience in nature (emotions, sense of time, finding, and threats) and constructing an authentic reality.

Eder (1988) describes nature as the signifier. He argues that the contents of the described signified are decided by society itself. He contends that “society sets down the elementary rules for perceiving and experiencing the world in the symbolization of nature” (p. 31). He reiterates that nature is a cultural product. Put differently, the social foundation of ideology stylizes “nature into either the ideal model of society or the enemy of society,” thus, the relationship to nature is “indicators of the state of society, not the state of nature” (p. 32).

On the other hand, Michael (1996) points out the role of nonhumans in the construction of human identity. He argues for “the construction of identity in which nonhumans play a relatively autonomous part” (p. 141). In this book, he elaborates on animals and environmental nature, giving them the role of an actor. He contends that “local nature can potentially enroll through the expansion of identity, formulated in physical/ behavioral terms: this is part of its attraction for humans” (p. 150).
Cheney's (1997) perspective about nature is based on the concept of contextualized language, which describes "a process of human interaction with the land which ensures the health both of the land and the community" (p. 332). He explores this relationship between contextualized language and traditional cultures through Native American literature, which describes subsistence life and its close tie with the natural environment. He argues that "self and geography are bound together in a narrative which locates us in the moral space of defining relations" (p. 337). He contends that we can achieve a healthy self and a healthy community by contextualizing narratives which are firmly grounded in the geography where we live our lives.

Clayton and Opotow's (2003) perspective is that this is a more reciprocal relationship between nature and human identity. They argue that "not only is the natural world given an identity through the way in which people view and experience their relationship with it, but it also influences individual identities" (p. 9). They point out the importance of emotional connections to "particular environmental aspects of places people have lived rocky terrain, harsh winters, and the ocean shore-serve to shape individuals' self-definitions" and these attachments to nature can "contribute to the formation of group identities in environmental contexts" (p. 9).

Tyrrel's (2002) study focuses on nature and its affect on community members. In her thesis "The Last Frontier" of Circle, Alaska, she discusses how the physical environment such as mountains, water, climate, and wildlife affect the construction of each individual's identity in that village. She also shows how the involvement in and
participation through community affects the members' sense of identity and its transformation.

As I reviewed the existing literature regarding the relationship between self-identity and living in a community, I discovered three characteristics related to my research topic. First, most of the studies have focused on the categorization or frames of how to approach these issues. Thus, most of the theories are developed on the basis of different components, dimensions, levels, and layers. In other words, most of the theories are concerned about the structures, rather than the process or formation of the content itself. The second characteristic of existing studies comes mainly from the perspectives of researchers rather than from the people who experience the change of their identity by living in a community. Many studies adopted survey interviews, which are formulaically coded and categorized, and thus do not allow the respondents to elaborate their opinions. As a whole, researchers have not actively engaged the interviewee’s voice in the research. Thirdly, most of the studies have utilized quantitative methods extensively. Comparatively, Cuba’s (1987) research attempted to include both the researcher’s and interviewees’ perspectives; however, it reflects only limited and weak voices of interviewees. Though he utilized the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, he depended on the former extensively. Thus, the imbalance caused limited and fragmented voice from interviewees.

Existing studies I review above are mainly based on positivistic theory in collecting and analyzing data. Positivistic theories may be useful to acquire knowledge and information about physical phenomena such as thunder, floods, and earthquakes.
However, these theories are too limited to understand human reality, which is complex and is created through communicative interaction. Since the purpose of this study is to understand and create knowledge based on the interviewees’ perspectives from their lived experiences in the community, Social Construction of Reality is a better “fit” in trying to grasp the concept of the “lived experience” of identity. By adopting this theory, I can include my co-researchers own voices and experiences in understanding the self as a product of moment-to-moment change, thus it brings us to an understanding of life as it is actually lived. Thus, this theory serves my research goal of understanding how my co-researchers create their communal identities from their living experiences.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology and Method

3.1 Purpose of This Study

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) point out that selection of an appropriate methodology and design depends on “the nature of the research question and the purpose of the study” (p. 81). This study will show how individuals create and transform their identity based in part on their choice of community and how communicative interactions with co-residents co-construct meaning for members as participants of a community. Based on the nature of the research question and the purpose of this study, I decided that a qualitative design, especially Narrative Methodology, would be the most appropriate choice for this study. I employed conversational interviewing as a method for collecting data for this qualitative study and use Narrative Analysis to interpret themes from the stories told by my co-researchers.

My approach to this study came from the perspective of human science and qualitative research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), qualitative research is characterized as “an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 3). They emphasize that qualitative researchers should “study things in their natural settings, attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Adopting this perspective, I will try to approach my research question in the natural setting rather than in controlled or restricted settings. I will also make sense both from my interactions with my co-researchers and from the discourse. I will facilitate with my co-researchers to unfold the meaning of their stories by letting them
have enough time rather than constricting their responses within the limitations of questions as in survey interviews. Most importantly, I will be conscious of my roles: as a researcher, a listener, an interpreter, and as narrator in the process of research as I attempt to co-construct meaning by returning to reflexivity and utilizing the hermeneutic circle, moving continuously back and forth between what is said to what I know and what I want to know, bringing pieces and parts into juxtaposition with the story form, to understand my co-researchers.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Narratives and Social Constructionism

Polkinghorne (1988) describes Narratives as “the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process—also called ‘stories,’ ‘tales,’ or ‘histories,’” (p. 13). He emphasizes narrative as a form of meaning making. He argues that “Human existence takes place in and is figured by a linguistic milieu, with narrative being the primary form through which humans construct the dimension of their life’s meaningfulness and understand it as significant” (p. 155). He discusses two different levels of narratives performances: in the individual level “people have a narrative of their own lives which enables them to construe what they are and where they are headed” and in the cultural level “narratives serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs and transmit values” (p. 14).

We use narratives often in our daily life without being conscious of adopting them. The meaning, function, and usages of narratives tend to underlie our conscious threshold because narratives happen so frequently in our daily life. Narratives are one of the most
common and oldest human communicative forms when people want to describe, talk about, teach, and advise someone regarding various topics. Generally, people use narratives when they want to describe their experiences, dreams, and plans, or when they express their feelings and assign meanings to the stories they tell, have been told, or have heard about. Most people by nature seem to have a desire to tell stories and to be heard by some others. Through narratives, people relate to each other’s experience, bond as in-group members or significant others, and share the meaning of the story or even a philosophy of life.

One of the characteristics of narratives is that every narrative is the reflection of the narrator’s self and identity. People tell a story not only for fun, but also to insert themselves and their identities into the society in which they belong. People try to make sense of their lives and understand the meaning of their experiences by telling stories. Through personal stories, people attempt to create consistent, coherent, and ideal selves. In other words, they construct their realities and identities by telling stories. Narrative’s nature of constructing reality fundamentally is based on the epistemology of Constructionism.

As I delved into the literature for this review, I found that social constructionists regard reality and self as “socially constructed through various relational and linguistic processes” (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 7.) Though there are various kinds of linguistic processes, narratives function greatly to make people’s reality and identity meaningful in our daily lives because narratives help people to understand their action as well as that of others’ by recollecting and reflecting experiences through mediated language.
Recollecting and reflecting their own and others experiences enable them to configure the meaning of stories and further, the meaning of life, which affects the construction of their realities and identities.

Kvale (1996) proffers the legitimacy of narratives as a scientific methodology by stating that “narratives and conversations are today regarded as essential for obtaining knowledge for the social world, including scientific knowledge” (p. 8). He further elaborates the constructive nature of the knowledge of this methodology. Another benefit of narratives as methodology is that researchers can experience and examine people’s meaning making, the process and its dynamics, in communication. The researcher can experience the dynamics of participating as listener and of co-researchers’ expression in the process of meaning making.

3.2.2 Self as Narrative

The purpose of this study is to understand the matter of a shared self identity using the co-researchers’ narratives of their lived experience in the Fairbanks community. Thus, the relationship between self and narrative is necessary to examine. As I mentioned, the self concept is constructed, changed, and transformed by interactions with people mediated by language. A person’s existence is achieved, confirmed, and recognized by oneself and the community in which one belongs, through multiple roles, status, attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are expressed through styles of communication. In this process, a personal story functions significantly when a person tries to extend and confirm her or his own reality and existence in a meaningful dimension. In this sense, the contribution of narratives to describe and constitute one’s
self and identity is paramount in one’s life. Each person tries to achieve a unique existence through narrating a special story to oneself and others. Such narratives are a powerful means for integrating one’s own life.

Polkinghorne (1988) states self as “a concept defined as the expressive process of human existence, whose form is narrativity” (p. 151). His view of self agrees with Strawson’s description of the self as “a personal life narrative” in Strawson’s 1959 study (as cited in Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 151). Strawson, according to Polkinghorne, posits one’s individuations are related with one’s location in a story or in a history. He views that personal subjectivity is only achieved by the reference to intersubjectivity or community. In other words, one achieves one’s identity through interactions with other people in a specific temporal social and cultural setting. Thus, on one hand, an individual adopts a plot that connects and gives coherent meaning among one’s various experienced events. However, on the other hand, the specific cultures in which one lives, provide the possible plots and at the same time, constrain the boundaries of accepted plots among community members.

3.2.3 The Narrative Scheme

Whereas received science, or the positivist’s paradigmatic mode, focuses on logical reasoning and causality to connect events in order to search for universal truth, the “narrative mode looks for particular connections between events” in order to understand the life complexly constructed in human reality (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 17). Polkinghorne (1988) argues the importance of a narrative organizational scheme in order to understand human activity. Through the narrative frame work, we can conceive our
own and others’ behavior. Most importantly, the configuration of individual events as sequences of a related whole is essential in guiding us to comprehend the effects and the significance of each event, compared to the assumption of a unified, organized whole.

Thus, narratives need the plot to be meaningful. Without the plot, each event may appear as separate and discrete. The meaning of each event does not go beyond a categorical realm. The plot weaves together each individual event as a meaningful, significant, and completed story. Depending on plots, same events may construct completely different meaning, understanding, and insight. Put differently, plot functions as a nexus to give coherence and makes sense from an isolated event or phenomenon.

Narratives require both the listener and speaker to acquire meaning.Polkinghorne (1988) describes this as “the hearer, in the expectation that a speaker’s linked sentences are intended as an expression, tries to compose them into a whole so that their meaning can be understood” (p. 33). There are four factors composing communication models of discourse: addresser, addressee, code, and contact (cited in Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 33).

However, there is a difference, in a listener’s role, in two different discourses: the positivist’s paradigmatic mode, and the narrative mode. The former uses communicative logic to prove hypotheses by linking other statements. In this case, the referential and phatic functions of message are mainly utilized. The role of a listener is to analyze and verify the truth of the combined sentence based on logical reasoning. This logic is used to explain and predict phenomena in the material realm. On the other hand, the latter uses narrative logics, how the individual statements contribute to a plot. It is related with creating understanding as an integration of its parts regarding coherence and consistency.
through its dialectical interaction. In this case Jakobson’s emotive, connotative, and poetic functions are utilized. The role of a listener is to co-construct and share the meaning of narrative truth. The main function of this discourse is to understand in the realm of meaning. The gist of the narrative schemes was described by Polkinghorne (1988) eloquently as:

The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole. At the level of a single life, the autobiographical narrative shows life as unified and whole. In stories about other lives and in histories of social groups, narrative shows the interconnectedness and significance of seemingly random activities. (p. 36)

3.3 Method

Kvale (1996) states the function of conversational interview as a basic mode of knowing and understanding human reality. He describes the conversational interview as a “conversational technique in which knowledge is constructed through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee” (p. 36). A closely related position is postulated by Mishler (1986) as:

Rather than serving as a stimulus having a predetermined and presumably shared meaning and intended to elicit a response, a question may more usefully be thought of as part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other. (pp. 53-54)
Mishler (1986) clarifies the main difference between everyday conversation and research conversation is awareness of question forms, a focus on the dynamics of interaction between interviewer and interviewee, and a critical attention to what is said. He further contends that interviews should be redefined as "speech events or speech activities, particular types of discourse regulated and guided by norms of appropriateness and relevance that are part of speakers' shared linguistic competencies as members of a community" (p. 137).

A conversational interview is a radical method of data collection, compared to legal interrogation interviews and therapeutic interviews: researchers do not tenaciously pursue the logic and truth of the speaker's arguments. Kvale (1996) postulates this difference as the advantage of the conversational interview method being a "uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects' everyday world" (p. 70). He emphasizes that this method is effective when a researcher is looking for description of co-researchers' lived world in regard to interpretations of meaning. According to Kvale, the main focus of the conversational interview is "to understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspective" (p. 27). He further argues that interviews empower the subjects as equal to the interviewers by allowing the subjects to express their own perspectives in their own words.

Kvale (1996) suggests the criteria for evaluating the quality of a conversational interview in his book *Interviews* where he states:

The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the
The shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subjects' answers, the better. The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers. The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview. The interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers in the course of the interview. The interview is "self-communicating"—it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations. (p. 145)

In spite of highly loose and flexible structures of conversational interview, as compared to survey interview, there should be a focus on certain themes as an interview guide. Kvale (1996) divides the research interview process into seven stages: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. Each stage is interrelated and each affects the other; thus, the researcher needs knowledge and skill to implement research and to get the best result. The thematizing stage focuses on the why and what of the present research. These aspects should be answered clearly prior to deciding the designing stage. The designing stage is closely related to the first stage in order to achieve the knowledge sought. The third stage, interviewing, is the interactional process with the co-researcher where the researcher obtains knowledge as data through conversation. The next stage, transcribing is the transformational process from a fluid oral form of data into the stable form of written data. Analyzing is based on the purpose of the research and researcher's expertise regarding appropriate analysis. Verifying is the stage of confirming the accuracy and clarity of research findings. At last,
reporting is the stage to finalize the whole process of research as a written form to anticipated audiences.

At the actual data gathering stage of interviewing, the interviewer may ask the interviewee to describe a situation he or she has experienced regarding the research topic. Then based on the interviewee’s statements, the researcher keeps the conversation on the track to investigate the interviewee’s experience by use of guiding and probing questions. The conversational interview proceeds toward the direction of clarifying the interviewee’s experience, understanding, and meanings. This process is conceived as a dialectic through which data is formed in the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, revolving around the research topic. This is also the time a researcher needs to be careful of ethical issues regarding the rights of interviewees.

As a whole, the conversational interview fits my purpose to gather data from my co-researchers in order to know and understand their reality regarding my research question. This method enables me to elicit their description of various aspects of their experience by soliciting their stories of lived experience regarding the research topic. In particular, my focus is to understand the meanings of lived experience from the perspective of my co-researchers. This method is suitable for my co-researchers to describe, clarify and expand the depth of meaning of their experiences as it is related to the topic. I can also experience the process my co-researchers share in making sense of their observation and reporting. Most importantly, this method allows me to co-construct meaning with my co-researchers by participating in the conversation as an attentive
listener and as facilitator. In other words, I can combine knowledge construction through my interaction with co-researchers with what I already know of my topic.

Using this method has some other benefits. First, I can pay critical attention to what is said without constraining my co-researchers' discussion regarding how, what, how long, in what detail, the seeming relevancy to the topic. This format contributes to a deep and penetrating approach to the topic because of its sensitivity and flexibility, which enables me to capture the experiences and lived meanings of my co-researchers. Second, this method allows me to listen to the changing, complex, and delicate stories because their living experience in the community continues and has lasted over time; at least more than three years.

Based on this theoretical foundation, I interviewed six people using the conversational interview method. Each interview took about one and a half hours. An oral consent of the Informative Consent Form was substituted with written consent, which has been permitted by Institutional Review Board.

I recorded conversations by using an audio-recorder. And at the same time, I took notes on the nonverbal expression of my co-researchers. Once I finished all the interviews, I transcribed the recordings verbatim, adding my experiential notes and ideas for final analysis.

3.4 Co-Researcher

Prior to initiating the research, I acquired the permission of research from Institutional Review Board at the University of Fairbanks Alaska. I decided to select people who can best help me to understand regarding my research topic. I decided age,
gender, race, and social class are not important aspects to influence my research. I decide the length of living in this community and their commitments are more influential to understand my research question. Based on my personal experience and my informal conversations with many people, I decided that a minimum of three years of living in and their own willing decision to stay in the Fairbanks community, based on their satisfaction of living here, would be the qualifying attributes to be a co-researcher.

I have selected co-researchers conveniently through my involvement to community activities such as volunteer works in multicultural organizations, and in intercultural events. I asked some people who satisfied the aforementioned qualifications whether they were interested in my research as a co-researcher. I gave them basic information about the research topic, research purpose, approximate time requirement, and possible gains from their decision to participate as a co-researcher. Thus, I knew all of my co-researchers through shared volunteer works or from preparing cultural events. Most of them were familiar to me, and we had certain degrees of close feeling, trust, and respect for each other.

At last, I selected six co-researchers based on Kvale’s (1996) suggestion for adequate numbers in qualitative research. The key concepts to qualify interviewees need to be defined clearly for preventing confusion or misunderstanding of their choice in this research because I explore how the co-researcher’s identity is constructed and changed by deciding to stay in and having lived in the local community.
3.4.1 Parameters

*Local community* in this study is defined as either the Fairbanks North Star Borough or Alaska as a whole depending on the interviewee’s conversational contents and context.

*Decision to stay* is the co-researcher’s willing decision to stay and live in the local community based on his or her attraction to the area and is not influenced by external forces.

*Having lived in the local community* in this study is defined as living in this local community more than three years and having the desire to stay further.

Then, just prior to our interviewing, I explained essential information regarding my research, particularly the process, once again and clarifying with them if they have further questions. Only after obtaining the interviewee’s oral Informed Consent did I begin the actual interviewing.

I adopted Mishler’s (1986) recommendation during my interaction with my co-researchers: empowering interviewees. Mishler (1986) elaborates that positivistic research methods treat the subjects as objects rather than as a living human beings, which causes and perpetuates respondents’ helpless and powerless attitude. He exemplifies how survey research restricts the respondents’ answers in order to fit them in the predetermined categories by coders. He adds that the survey researchers cut off the irrelevant answers that seemingly do not fit into the expected answer, which may turn out to be valuable data giving insight for the studied phenomena as did his interview experience. As a conclusion, he suggests the empowerment of respondents by respecting
their way of constructing meaning. He contends that this empowerment of respondents transforms research practice in regard to encouraging and facilitating "their efforts to learn and act" (p. 135).

Drawing the supportive relationship with co-researchers from Mishler (1986), Polkinghorne (1988), and Kvale (1996), I tried to support my co-researchers telling their complete stories in detail, with sufficient attention from me as a listener, letting them unfold their stories, encouraging them to configure the connections among episodes, and urging them to make sense out of their stories. I showed my respect as a listener by paying attention to their stories, showing my interest, asking clarification, stimulating different perspectives, encouraging relating individual events to a whole structure. At the same time, I was always careful to let my co-researchers have the initiative to tell me their stories without worrying about my judgment or social norms and criteria.

3.5 Researcher as Research Tool

Kvale (1996) emphasizes the importance of the interviewer as a research tool, critically affecting research from the point of view of ethics and quality. He discusses the role of the interviewer as:

The person of the researcher is critical for the quality of the scientific knowledge and for the soundness of ethical decisions in any research project. By interviewing, the importance of the researcher as a person is magnified because the interviewer him-or herself is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge. Being familiar with value issues, ethical guidelines, and ethical theories may help in choices that weigh ethical versus scientific concerns in a study. In the end, however, the
integrity of the researcher—his or her honesty and fairness, knowledge, and experience—are the decisive factors. (p. 117)

Kvale (1996) suggests as qualifications for the interviewer: that she or he be knowledgeable with the issues to pursue, in structuring the interview outline, clear in asking questions, gentle in interaction with interviewees, sensitive with what is said by interviewees, open to new aspects of the topic, careful in steering the direction of interview, critical to checking, good at remembering the important statements, and open to interpreting to clarify and extend co-researcher’s meanings.

In particular, during the whole process of narrative research, the researcher needs both expertise and craftsmanship. In order to obtain a meaningful knowledge about the researched phenomena, the researcher needs expertise: knowledge of topic and skills to implement research. Through the thorough literature review, a researcher prepares a working level of knowledge. However, acquiring skills to implement effective and ethical interviews and analysis is not easy from knowledge alone. Interviewing skills need more than theoretical knowledge. This is a challenging part for the novice researcher.

As Kvale (1996) emphasizes, this craftsmanship only can be achieved by apprenticeship. Under the guidance of a master, through the observation and constantly repeated practice, a novice researcher is able to refine his or her skills. Thus, craftsmanship requires a researcher to saturate oneself in the context of a particular area of knowledge by being engaged and involved in the whole process of research. A novice researcher has to observe, imitate, participate, practice, recollect, reflect, and analyze
one's performance repeatedly with the support of a master. Only through the repetition of this research practice and experience, can an apprentice researcher get closer to the level of the master's expertise. Kvale (1996) eloquently contends that craftsmanship includes "a shift from method to the person of the researcher, relating science to art, a skill model of transition from novice to expert, and the learning of research through apprenticeship" (p. 105).

One of the most important qualities to master in craftsmanship is the developing of a sense of reflexivity. A researcher's reflexivity directly affects every stage of research in narrative research because everything that happens in the research is related from researcher's thinking. Thus, the researcher engages in utilizing reflexivity to be mindful while he or she proceeds with each step, and at the same time, on what happens in researcher's mind. Reflexivity functions as a mindful guiding voice for a researcher while the researcher is engaged in research: influence of assumption, guidance of every selection, decision, analysis, and interpretation along a research. This voice is not heard unless a researcher is constantly conscious of it by paying attention and being mindful. This constant self-awareness or self-supervision, which is necessary for narrative research, is quite challenging to acquire for an apprentice researcher.

A researcher's engagement level of reflexivity influences not only what is told but also how it is told during the interview. A researcher should be mindful of the social context and its interrelationship to contextual effect on narrative. In other words, a researcher listens to an interviewee's narration and at the same time how the broader sociocultural context affects the conversation for teller, listener, and contents.
In this research, I constantly reminded myself of my roles and tasks. I enacted many roles sometimes one at a time, other times many at the same time. For example, during the interview, I was not only a listener and a facilitator, but also a prospective interpreter and narrator to my audience in upcoming stages. During my final analysis, I recollected the nonverbal messages from interviewees. And at the same time, I was conscious of my assumptions. During the stage of reporting, I was a narrator who speaks from my own voice and was an advocate for my co-researchers at the same time. Besides this, I anticipated my audience’s voices in this ongoing conversation. Consequently, this style of research was quite an unusual experience from the normal perception in everyday life. I had to be a mediator for listening to many distinct or overlapped voices from myself, my co-researchers, and community, both my original cultural community and the present community I was investigating.

Most importantly, I had to remember my own assumptions regarding this topic. From my preliminary informal interviews with my friends, I realized how my view can be different from others in this community. Unlike my enthusiastic and positive view about living in this community, a few friends expressed no interest regarding this topic. When they described no affection after living here for a while, and no interest in this topic, I was literally shocked. Based on my experience, I expected that all the people were excited about living in this community, which was one of my personal assumptions. This was an insightful experience for the importance of reflexivity and its function.

I also had to bracket my cultural baggage, which may be different from my co-researchers’ based on my cultural background. I was born, raised, and lived in South
Korea for 35 years and have lived in Japan for 3 years. Both countries are often characterized as collectivistic and people manifest a strong attachment to places compared to America. Although I was not a typical member of my home country in the sense of being more independent than other members, I still have a tendency for strong attachment and loyalty to the physical community where I belong. In particular, my thinking pattern regarding collectivity and nature may be very different because I am from a strongly collective society where human beings are regarded as a part of nature. Thus, I had to remain aware of these patterns of my perspective and to try to bracket these during my research.

3.6 Method of Final Analysis

Kvale (1996) posits the purpose of the analysis is “to uncover the meaning of the question” by explicating its implicit conceptions of the research (p. 177). He elucidates the importance of researcher’s preplan for all the stages of research from the planning of interviews, their implementation, to analysis. He argues that a researcher should think about how the interviews are analyzed before they are conducted.

Kvale discusses one aspect of analysis from the transcripts is the search from the key words that point “common threads of meaning underlying the question’ (p. 185). It is also a creative process, in which the researcher needs to question in order to find the implied meanings among the transcripts. Sometimes a researcher should ask about possible meanings for the analysis utilizing an imagined dialogue.

Analysis bridges the interview description and its interpretation. Kvale posits six steps of analysis:
(a) the subjects describe their lived world during the interview . . . , (b) the subjects themselves discover new relationships during the interview, see new meanings in what they experience and do . . . , (c) the interviewer, during the interview, condenses and interprets the meaning of what the interviewee describes, and sends the meaning back . . . , (d) the transcribed interview is interpreted by the interviewer . . . Five main approaches to the analysis of meanings are condensation, categorization, narrative structuring, interpretation, and ad hoc methods, (e) a re-interview . . . , and (e) extend the continuum of description and interpretation to include action . . . (pp. 189-190)

Validity of analysis is critical for truth and knowledge claim in science. However, the validity of narrative analysis is different from the natural scientific assumption. Social construction of reality values conversation and interaction with the social world rather than objective observation. Thus, in human science, validation is a matter of methodological concurrency; a constant investigation process such as “a continual checking, questioning, and theoretical interpretation of the findings” (Kvale, 1996, p. 289). Kvale (1996) reiterates that validity is not the final inspection of the production, rather “quality control through the stages of knowledge production” (p. 236). He asserts that the pivotal role of craftsmanship is validation through “investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (p. 241).
CHAPTER 4
Journey into the Narrative World

The meaning of human life is constructed by telling personal stories to oneself or sharing with others. We perceive, interpret, organize, and tell the stories to ourselves and to others who listen. Story telling is a human medium created, utilized, and developed for understanding and supporting each other. It also creates a shared reality through which we perceive and assign meanings to things and events that we experience. We relate to others and become intimate by sharing stories. Narration is one of the ultimate forms of human interaction. Through narrative we transact reality and identity. Each individual’s narrative is creation, which offers feedback, response, and revision. Based on sharing personal narration, which can be joyful or painful, we develop camaraderie as a member of human species as well as a part of a cultural group which shares similar but different views regarding the meaning of nature, time, life, and human relationships.

Through my narrative interviews with my co-researchers, I share not only their insights, experiences, views, and interpretations, but also their courage, fear, joy, and pain. As a researcher, I had to monitor my action and reaction through the entire conversing process. I tried to be neutral because I didn’t want affect their direction of talking or development. At the same time, I tried to offer them the freedom and initiative to be the hero or heroine in their own narration. However, I was reflexively mindful, acknowledging my role as a researcher and a facilitator. Sometimes I was very tempted to jump into the conversation to tell my stories. I was often engrossed in sharing the stories; I just wanted to be an equal conversational partner without worrying about any
obligation burdened by my enjoyment of talking. Sometimes listening itself was a pure
joy, while other times it was very painful because either I could relate or I couldn’t relate.
I tried to be empathetic as a sounding board while avoiding the temptation of interrupting
my co-researchers. However, I couldn’t and didn’t want to be a wooden board, which
was impossible after a couple of interview interactions. Instead, I began to be more
sensitive and to put more energy into consciously regarding my interaction with them.

The process of this research itself has been a journey into the world of narration
and understanding. It was a journey not only into the world of narration, but also into the
meanings of searching and its development through the entire process of sharing the
narration. It was also a process of apprenticeship guided by previous knowledge and
feedback from my advisor regarding the craftsmanship of interview research.

Each interview offered me a lot to think about for both content and interaction
during the interview. Each interview guided me into the direction of better understanding
and facilitating. After finishing the six interviews, I began transcribing every single word
verbatim as well as listening to the interview tapes over and over again. I experienced
my whole world revolve around my thesis topic and the search for themes. I realized that
I was too close to the interview contents, so I tried to put some distance by watching my
favorite show, Star Trek, Next Generation. I was amazed and surprised that all the
members of the Star Trek crew talked about my thesis. They repeated all the key words
which I had in my transcriptions such as adventure, challenge, risk, cooperation, helping
each other, and senior officers’ mentoring.
While indulging in the description process after transcription, I have savored as if appreciating delicacies, enjoying the depth and the flavor of the capta with plenty of time. I was surprised by the richness of the contents and the depth of the meanings that I could not fully catch during actual interactions. I also was moved and touched by the dramatic, poetic, and symbolic expressions of my co-researchers. Some expressions were so powerful, the sound of the voice and emotion resounded in my heart over and over again like the tune of my favorite song, which I could not stop repeating. It was not only the exploring process, but also a healing process to enrich my worn out warmth and softness in my heart. At the end of the description, I was able to write a poem for the first time since my high school days. Thus, this research fertilized my heart once again offering a bonus of reviving my poetic aspiration.

4.1 Gregory's Narrative

Originally, Gregory is from San Francisco and his wife is from southern California. He has four grown children and has lived in Fairbanks since 1993. Gregory may be characterized as seemingly calm, a spiritual person who describes his life philosophy as one that values the spirituality and the beauty of nature. He claims to believe in the innate goodness of every people and to enjoy supporting other peoples' growth. When asked to tell me about himself, he does so in the context of his living experience in many different places such as California, Europe, Asia, Australia, and many other places while he was teaching and in the military. I was informed that he and his wife have seen other parts of the world before settling down in Alaska.
He explains how he was first attracted to Fairbanks. He says he heard about the people and beautiful nature from a person he met in a training program who had been stationed in Fairbanks. When he returned to California after being stationed in Europe and Asia, he looked to do something different, so when knew that there was an opening in Alaska, he said, “That would be great, let me take it.” While he does not do much hunting or fishing like many people in Alaska, he speaks of enjoying camping very much. He emphasizes the difference in accessing nature here. He states that it takes several hours to go to the mountains from the big city, through the traffic and pollution and then to go back through the same hectic process again after enjoying nature reduces a lot of the experience he tasted in nature. Compared to the big city, here “You can really enjoy being in a natural setting easily.”

He tells me how much his wife loves it here. His wife followed him whenever he was transferred. When she came here, she wanted to settle down because she thought “This is a good place.” According to him, “This is where she really enjoys it.” Thus, after two years, he resigned his job in order to stay here and then looked for another job. Besides this story, he speaks about his wife and family often during our conversation. I know her through a couple of intercultural events that I organized. I had an opportunity to talk with her and became fond of her. I found her to be genuine and empathetic like her husband. Most importantly, she shows a lot of genuine concern and interest in those events. I observe that he and she interact with people from different cultural backgrounds very naturally.
Gregory lists what affects his decision to settle down here: the quietness, the beauty of the country, the friendliness of the people, and the opportunity to be more independent than in the lower 48 or any other place. He describes “the bombardment of the external noise from cars, gunshots, things breaking, ambulances, and fire engines,” from which he felt “stress and frustration.” Compared to the negative impact caused by all those sounds in California, he is now able to enjoy “the quietness of spirit,” where he can “get more in touch with [his] own spiritual needs, [his] emotional needs.” He emphasizes that he and his wife are spiritual people and how much the spirituality and tranquility of the place help him to easily get in touch with his soul without being negatively influenced by the pace of life as in a big city; which is “so fast and so hectic.” He clarifies that “It is easier to slow it down here.” which helps him “maintain a level of balance rather than being up and down.”

Gregory asserts that the environment in Fairbanks is “more conducive to our own personal health.” He describes his appreciation of the beauty of nature:

Basically being able to walk outdoors at night for us and being able to see the stars, seeing the aurora borealis, seeing just what God has created and how beautiful it is, seeing the mountains in the wintertime, going out on drives and just seeing the snow out in the distance, being able to walk across the tundra, smell things that we hadn’t smelled before, being able to touch different things that are unique to the area.

To him, this is not an artificial environment, manmade things, rather an approach to nature, “more directly, more involved with it, easier to be there as a part of it, with
enjoyment of the regular beauty on a day–to-day basis." He adds that the smog from the fire last summer reminds him of the smog in the big cities, which increases his appreciation of the preciousness of this environment.

Gregory describes the people in Fairbanks: "They are more aware of what’s going on," which leads people "to take care of someone if something happened to them; they expect somebody also to help them out." He postulates that the weather conditions, such as minus 40 degrees, affects peoples’ attitude about helping each other. He tells me of an episode in which his car had problems in the lower 48 so he had to pull off to the side of the road. Although a lot of cars passed by, it took half an hour for somebody to stop to see if they could help him. Ironically, they were not American; they were Australians who were traveling. On the contrary, he tells me his daughter spun out on her way into Fairbanks a few weeks back and within two minutes someone was helping her out. By these episodes, he concludes that the people here are aware of physical needs and take care of others more readily. He and I shared our experiences and those of our friends’ regarding how quickly and how many cars have stopped to help us when we pull our cars to the side of road, sometimes just for checking mail. We shared and related as nice Alaskans in our conversation as we often do in our daily lives. It was fun. It increased our closeness; I almost forgot I was in the middle of a conversation for my thesis. I was engaged in speaking a ritual, sharing similar, wonderful, and unique experiences only possible in Alaska. He concludes by saying “You don’t see that as much other in places in the country that you do here.” He and I agreed that this type of shared talking about the prompt help from the other people when we are in trouble, especially with car
problems, makes us appreciate: “the situation where you’re happy that the care level is so high, and basically reaffirms what people up here do for you.” It makes us “aware that people in this community are going to be there for you, rather than like it is in other communities.” In his opinion, those experiences and feelings motivate people who think in the same way, “because you know others are there for you then, you will be there to help people out too.”

Regarding the friendless, Gregory adds that an important factor is that it is a small community. He says “There is what only 30 to 40 thousands people in Fairbanks so your chances of getting to know more people or be aware of more people I think would be greater” which leads us running into people we know a lot more often, so “people tend to smile and acknowledge each other more.”

Then, Gregory began talking about independence. He analyzes that “a lot of people up here are willing to go live out and be by themselves.” He points that a lot of people have the tendency here to buy their own property, and they stay on their property as “the king and queen of their own area.” This affects people by requiring them to make more “independent choices and the government doesn’t seem to be as intrusive here as they are in other places.” He further elaborates that:

You don’t have the true ‘big brother’ concept that you might have in areas in the lower 48 where as you’re driving down the street and see cameras up on the stop lights watching you and so forth, taking your picture for speeding tickets, monitoring activities in local areas. So it just seems to be an area where if you want to be off by yourself, if you want to do things, there is not a - you don’t have the
infringement upon you that you might have other places. And if you want to be active you can still choose to be active in different places. So it just seems to be a more frontier rugged atmosphere up here than you would have other places.

He summarizes this more freedom, independence and less regulation by government and by society as “a more positive type of environment.”

He continues this topic tying the relationship with his neighbor. He explains the relationship is based on as much as we want to share with them and vice versa. He tells me an example:

One of my neighbors works here at the University and we’ve talked when we had flooding a couple of years ago we helped each other out so when it comes down to common things that you help each other when you really need it. You know that you’re there for each other and if you want to share stories you can do that, otherwise you just go on your way and just be whatever you want to do.

When asked to further tell me about the community, Gregory begins with the concept of community as a group of the people that one associates with for specific reasons such as having common purposes and certain levels of commitment. He delineates various communities based on boundaries such as political structure and school system, and sub communities based on interest such as a church, support groups, community of musicians. However, he states that all these sub communities are within the overall larger Fairbanks community.

When I had some confusion regarding the concept of community, he guided me with more detailed explanation and examples. He iterates that:
Again, it is common goals, common objectives, and common interests, which make up the community where you are able to relate specifically in those areas and then from there you can branch that out to find what is also important. For the music it is a creative group. My wife and I both like the creativity of it. So that impacts and positively reinforces things within us or our needs to be creative to go into that type of environment.

When I asked further explanation about the relationship between sub-communities and overall community, he explains that:

They all have their own little common goal that makes up part of the bigger goal. If you were to diagram, you have your big circle and within that big circle you have groups of smaller circles and some of those smaller circles might just be by themselves or they might intersect other circles. So you might have a circle of musicians that are also dog mushers. So they have their interests overlapping in a couple different areas. You might have some people that are real estate agents, so they’re looking at the economic development of the land to put houses on, but they may be part of another thing so they are working together for what they see as a common good in certain areas. So the different sub communities are all part of the overall whole of the Fairbanks community.

I question how he would describe the characteristics of the Fairbanks community. He answers that as a combination of “still having the wild west where you are so many years behind the rest of the country” and “progressive approach to the future.” He delineates the aspect of the past as a legacy of Gold Rush Days attitude, and the aspect
toward the future as “we are trying to be a leader in the 21st century for certain things.” He eloquently states this as “plugging into a pioneer spirit of knowing your roots and going to the future.” He pronounces very clearly when he says that it’s like “Alaska’s motto, North to the Future.” When I show nod, he continues with a serious look that “learning from the past, taking that attitude, taking that spirit to go to the future where you’re not just pleased with the status quo but you want to make something better.”

The mention of ruggedness leads us to the topic of isolation and distance from the rest of the United States of America. He is smiling when he says “A lot of times Alaska is forgotten. You take a look at the national weather map and they never give Alaska.” He connects this idea of distance and isolation. He says it makes people here “more willing, more desirous of seeing the improvements that are going to make their lifestyle conducive to what they want it to be.” He combines the ruggedness, the pioneer spirit and motivation for improvement upon that for the future.

This conversation stimulates me to delve into more about pioneer spirit and its affect on his living here. He begins with the example of Golden Days, Pioneer Park, Pioneer Home, Musher’s Hall, and the Iditarod, which are located in town. The continual exposure to the events and parks leads us to talk about related stories and brings us to consider “the past and how the past has affected the future.” He also gives other examples such as the Malamute Saloon, and the poetry of Robert Service. He asserts that “You go down into parts of town and you see some of the older log cabins and they have been around for years and that also ties you back into the past.” He emphasizes that
realizing the continuities, stability, and change make you want to be "an agent of change for the positive."

I push the point further by pointing out that "there are also old buildings in the lower 48. What makes it different here with same tokens of the past?" He is eager to help me to understand the difference when he says that:

In the lower 48 you have to get out of the cities in order to experience it. You take a look at San Francisco where it is not a residential area it is high rise buildings that are continually going up. They have their Trans America pyramid. They have other things there. So the older buildings, the things those have been around for a while tend to get hidden.

After explaining the Golden Days event and Pioneer Park in detail, he tells me that those festivals and buildings let him visualize the western days of Alaska; to feel what the pioneers got through at that time. This immersion, not only just in the history, but in the feeling of it, makes him acknowledge the pioneer spirit of the people that were here before and relate to how they struggled through difficulty and they made it. This encourages him that "those people had that hard of a time, then what we're doing now might be minor inconvenience but we can make it through it." He further elaborates on how the Iditarod represents the isolation of the old days and the trial of getting rid of that by carrying the medication for the connection. His voice is intense while he tells me that:

As I said just as a historical thing of getting rid of the isolation but you had Nome that was separated that needed medication and the only way to get there was by dog team and dog teams did it. So taking a look at again they're not going to leave
anybody out there. They’re going to find a new and unique way and you take that pioneer spirit and now they’re finding new and unique ways to do things here for the future.

Gregory offers his perception of coldness and darkness. He was not bothered by coldness before coming here, but as he gets older the cold is starting to affect him and is not as much fun as it used to be. He says, laughing “My car is getting a little bit older so it is getting a little more troublesome because of the weather that we wouldn’t have done in other places.” He also mentions the difficulty of going outside at 40 below or 60 below to start a car. He recalls that to leave the car running for half an hour just to get it so one can drive it, is getting harder. Wearing a lot of clothes such as thermal underwear, pants, over pants, thermal shirt, shirt, jacket, outer jacket make him feel like he looks like “a Pillsbury doughboy” trying to get into the car. So the combination of climate and temperature is making it more and more difficult year after year for him to really appreciate it.

Though he got frostnip on his hands when he first got here, he was not bothered by coldness and darkness so much; he is rather affected and over-stimulated by 24 hours daylight in the summer because both he and his wife are light sensitive. He describes the extreme change of weather and what it means as:

Well as you think about it, there is no place else in the world or in the United States that I know of where you can have, between summer and winter 150 to 160 degree temperature change and a difference between four hours of daylight and 24 hours of daylight. Unless you’ve really lived that you just don’t understand it.
And it is funny talking to people in the lower 48 and other places that don’t have any real concept of Alaska and think that even the summer is a frozen wasteland. Related to the reaction of people who live in the lower 48, he told me a funny story of how he made fun of his gullible friends. He told them that he lives in igloo all year round and showed them a picture he had taken once.

After listening to my changed perspective about being a member of the community, based on my experiences of living in different places, he assured me that different places offer different levels of pride, connectivity, and awareness to the area. He admits that for the most part, the people in Fairbanks are very much aware of their “uniqueness, and pride, the reason why the vast majority of people are here.”

He mentions that this community has done a lot of good things and he sees where he has had a role in helping that out. While he delineates how his wife has been actively involved, he asserts that a lot of people do this because they want to be part of the community and want to be somebody that is going to join in and contribute. They also want to be “somebody who is going to help out, rather than just somebody who is going to be taking and taking and taking all the time.” Regarding the economic or the social concept, compared to some places in the lower 48, people think “What is the city going to give to me? What is the governor going to give to me?” On the contrary, “To some extent people here see what they can do to help.” He states that this is the independence and also a different connectivity to the community.

Finally, he talks about his experience in the summer Fair, and Intercultural Friendship Day, where he can meet people from different cultures, experience different
ideas, taste different food, and renew old thoughts; maintain new ones and see the same people there year after year. He describes this opportunity as “Where it is not you go one year and then the next year it is somebody completely different. So it is establishing a relationship, a knowledge that you know who these people are.” He expresses his appreciation of these opportunities as “broaching a different cultural gap” and says he appreciates the diversity of our community. He concludes: the Fairbanks community where people are “more independent but at the same time dependent” for some reasons with each other, “less competition, more connected” to the community, and the community as a whole is “accepting of the different groups” such as military people whereas in a lot of other places there is a lot of lip service but not necessarily activity in connecting.

4.2 Cathy's Narrative

Cathy is very active, outspoken, and sympathetic to people with difficulties. She is in her 60s and has lived in Alaska for 11 years. She has three sons and six grandchildren. She went back to school and got both a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master's degree when she was in her 50s. She had worked as a medical office manager; however, after getting her degrees; she teaches for several colleges.

When asked what brought her here, she answers in a strong voice without any hesitation, “I wanted a new life.” She continues telling the reason she ended up here in Fairbanks:

I did not want to continue the way I was living at the time. I wanted to do something that would fulfill me. In other words, I had a dream all my life of who I
wanted to be. I had allowed other people to make me who they wanted me to be instead of what I wanted to be. So, it's as though I came to a wall, a brick wall, and I couldn't see over that wall but I could see the side I was on, and I did not like that side. I had to step off into the unknown to be able to realize some of my dreams. It was a hard step but it was the best thing I ever did in my life.

She states this as though she had repeated the story many times. She doesn't seem to breathe between the sentences. She pauses a few seconds; she begins the story of how it happened; in detail and in a very dramatic way. I can visualize the scenes she is describing as if I am watching a dramatic scene in a movie. The scene starts like this:

I was building a little house. Something happened, which made it so that I could no longer stay there. I remember sitting on the bed upstairs in my room. My son came up and sat down on the bed right next to me. He said, 'You know something, Ma. All your life you've done what everyone else wanted you to do. Why don't you take a minute and decide what you want to do? Forget everybody else. What do you want?' I said, 'I've always wanted to live in Alaska.' He picked up the phone and handed it to me. He said 'Call Jennie.'

Jennie offered one of the apartments she owns to Cathy and told her to bring a minimum of three months living expenses to sustain her until she got a job. Her son's reaction was, "Great. I will pack for you." It didn't take long for her to put her things into storage, and her son to go over her car and pack it. She drove North with the Milepost. She reiterates "leaving's the best thing I have ever done in my life." She describes the excitement and courage of driving a car to an unknown world, saying "I had been afraid, all my life, to
take even a bus ride, so I had never been on one before unless somebody else was with me, never on my own. I had been so afraid to do anything.”

Cathy is excited while she describes driving to Alaska. She remembers the people she met on the way and how they were helpful, supportive, and that she had an enjoyable time. When her car broke down “in the middle of nowhere,” she had to wait for the parts to be delivered. It took five days; in the mean time she met some people:

There were five other families; their cars had broken down also. We had what you call ‘Stone Soup;’ we put all our food together. We had all the things we needed. One family had a canoe. People were just really, really friendly. Once we were on our way again, we were excited; we had a great trip out here. We went up the ‘Top of the World Highway.’ We got in here about midnight, with the sun shining in our faces as we arrived. It was wonderful. Yes, it was. It was an adventure.

With a lot of emotion she articulates “The scenery was incredible and I lost all my fear of doing something.”

Cathy remembers the exact time as well as the exact date and month of her arrival. Within five days, she got a good job. After a year and three months, she went to back to school to begin her B.A. degree. During the following six years, she finished both a B. A. and M. A. while she worked three part time jobs. Finally, she filed for her divorce, after 21 years of marriage. She restates “It’s like jumping off into the unknown.” She seems to re-experience the memory and her strong resolution regarding her decision to file for divorce. She doesn’t look at me while she says:
I don’t know how to explain this. It’s like you are in a big pot of cold water and the fire is very low; as the temperature is slowly raised, you don’t notice. When the temperature becomes destructive, you still don’t notice because you have adapted to it. It takes a long time for you to realize you are being destroyed. That’s exactly what my life had been. I didn’t want to be destroyed, even though I’d actually tried to commit suicide. A friend of mine more or less stopped me. She gave me a book called “The Giant Within” by Tony Robbins. “That’s where I got the idea that if I want to do something, I have to do it; I can’t expect somebody else do it for me.”

She admits that she had never realized, as most people do, that Alaska is so big until moving and living here although she had taken a short touring visit to Southeast Alaska. She also did not realize how cold it gets in the winter. Her first winter in Alaska was a meaningful one. She describes how she made it through the first winter. She begins laughing loudly while she tells me that:

When you first get here, you’ve never been in this kind of weather before. People say, go out and buy some Sorrels; you need a wool coat; you need this; you need that. So I spent some of my hard earned money on stuff like that at that time. I wish I had done a little bit more research because Sorrel boots are way too heavy to trudge around in and I hiked to work. And a wool coat! Give me a break! You feel like you are carrying a ton!

She also acknowledges her fear in the beginning as she states:

And making it through; you know the winters up here back then were a little bit
harsher than now. I had been married most of all my life. Somebody was there to make sure that I did everything right and that I was okay. This was the first time I had done something on my own. And I still didn’t have a lot of confidence but I made it through the first winter.

Then Cathy continues all the amusing and funny episodes that she had experienced such as spraying the window cleaner on the window in December, which became a failure to clean the window since it froze as soon as it hit the cold window pane; leaving a cup of coffee in her car and finding it completely frozen the next morning; having to adjust her life-time habit of leaving her bedroom window open year-round; finding her tires went flat when it was forty five degrees below zero; regretting that she had left her water bottle in the car. She expresses “all those little things, those are fun, that’s a part of your daily life here.” She concludes that “when I made it through the first winter without any major problems; I thought; ‘I can do anything.’ That’s when I made up my mind to go back to school, and that’s what I did.”

Cathy shares her research about change:

It’s exciting when you are over fifty years old to do something new because most people fifty years old continue to do the same thing. I’ve done a lot of research into change, whether it’s catastrophic or just a little day-to-day change. What are changes like? What made me want to change my life? Most people who are very uncomfortable on the other side of the brick wall will stay in their ‘uncomfortability.’ People stay uncomfortable, and even terrified, rather than jump into the unknown. I believe that jumping into the unknown was the best
thing I ever did for myself in my life, because I was able to discover the pioneer stock in me.

Then she elaborates about how her great grandparents traveled across the United States in a wagon train. Her grandpa had a horse; he got an extra 25 cents a day for using the horse to help the people on the wagon train. Her grandma and grandpa were married in Oregon and homesteaded on an island in Puget Sound. She shows me a big smile when she says “I feel like I’ve got a lot of her strength in me. And I didn’t know that until I did the adventure myself; went on the adventure myself.”

Once again, she compares her life before and after moving up here. She explains that she was raised in an era, in the 1940s and the 1950s, when “all we were raised for was to defer to men, you do what you are supposed to do, you raise your family, that kind of thing.” After a little sigh, she continues “so, it was very exciting for me to realize that I was a person in my own right. And that I could become a scholar. That gave me a lot of confidence. There is no way anybody can walk on me any more.”

When asked what has changed since living here, she gives me some examples: political opinion, attitude, and value system. First, she refers to how her political view has changed from “dyed in the wool” democrat, who worked to help the voting registration all through the night whenever there were elections coming, to a very conservative person. Although she still reserves her democratic perspective regarding the issue of abortion, she became conservative as most of her students are. That change came about through her pondering the fact that she “came up here to become an individual.” According to her description, “over the last ten years, since I have been here
in Alaska, I've slowly seen myself change and I am no longer anywhere near liberal; I am conservative. In fact, I am very conservative.” Once again, she articulates: “I do not believe in big government at all. If we need something, we should be willing to work for it ourselves.” She rejects government control because she thinks that “government is so corrupt and too big.”

Secondly, her value about material things has changed. She tells me how she decorated and furnished her one bedroom apartment, her entire house, for under a hundred dollars from yard sales with such finds as a one dollar popcorn popper, thirty five dollar sofa, free curtains, three dollar sheets, and cheap lamps. Her voice is filled with joy and I could feel her thrill while she lists her treasures from the yard sales. She describes her attitude regarding material things before moving up here; the only control she had was over material things such as furniture in the house. She went through a transformation through her experience living here. She emphasizes “If I can furnish my own apartment and be very comfortable for under 100 dollars, I can lose everything and start over again. I can do it, whereas a lot of people are totally destroyed if they don’t have their things.” After a pause, she tells me she went to her storage place in the lower 48 two years ago, and sold all her belongings in a huge sale, making four thousand dollars. She says that “I had done without that stuff for years; I didn’t need it. Life is just as happy without it; so I learned stuff doesn’t count.” After discussing another topic, she returns to this again: “I just learned that being a part of something is more important than money.”
Additionally, Cathy delineates how she used to be a perfectionist, not allowing any single spot on anything or her friend’s kids to touch anything, which prevented her friend from bringing her kids to visit because she didn’t want to “be yelling at kids all day, telling them, don’t do that, don’t do that, don’t do that in Cathy’s house.” Cathy laughs hilariously while she describes the same friend’s visit with her grandchild, exclaiming “Boy, have you changed!” Cathy continues “it was a long time ago that took place, but I don’t care now.” She says, now she is “more laid back,” and [things] “don’t have to be perfect. They can just be how they are.”

Cathy is eager to express how people in Fairbanks’ community are different from others who live in the lower 48. First, she told me the story about her car breaking down on the Alcan Highway; it was not even a minute and a half before somebody, three somebodies, in pick-up trucks stopped to help her. She states that: “If I had been in the lower 48; ‘oh, no, no, no, go away, I don’t want you anywhere near me, I don’t know who you are’.” So that was a really good lesson to her, she says “up here, anytime you see somebody on the side of the road, anytime anybody needs help, you help.” For example, if somebody arrives at the airport in the middle of night on a flight she is on, she offers help or a ride to that stranger.

Cathy asserts that people here care about each other; “We are very fiercely independent, but we are also collective in the fact that we look out for each other.” Cathy’s face is glowing when she describes a good memory to illustrate her point:

I remember my first immersion into the attitude of Fairbanks was when I moved in over on Ninth Street, the first place I lived. I was in a basement
apartment and the people above us were a family with two boys. I had a my son with me. Our car, when we come in off the Alcan, was hugely dirty. I sort of had gotten most of the dirt off, but I hadn’t really had the chance to go and wash it yet. I came out one morning to go to work, and my neighbor above me had washed and polished my car. He had been doing his car, right next to mine because we had garages right there together. He had splashed some water on my car and he just went ahead and washed it. His name was Sam, I remember; he later died. I couldn’t believe it! He washed my car! It was just like, that was really cool.

Cathy’s eyes are sparkling when she tells me about the difference between the people in the lower 48 and here:

Oh, we care about each other; most people here care about each other. Down there everybody was out to do their own thing; they were just interested in themselves. They weren’t really interested in the community because they were so busy doing what they wanted to do. It’s sort of like, I don’t mean to be sarcastic but, okay, ‘I am a Christian, and I believe that I should help you, so therefore, I am going to help you the way I want to help you and the heck with how you look at things. Whether you want help or not, I am gonna make myself feel better by helping you.’ I was, we were, in an environment like that.

Cathy repeats in many different ways the differences between the social attitudes:

“whereas down there, people were more self-oriented in regard to ‘I want to do it this way; that’s why it’s gonna be done that way.’ Here people are more together, connected, and collective though fiercely independent.” She also gives me her rational reason for
believing we are like this, saying, “because everybody values not only themselves but also those around them since you couldn’t survive without those around you.”

Through all these experiences, Cathy’s relationships with her friends, her relatives, and her neighbors have been affected dramatically. She became a best friend of her children’s father, who is very materialistic. She decided to take care of her old and sick aunt who had suffered from her brother’s mistreatment; became friendly, open enough to enjoy riding all day long on the bus, talking with “some good bus drivers,” and “all the fascinating people in the bus.” She repeatedly says how she has changed, confessing “probably if I had stayed in the lower 48, never came up here; I would never have learned what’s important to me, or to be more independent. What’s important has changed.”

At last, our conversation centers on the Fairbanks community itself. Cathy seems like a teacher who is anxious to guide me to understand the point of the lesson. Her definition of the Fairbanks community includes the following: the military, the villages around the town where people drive from for supplies and services, “the downtown community where everyone knows that there we have two hundred alcoholics and drug addicts,” and the tourists who are a good source of economic income to our community.

Cathy refers to the frontier spirit to explain the Fairbanks community. She seems very proud when she contrasts Fairbanks and Anchorage; “they are totally different. I consider Anchorage a part of the lower 48; they’ve got the lower 48 attitude.” She gives me a vivid example to demonstrate how the frontier spirit gets diluted as the distance from Fairbanks increases:

It’s like a frontier spirit. It’s more than just the cold. I don’t think that you can say
it’s just the cold making us that close-knit community. I remember going ‘outside’ a lot when I first got here. Flying out, I went to conferences and I went to different things. The physical feeling, the emotional feeling, and the spiritual feeling on the plane between Fairbanks and Anchorage, and between Anchorage and Seattle, and Anchorage and St. Paul, or Anchorage and Phoenix, wherever you were going, was totally different. The plane could be absolutely full from Fairbanks to Anchorage and yet there was a camaraderie. Everybody would talk to everybody, ‘oh, hi back there’; yeah, you know, we all didn’t know each other, but we ‘knew’ each other.’ You get on a plane in Anchorage and you sit in your little place. That’s it. Whole thing changed. Same plane, but the whole thing changed. So, it’s not just the cold. I don’t know what it is, but it has to do more with collectivity. It has to do with more: we know each other.

Cathy postulates that our town’s role is the hub of the whole interior. It functions as a center for the people from the villages to see the town or the fair as well as purchase some supplies. She also mentions the three main players in town –the university, the hospital, and the military- and how “they all work together to make the community what it is” instead of existing separately. She tells me about some of her friends who were stationed here while they were in the military, and came back to live here after their retirements. She seems to be confirming herself when she says that “we are too big a community to just have one segment dominate over the other. I don’t see that one is over any other. I think there are co-cultures.” She elaborates that in spite of the “geographical
separation," all the co-cultural groups are "interactive." Finally, she ties her elaboration to frontier spirit:

I think people come here because of the frontier spirit. Frontier spirit entails different things to different people. But I think that's the reason they like it here; they like that spirit. It's adventurous. I think the frontier spirit attracts people. When we discover that independent spirit in ourselves, but also share it, we get tougher. This makes it a home for me. I love it here. That's the reason I came and that's the reason I stay. After living here ten years, I understand it more. I am more familiar with all the facets attached to it.

4.3 Mary's Narrative

Mary is in her late 50s, and has two sons with her husband. She has lived in Alaska, most of the time, in Fairbanks, on and off since 1969. Her family took a 9 year break when they moved to California and tried living in Berkeley, California, then returned to Fairbanks, Alaska. She and her husband have traveled extensively to England, Europe, New Zealand, and Australia. She has worked as a Russian interpreter and English teacher in Russia for a while too. She has done "a tremendous amount of volunteer work in the community with different organizations."

First, Mary explains how she came to Fairbanks. When her husband was a graduate student at Stanford University looking for a research topic in the field of alpine ecology, he had difficulty finding money for his research. Only the Alaska Pipeline Company put a fair amount of money into doing scientific research on re-vegetation along the pipeline. This gave him an opportunity to continue his research in Alaskan
ecology. Until he finished his thesis, he and Mary spent a lot of time in Alaska, though he was still a Stanford student. When he finished his thesis in 1973, he got a job at the Institute of Arctic Biology, so they settled down in Fairbanks.

When asked to describe Fairbanks, Mary articulates clearly:

To my mind the Fairbanks community is one of the most ideal communities to live in probably all of America. For us it combines both the educational and cultural opportunities that are afforded by a university town with the tremendous outdoor environment that one can enjoy, winter sports and summer sports, kayaking and hiking. It also has a very unique frontier feeling of community that I don't believe exists in many places in America. There's a feeling in Fairbanks that this is a difficult climate, a difficult environment, that we may not see eye to eye on all topics, but we all have to get along because we all have to – we all depend on each other. To deal with this cold environment, we need each other and we also know that we have something in common in that we all relish the challenge of living in this northern climate.

Mary defines the concept of community as "holding something in common with." Regarding the Fairbanks community, she believes that we have "the same attitude toward living in the north, the values about what's important." She looks eager and serious when she elaborates:

I think that there is a strong sense of community here in that most people feel that they do belong together. You could probably say that community has three or four different definitions. Community does have a geographical . . . and in our
sense the Fairbanks community is pretty easy to define because it --when you fly into Fairbanks you see nothing, nothing, nothing, and then suddenly, there’s Fairbanks right in front of you this little gem of sparkling lights, the sparkling diamond tiara of lights that suddenly appears out of nowhere and you can say that that’s the community.

In addition, she includes the people who live on the far outskirts of Fairbanks, who may not be in the Fairbanks geographical area, but they’re “still part of the Fairbanks community” because they “share the same set of attitudes that they have chosen to live in this area.” She further includes “the people who travel back and forth between the villages and Fairbanks” in order to do their shopping, for medicine, groceries, and cultural things. When asked if she included them even when she moved here first, she replies “it’s a new idea that I’m developing.” She refers to the relationships she has had with her adopted son from a native village and with her husband’s Athabascan students.

This topic of native people leads Mary to talk about her adopted son, Mike. She adopted him when her first son was two years old. As he grew older, Mike began to be involved in native dancing and took some classes about native culture. Through her support for Mike, Mary has more opportunities to get to know native people and of their hardships in this community. She admits that it took time to become “aware their unfortunate situation: it’s been a slow development.”

Mary tells me an episode her son experienced. When Mike was in high school, he would go to places to look for a job and they would either “immediately offer him a job as a dishwasher” or tell him there were “no jobs available.” After listening to Mike, who
was told there were no jobs available, Mary’s first son said “it’s ridiculous,” then, went to the same place and was offered application forms. Mary asserts that: “some things I don’t like to say, but I know that they’re true. I know that there’s a fair amount of discrimination against the Athabascan. They’re at the very bottom of the pile here.”

However, Mary points out the influence of education and the cultural events such as the Festival of Native Arts and the World Eskimo Indian Olympics have created a presence for the native community in town that is seen as a “positive influence,” which is significant because “it’s something the rest of the community can relate to as a really good thing.” She sounds confident while asserting that all the diverse ethnic groups “enrich our community.” She adds her wish at the end of this topic: “I would like to see the native community take a larger part in all events, in activities at the university and everywhere.”

Mary characterizes the Fairbanks community as “more open than some other similarly isolated communities.” She attributes this to the influence of the university and the military. In particular, military people’s frequent travel and intermarriage is one of the main factors for this openness. Mary lists another characteristic of our community, the sense of the frontier, in which “people judge you on what you can do as opposed to where you’ve come from and what you’ve done.” The third characteristic she mentions is the interaction among people in our community. She illustrates this with International Friendship Day. She postulates how people develop their understanding of all different ethnic members thorough the interaction that this event offers. She further probes the
existence of "many different communities" and their frequent "interaction" because Fairbanks is "a small community."

Mary also acknowledges "the political tension between the military community and the university community." Though there are definitely "different perspectives" and they are "geographically separately located" from each other, she describes some common grounds as a part of Fairbanks community:

I still think they still belong to the same community because if there's a common acceptance of the fact, well, we're all stranded on the same flight and we can't get out of Fairbanks because of the cold weather. We're all driving on the same road that we're going to have problems on, and you can't isolate yourself from other parts of the community or the other communities within the greater Fairbanks community.

Mary includes the interaction among these groups with examples of university administrators who are ex-military. She states that "there's more than you might expect but less than there could be." Mary stresses that people from these communities would find they had "more in common than you would expect" when people "sit down and talk together" in spite of a strong political divide as "red and blue." She attributes this to the basic foundations they share such as "the isolation, the weather, and the choice to live in Alaska."

Regarding the weather, Mary considers this place to have been favored by mainly young people until recently. She explains the hardships for old people to handle here, such as "inadequate housing for seniors" and the situation where they have "to plow or
shovel their own snow.” She thinks this is “a real expectation that you be self-reliant in Alaska and that you be able to withstand the challenges of the weather.” She is certain that the only people who “really enjoy living in Fairbanks” are people who “enjoy doing something outdoors in the winter” because of the darkness and cabin fever. She describes how much people are affected by weather: “the darkness, in January and February, it gets very dark and people get very depressed and angry with each other and then in summer if the sun is out everybody is smiling and getting along with each other just fine again.” She iterates the weather as one of “the great factors” that “we just learn to accept and live with.”

When Mary begins to delve into the meaning of self-reliance in our community, she refers not only to coping with the weather and living skills but also “our own entertainment.” She describes the Fairbanks Symphony as one of “many amateur arts and music productions,” which “contribute to the sense of community.” Fairbanks Symphony also illustrates one of the many events and activities where military people interact with university people. For example, “the brass section comes from the military” even though “most of the violinists are from the university.” She laughs admitting that and we must get together because “there is no choice,” and we don’t have “enough population to have a Military Orchestra and a University Orchestra.” Thus, she thinks “isolation makes people work together” in other art associations and churches.

Mary stresses how all those things relate to the mentality we have in this community. Mary states that people have “a strong collective characteristic here as well as individuality.” She explains this as “having both; peoples’ individuality isn’t
threatened,” because we have our own “personal space” and so we are “more willing to
share.”

Mary adds another common factor that affects looking for relationships. People come here by their own choice whatever the reasons are, except military wives and families. In her case, she chose to live here because of “the great outdoors, the freedom from urban stresses, space, absence of pollution, and raising her children without negative influences of the pop culture in the lower 48.” In particular, she is very satisfied with the school system in our community, especially when she first moved here. She articulates that “there was a lot of money going into the community and the school system, a lot of young energetic idealistic teachers and we felt that it was a wonderful place to raise children.”

Mary’s family came back to Fairbanks after nine years of living in the Bay area. She confesses that “we decided we didn’t want to live in an urban environment, and we felt most at home back here.” Mary describes what her living experience in the Bay area was like. First, she points out that life was “more materialistic” because of the cost of living is higher including all the fixed costs like taxes, insurance, and auto registration. She assumes that to make more money in that environment that people can afford “less time to do things as volunteers.” On the other hand, in Fairbanks, people can be “more self-reliant, there is more choice in how you spend your money.” On top of that, here people can grow vegetables for their food source during the summer time with ease and fun. She probes this connection to the land:

I think that people feel that they have more worth here because when you own an
acres of land, it's a very atavistic element that goes far back into our past that if you have space around you feel that you're in control of something, whereas if you live in a room in an apartment building you feel more threatened in terms of your own personal space. That gives people more freedom here. There are opportunities to enjoy the whole state were you don't see anyone, where you feel isolated from the rest of the world but also free to do your own thing. And the natural environment: you experience it in a very different real way, I think people have a much more real connection to the earth and are therefore centered in reality. We're impacted by the changes in light, the weather, where in an urban area you can live year in and year out doing the same thing because it really doesn't change that much.

Mary relates these influences to her idea of the ideal community. She admits that this same word maybe accepted differently by the people who live in different countries but to American, "to live together, work together, pray together, and solve their own problems together seems an ideal community." So she expresses her personal definition of ideal community as "one in which you can develop your own interests, and so can your family." She returns to the topic of land, which allows us to be "more accepting of different lifestyles here, including the right of someone to live in a cabin and be antisocial and not interact with the rest to the community because they are not impinging on us." She concludes that "the space" allows us to be "more generous" and that there is "a better possibility that this kind of community exists here."
When asked about how many people are not interested in interaction in the community, she replies that “one third of the people in every community I have lived in within Fairbanks don’t interact much with other people.” At the end of this sentence she adds, “these people are not excluded. They are just accepted.” unless they “react negatively” by doing something “dangerous.” On the other hand, because “we are all newcomers” without bringing family or relatives everybody is looking for “the new connection.” Then, she tells her experiences of developing relationships with miners in the neighbor where she first moved when she came to Fairbanks and with the ex-military people who ran the road house while she accompanied her husband in his research in the remote areas with her little sons.

Mary also tells me the relationship her family developed with the people who built their own cabins like her family did. They visit each other for the house warming and holidays such as Thanksgiving, instead of visiting relatives like in lower 48. She describes these friends as salt of the earth people. She also shares how she experiences the house building as fitting with the image and relish of self-reliance.

At the end of our conversation, Mary talks about her father, who she had to bring here after her mother’s death. She seems to miss him very much while she describes how he was well treated here by all the people. He was content with the recognition of his being and making friends with doctors, members of orchestra, the audience of the concert whereas he spent 25 years in the orchestra in the same city without making any friends among the audience. She cites him, saying “this is a wonderful community for older people and a wonderful place to grow old.”
After talking more regarding her involvement in the community through various volunteer works, Mary concludes proudly:

It's really hard to say how a community affects how you are, but it gives me a lot of satisfaction because I can look this community around and say 'I was involved in getting this started, I was involved in getting that started' and because this is a new community and there weren't a lot of institutions, I was able to be in on the ground floor and that gives me . . . but I get a lot of satisfaction out of seeing there's a lot of different organizations I've had a lot of input into and feel that I've helped them. So I think it makes me feel more positive not only that I contributed but that I was able to get something off the ground and started and up and running which you would not have the feeling in New York city. I think I'm a lot healthier because I can get outdoors and exercise more, and I think my life would have been really different if I hadn't come here, but I would have become much more of an ivory towered intellectual than I have become in Fairbanks because there are so many opportunities to develop other aspects of my life, like ice sculpture. This community really allows you to develop yourself and find yourself based on who you are, what you can do, not on where you came from and who your parents were or how much money they had.

4.4 Jane's Narrative

Jane is in her early 50s, with three children, who are 21, 19, and 16 years old. She has been happily married for 23 years with her first husband, and has lived in Fairbanks for ten years. She is working in a social science field. She is originally from midwest
Indiana. Just before coming up here, they lived in Idaho. She is very cheerful, always smiling while she is conversing with people; she is nodding, listening carefully with a full attention, which shows her attitude and skill as a supporter. During the entire interview, we were constantly laughing loudly with a pleasure and joy. I savored every moment of the interview with her, appreciating how it can be pleasant and joyous to have a conversation with someone who is attentive and mutually interested in a topic.

Jane begins with the story of how she came up to Fairbanks. It was her husband’s job situation that motivated them to think about Fairbanks. Her husband’s research funding had run out and he could only find funds at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Thus, she also applied for a job here and came up here for her job interview. Though she and her husband were offered jobs, at the last minute, her husband’s grant was refunded by the institute where he was working. So, they decided to stay there. But visiting Fairbanks impressed Jane very much, she was smiling brightly when she exclaims “I just loved it, I had a wonderful time. And the air was just beautiful!” Then, three years later, her husband’s grant ran out again. When she heard the position was reopened, she applied again. Though she had other job offers in other places, she chose here because she likes “the work culture here” and “people here she is working with.” She adds that “I thought that it was just absolutely beautiful” and “it’s different than any place I have ever been.” She describes that decision as a “pretty dramatic change.” But she adds, “I did not think it through; bringing all the kids up here.”
Jane’s story has a lot to do with her children and her job during the entire conversation. Both aspects she refers to very often. She thinks Alaska is different in terms of her work. She states that:

Alaska is so unique because there is no other job close, so if you are in this field in this area and if I was really unhappy with my work, I will almost have to leave Alaska, whereas if you live in some place else, you wouldn’t have to do that because of metropolitan area. So that’s a little different.

Jane gives me a more detailed explanation why she decided to take the job regarding her children. She thinks the department was small, and had a “much more relaxed atmosphere than other places” that she visited. She continues how her three school age children affect her selection. She did not want to work for a university that had a very high demand for publication to get tenure. So she thinks that such an “atmosphere that does not maintain these real high bars, were an attractive consideration” for her.

Besides that, Jane is very satisfied with the fact that “Fairbanks is a very family oriented community so it is a very good place to make a family.” She asserts that she chose this place for her children’s’ “balanced life” instead of looking for her own “fancy career.” She explains why this place is a family oriented place: isolation and her association with academic community. She expresses her content and pride while she is explaining how good the school programs we have. Such as “wonderful sports programs, outstanding music programs, and a Nordic ski club.” She is excited in saying “a lot of people who are very motivated to make sure that there are things going on so their kids
still get a lot of opportunities.” She also appreciates that the schools are great, which offer programs which welcome families.” She summarizes saying “I think, because of isolation and because of a lot of academics that want their kids to have a lot of opportunities that they work together here,” which makes her feel good “having kids here keeps you always busy with stuff to do” even in the winter.

Our discussion naturally developed around her children. It is noticeable whenever she mentions her children that her voice is filled with affective emotion, which adds a sweeter tone to her already cheerful voice. When I asked her how this environment has affected her children. She responds that “That’s a good question to ask me because I am dealing with that right now.” She begins with her son who has just graduated from one of the competitive universities in the lower 48. First, she mentions that “many friends of his already dropped out of school and have come back and started to go to UAF.” She cites her son’s expression:

He is talking about it, and he says because people in Alaska are different, they have priority, more low key and relaxed. . . . Everybody he knows from the top ten percent of high school graduation, he says are very not only goal directed, they are very consumer oriented. They talk about clothes, fashion, and buying big cars. Jane continues this topic and adds her feeling and opinion. She sounds serious, proud, and relieved when she says:

And that’s really foreign to them because in Alaska, we are very functional and I realized that. It would be ridiculous to be out in the snow with a fancy car, Jaguar doesn’t mean a thing here. And I think that’s a real surprise to him. He shopped in
the discount stores, Value Village, with his friends. So there is a difference, there is a difference there . . . not this goal oriented, get ahead, make a lot of money, he didn’t ever pick that up.

Jane realizes that her children may not be quite competing “to get ahead to make a lot of money,” but their experiences “living out there,” in which “the emphasis is on consumerism and money gives you a status,” makes them really “value the outdoors and the natural environment,” even if she doesn’t try emphasizing that value, “they may have picked that up. They take it for granted while they were here because they’ve just grown up with this.”

Jane’s face gets more brightened when she begins talking about her daughter. Her daughter is “the same way.” She was accepted into one of the good private schools in the Los Angeles area. Her daughter was there three days and said “Get me out of here.” She couldn’t stand “smog; she couldn’t stand kids where everybody was so dressed up like a celebrity.” At this point, Jane inserts her comment “And you don’t have that here; you don’t have those kind of classes.” Then her daughter transferred to Southern Oregon, which is a “very small campus with the same numbers of students as here, hiking environment.” Jane finishes her talking with a big smile when she says “And my daughter loves it, she is very happy there now.”

Once again, Jane seems savoring the memory of the conversation with her son about people in Alaska as very “functional,” whereas the consumer-oriented attitude is “foreign.” She adds her observation of her son, “when he was here, taking for granted we
have trails, mountains, the sledding party” and now there “he sees such a huge urban center and can’t even really hike to get out.”

Then Jane moves back to her daughter again. During our interview, her focus swings like a pendulum among her children. Her son reminds her of a similar episode of her daughter’s. This time, the topic of attitude among the people in Fairbanks, leads to her daughter’s attitude regarding the diversity. Jane tells me how she was surprised and proud when saw one of her daughter’s pictures in the new campus. When Jane saw her daughter’s picture with all different ethnic friends, she asked if her daughter’s college is diverse. She replied ‘no, not really.” Thus, Jane is certain that her daughter “is a kind of kid that would be so comfortable and accepting that her friends come from wide range of backgrounds and I think she got that from here.” Jane attributes that the attitude came from her daughter attending “Lathrop high school where she had more diverse friends.”

Jane surprises and amuses me when she shares information with me. In fact, recently she just had a person come up from Eastern Washington University, who was recruiting and she gets to pick what school she goes to recruit. Thanks to her colleague’s comments, this recruiter comes here because “it is one of the most diverse programs. Jane’s talking got amazingly fast as she says that “they like to have students from other areas because it enriches educational backgrounds. And our community is so diverse.”

Regarding the diversity issue in the Fairbanks community, Jane points out the existence of “some circles and pockets interaction.” She postulates that she lives in Farmers Loop and her living area is mainly within five or seven miles. She considers Fort Wainwright as another separate world, very distinct and has its own community
which is tight and different from her community. Still, she interacts with military community through her students who come to learn from her. Besides this, she lists a few other factors affecting our community as accepting, tolerating, and diverse: ideal size that increases frequent interaction among people, a lot of people from amazingly different backgrounds, no cliques, university and military’s promoting role of diversity thanks to their racial and ethnically diverse composition. Most of all, she says she appreciates that our community doesn’t have established cliques and clubs, which shun newcomers. Most importantly, she indicates that the majority of the people here come from outside without bringing their family and relatives, they are looking for new relationships. In that sense, we have similarity. She describes this:

People come and go in Fairbanks. New people come in. And that’s the academic piece maybe, too. But the community here is a little bit different. It’s not a people to be here forever, not families, and there are some but not my groups I hang with. My families are not here. So not relatives and cousins, and grandparents. It’s like you make your own. Well, there is something I like about this. This is a community of people who are similar to you in that way because people here mind being close to their family. There are people here who stick around the other people who come and go. And they are all comfortable.

Jane teaches me how diverse co-communities exist in Fairbanks based on life style or political preference, and value system: Ester is incredibly liberal. It is called the Republic of Ester. Two Rivers is where a lot of libertarian, independent, dog mushers and farmers live. And North Pole is close to military bases, and is known for being much
more conservative and religious. Wood River, Chena Ridge, and Farmer’s Loop are mainly where university related people live. Downtown is where the business area is mixed with a low income people. She regards the existence of the Downtown part of Fairbanks as one of co-communities “where we have food shelters, women’s shelters, and those little restaurants. It’s still nice to go down there. And then there is some tourist stuff there.”

Jane thinks Fairbanks is a very ideal sized town. She doesn’t like big cities because her children don’t like them. She doesn’t like Anchorage at all, though she admits that people there seem nice. She doesn’t think that she bumps into the people she knows like she does in Fairbanks. She enjoys bumping into people who are familiar to her in the airport, at the shops, which gives her satisfaction and trust based on the more frequent interaction and the feeling of networks. She reveals that her home town has only twelve hundred people, and is very homogeneous. People are nice to each other there, but not to outsiders or newcomers. She asserts that some “in and out flow is important to keep the community vibrant and tolerant.” Then she articulates that “we have military and university, both have those characteristics.”

She is sure her identity is not much changed since she was anxious to get out of and left her hometown. She has lived in many different places because of her career as Vista volunteer and similar jobs. In most cases, she intentionally selects the place in which she lives in on the basis of size and natural environment. Thus, Fairbanks is not particularly different in that sense. On the contrary, she says that her husband was reluctant to move to Fairbanks because he had lived all his life in his Midwest hometown.
However, once he lived here, he completely attached here and he doesn’t want to leave here at all. When asked what she guesses the reason of her husband’s fondness of this place, she replies confidently that his temperament is fitting with this place.

A few times, she expresses her uncertainty of satisfaction in living here at the moment. She shows her excitement when she travels to “the outer world,” lower 48, for a “reality check” regarding her career after she is free from child raising, which gives her more time to think about her career. Despite her ambivalent feelings, she states Fairbanks is a place hard to leave and she feels at home here most of the time. At the end of our conversation, Jane talks about her pride at being an Alaskan:

I love to talk about Alaska when I go to Lower 48. You know, you get to bragging about it. The fact is not a big deal, you put your kids on the school bus it’s fifty below and it’s cool. And they don’t cancel. Kids’ go outside at twenty below, and they don’t cancel the kids’ orchestra till thirty below. People don’t think anything ever ---been doing that. There’s a certain type of person that will do that. We have pride in that. . . . And there is a huge difference. People in Fairbanks, we feel like, we are real Alaskans. We are the ones who have the cold and snow. What’s the point of Anchorage, there is not even snow, and you got all those crowds in the big city anywhere. People who live here think that we are the real Alaskans.

When she finishes her last sentence, I could not help myself repeating that yes, we are the real Alaskans, and we laughed loudly and heartfully for a while. At that beautiful moment she seems like my elder sister whom I always wished to have since my childhood.
4.5 Bob’s Narrative

Bob is in his mid 20s, and has lived in Fairbanks for three years. He is originally from Southern California. He is in the graduate program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He is very polite, sensitive, gentle and sociable person. I have known him through my living in the dormitory a few years ago.

When asked what brought him here, Bob explains his application to several different universities in Alaska in order to “come and live here” for a while instead of “visiting as a tourist.” He describes his sudden development of interest about Alaska in the last couple of years in his undergraduate study. He states that “I only knew the basics of what Alaska was, but I was very attracted to the cold weather, the difference, the environment, and the natural wonders of the state, the lifestyle.” He wanted to experience:

Being around people who do and hear about subsistence lifestyle and what it means to live like that even if I don’t do it the entire time. I have lived in cabins, but I was attracted to the lifestyle even if it wasn’t just for me, particularly. I wanted to be surrounded by that.

Then, he elaborates with calm but assuring voice that:

California is very hot and I had gone to school at the University of Texas, in the middle of the desert, where it’s very hot, so I was ready for a change. At the same time, I wanted to go live somewhere else. I could’ve to live anywhere else in the states, but I had this idea about what Alaska would be like. I knew that Alaska wouldn’t be like the rest of the states. It was almost like living abroad. It’s really
like a different country. That was a big factor.

Bob reiterates several times the difference of coming to visit and coming to live from the beginning and throughout our entire conversation. He gives me an example how different visiting is from living, saying that:

Living in Southern California, to come and visit you get to go to the beach, the amusement park, shopping, but to actually live there is very different. In your daily life you don’t get to all of these things, and even when you get to do them it is only once a year or so. You don’t always have time. I didn’t want to come to Alaska and be a tourist. I wanted to know what it would be like to actually stay here, live here, and know that I was going to stay here year after year, and that I didn’t get a choice to go in summer when it was beautiful, or in winter to experience the cold. It wasn’t so much that I wanted to have a temporary experience. I wanted something more permanent. I wanted to see it from the inside and not just see the surface.

Bob provides more examples to support how experiences can be different as a visitor than form being a resident. He uses the example of darkness and coldness. He compares the visitor’s putting up with a few days of extreme daylight exposure, darkness, and coldness with the residents’ year long “first-hand” experience. Further, he pursues the difference between knowledge from books, media, and visitors, and from real living experience:

I had seen documentaries, read books and magazine articles, and they all talked about what Alaska was like, but nothing comes close to the experience. Basic knowledge: what the seasons are like, about the people, the fact that it’s not very
populated, that most people live in only once city, that you have to fly everywhere. These things are almost common knowledge, but I felt that even that information didn’t give me a realistic sense of what it was to live here and to a certain extent that made it more attractive. Even though I read all these accounts of Alaska, I felt that nobody could describe the experience.

When asked about his first hand experience of weather and place, he mentions a “reality check” that defies one’s expectations. He emphasizes the difference, saying “it’s one thing to know it and another to experience it” once again. His description of the physically “radical change through his first winter” here defied the concept that he had before coming here and made him “redefine the concepts of coldness, darkness, and daylight” in Alaska. He points out the physical reaction to the climate to Alaska. He shares his feeling:

The idea of winter, for me, wasn’t just cold and dark, but cold and dark and that your body would go through this change that it’s almost like you have to fight it to be able to function. The same thing in summer. They say it will be bright. That means you won’t get a lot of sleep and your body will have this amount of energy that will be the complete opposite from winter. My expectations were redefined once I got here.

He offers his perspectives regarding land and the environment, too. His expectations regarding the beauty of the nature were “surpassed above and beyond, ten times more beautiful” than he thought it would be. He tells me the difference between “seeing a beautiful picture in front of you” and being in the picture, where “suddenly
everything turns green in a matter of two or three weeks in spring.” That is “amazing” to him and “there’s this idea of time that a picture cannot capture and only experience can.” He also was shocked by limited access and how “difficult and expensive it is to get to a lot of places” to see them, besides time consuming preparation. Bob confesses that “it’s very different in Fairbanks and there’s a great awareness of and respect for the environment.” Bob looks serious when he asserts that “we cannot just adjust nature so it works for us. We have to do that.” His face looks calm again while he articulates slowly and clearly, “it’s almost like you are more aware of what’s out there. You’re actually more sensitive to nature.”

Bob admits his “very limited awareness of nature” while he was in California. He didn’t know “the difference between 30 below and 20 below; what it meant to go hiking and camping.” However, his awareness “increased and became augmented once he got here to Alaska.” Though he is always physically active and did hiking and camping in California, he didn’t do much and didn’t enjoy it that much. One of the reasons is the “lack of accessibility.” He compares working indoors and outdoors, feeling “constricted” versus feeling a “sense of fulfillment and more enjoyment,” in other words “feeling better physically and emotionally.”

Bob’s discussion related to space led him to a living space. He talks about his living experience in terms of space, comparing living in the dormitory on campus and living in the little cabin off campus. In particular, his experience of living in a cabin for one summer increased his awareness of the space concept and a person’s living in the same space with the others. He seems pondering while he shares his insight:
But I like the Fairbanks community. It amazes me that you find all these radically
different groups of people living together in this same small space. And we find
ways to get along. And it has to be, because we just have to put up with one
another, and the weather, and the cold. We all know how harsh it is. There is that
sense of support, mutual support, no matter how different you are. I would say
it’s a very atypical small town. Just judging by the size of the population, you’d
think there’s this small-town mentality, but there isn’t. You actually find all kinds
of people here.

When I asked him to define small town mentality, his answer was “meaning, being
narrow-minded, or not being open to other ideas, or being very fundamental about
beliefs.” As soon as he finished these sentences, he was in a hurry to add another
sentence, he talks rapidly, “and you get that in Fairbanks, but you also get the complete
opposite.” After admitting there are “definitely some people” who have a small town
mentality, he adds “but I would say that because of the size you might expect Fairbanks
to have it, but in fact it doesn’t because you get all kinds of people.”

Then, Bob develops his discussion into the direction of how much Fairbanksans are
diverse. Because of the small size of Fairbanks, about 40,000 people, “you might expect
everyone to have similar opinions and similar beliefs. But as a matter of fact, Fairbanks
defies that. There are a variety of people I’ve met that come from all different walks of
life and very different systems of beliefs.” Then he asserts that the size and the proximity
affect the people here to “rely on each other” based on “this shared awareness of place
and nature, of what it’s like to live in Alaska.” He further states that this “shared
awareness of who we are” help us to create our community “easier” and “safer” than everywhere else.

Regarding the feeling of safety, Bob shares his experiences. He and other people here leave their cars running at the supermarket, and then they go in, and they come back and “the car’s still there.” He compares this aspect to the bigger cities where muggings and stabbings occur everyday, which make the people who live there take it for granted. At this point, I was so tempted to share my feeling how I feel comfortable and don’t feel any danger whenever I walk back home at two or three o’clock in the middle of night.

I coax Bob to teach me more by asking, “I heard that in Finland, it’s just as cold as here, but their community is different from ours.” Stimulated by my curiosity, he begins to analyze why we create this type of community. He asserts that people come here by “oneself or with only immediate family,” thus people look for “that sense of community.” He points out “the necessity to create community because we come here by ourselves,” whereas the people in Finland “already have an established community that they operate on.”

Bob pursues the issue of choice in terms of “coming up here.” He contrasts the military people and their families who come here because of “obligation,” rather than by “choosing to come up here” like he and I. He sounds sympathetic when he mentions that some military wives come along with their husbands and do “not necessarily choose to come and they still have to function.” He focus on their “predetermined time” to stay here no matter whether they like it or not, regarding both “coming and leaving” by order
of authority. On the other hand, "we can always get tired and go somewhere else." He states that military people bring "a different perspective and more variety."

Bob went to back his experience of living in a cabin for one summer, which affects his perception of time, space, weather, and nature. He did not have a car, so he had to walk four miles one-way to reach his cabin. He had to be careful in his shopping to carry items with him. He didn’t have running water like most of cabins here. That affects his daily life regarding "personal hygiene" such as shower, toilet, and laundry. It was "a very humbling experience" for him. That experience makes him rethink about a frontier living. He says "I would not be able to be a frontiersperson."

Bob is not sure if he is as prepared as he could be and did not learn what to do in an emergency situation. He believes that it would take "a strong mentality, great resilience and strong will" before he could be a cabin dweller permanently, rather than for one summer as he did. When I joke that "you have tasted a little bit of frontier lifestyle," he responds that "it was more like cabin dwelling as opposed to frontier." He further elaborates his concept of frontier lifestyle regarding "finding your own food in the middle of nowhere, preserving the meat or fish for the rest of the year, and managing sled dogs." His conversations with his students, who depend on subsistence lifestyle, offer him a different understanding than he obtained from reading books. He appreciates the opportunity to ask them "the specific questions" he wants to know about, getting the sense of "one-on-one," that is quite different from getting "a filtered version of what it is through reading Alaskan literature."
Once again, Bob compares the difference of being able to get whatever and whenever he wanted in the supermarket in California, and the difference of hunting and fishing for food and preserving them in order to have that when people need. He talks a little slowly as he mentions that he "needs to prepare and learn to be able to do it."

His opinion about how the people in the Fairbanks community experience frontier spirit is based on the distance to the town. He thinks that "somebody who lives 100 miles north of Fairbanks, and who rarely sees lots of people, they have the extreme" compared to someone who lives in Fairbanks, having running water and electricity and cars. However, still people in town share this, to some extent because they still have to put up with that, plug their cars, walk through snow, 40-below weather, darkness and sunlight." He pronounces clearly, "we have that shared basics."

Bob's notion of these shared basics and experiences in this place, for example is that, "we all know what is like to live in 40-below, to have to drive in ice and through slush, the importance of gearing up for winter." These distinguish our perspectives from "the other parts of the United States," where [these experiences] "might be taken from granted." He uses the term "relatedness" that is cultivated from this shared background, which makes different "what it means to live in Fairbanks." He is eager to express his understanding to me, he elaborates further:

To live in Fairbanks is something different from what it means to live in Columbus, Ohio. There might not be a definition, but there is a definition of what it means to live in Fairbanks. There is a very clear mode of what it's like to live in Fairbanks. It's like what it's like to live in New York. New Yorkers know what it's
like to live in New York. The same thing is true of what is like to live in
Fairbanks. It may not necessarily be true for other parts. It might be more difficult
to define. But Everyone in Fairbanks knows what it's like to live in Fairbanks. It's
difficult to explain it to others. But we know that there is a feeling, certain
uniqueness to living in Fairbanks.

Even before he finishes his last sentence, I hear myself saying "that only people here
know," which was followed "only we know" with his smiling and nodding. For a while,
we were involved with this issue of the difficulty of explaining to outsiders. However,
we returned to the starting point, how it is easy to share this with other Fairbanskans.
Even when we met in the lower 48, just by saying "I am from Fairbanks," which let us
"immediately know that they know what's like to live in 40-below weather." He
approaches this issue again quite differently this time when he says:

When you get out of Fairbanks, you see the difference. Not just Fairbanks, but
when you get out of Alaska. Maybe being in Fairbanks you are not too aware of it,
because you are dealing with it on a day-to-day basis, but once you get out and go
somewhere else, suddenly you realize that it's easy to get out of town, that all of
these things are widely available. And it changes your perspective. For instance,
here if you want to buy something you have Fred Meyer's and Safeway, and Wal-
Mart. Somewhere else, there's all of a sudden an availability of things.

Bob articulates that his idea of community got changed. He looks serious again
while he says, "I don't know that I necessarily had that before I came here, or I just
wasn't aware of it." When asked his definition of sense of community, he answers
“people living together and how they interact and carry themselves on a daily basis.” He acknowledges that other people may define it differently than he does; however, he emphasizes that we have a “catalogue of shared experiences,” thus regardless of how people define community, we all have the same “basis such as no matter where people live, it’s tough to get out of Fairbanks, which is far from everywhere. Another example of commonality is drawn from how “we all know what it’s like to not be able to get out of your house at 40-below.” He asserts that basis, that commonality, is “at the very core of what it means to live in the Fairbanks community. No matter what you add or take away from it, the core remains intact. That’s how we relate to each other.”

Bob expresses his ambivalent feeling of appreciation of being far away from the rest of the world and his angst of how hard it can be to get out of here. Especially, he attributes limited flights and high expense to cause him to feel isolated from his family and friends.

At the end of our conversation, he shares his awareness of identity change. The experience of living in Alaska made him “aware, more aware,” of what he wants and what he doesn’t want; his talking thrilled me and gave me goose bumps:

For instance, I know I don’t want to live in a big city; that if a job offer came up in LA, I wouldn’t take it because now that I’ve been here, I don’t want to go back to that. There’s a sense of comfort in Alaska, for me that I didn’t always get anywhere else. It changes my view. It makes me appreciate things a lot more in terms of my identity: friendships, people, transportation, and availability of products, food. It’s not like everywhere. You have to do with what’s out there. It
teaches you to adjust your life and inevitably it shapes your identity. I couldn’t go back to live in hot weather. I knew I hated it, but I didn’t know how much I would like cold weather. Suddenly I had this very strong liking for cold weather. That changes my identity, too, because it limits the places where I am willing to live. I don’t like traffic. I can’t live in a big city. So all of these things change and shape your identity regardless.

Bob assures me that he is going to explore the other parts of Alaska as much as possible.

4.6 Robin’s Narrative

Robin introduces herself as the 4th generation of European-Americans from Germany, Ireland, Norway, and Switzerland. However, she clarifies that she and her parents would identify themselves as Alaskans before identifying as Americans. She is in her mid 20s, a single mother, and a senior student who majors in a social science. She always looks confident and balanced, with a sweet, gentle flavor, with her brightness and critical way of thinking. Her intelligence in academic areas, and maturity in human relationships, far exceeds others in her age group.

Robin and I met on Saturday morning, which was the time period that her parents could take care of her son, Eddie, during our interview. I enjoyed listening to her story so much that sometimes I felt as if I were in the middle of somebody’s reciting one of my favorite novels or poems. She is very articulate and poetic when she expresses her ideas, feelings, and interactions with others. Very often we laughed together and sighed together through the entire interview. In particular, her description of standing in the garden for the last harvest made my eyes filled with tears. My heart resounded with her
Robin's moving up here is a little different compared to other co-researchers I interviewed because she came to Fairbanks when she was only seven years old. She begins her story with her parents staying in Fairbanks in the 1970s. Robin's parents worked in Fairbanks while the pipeline was coming through. However, around 1976 when they decided to start a family, "they judged that the atmosphere in Fairbanks, they didn't think was conducive to raising a family." So they returned to Minnesota where she and her brother were both born. Because of the bad economic situation there, her father had had a lot of hardship to get a job. Robin's father had to change jobs many times such as working in a potato farm and fishing resort. She cites her father's story: "The year we moved back, my dad was working at a potato farm, and after the harvest, the boss said, 'Hey, Karl, you know, you have been great, thank you so much, but I can't pay you this year.'" Then her little brother, Robin and her mother had to move in with her grandparents. Her father worked for six months on the North Slope, in Prudhoe, before getting a job at a dairy in Fairbanks, that allowed him to bring the family up to live in here. So they moved to Fairbanks in 1985 when she was seven and her brother was five years old.

Robin expresses her ambivalent feeling at that time: she was excited that her father had "a real job" – one with a paycheck the family could count on - on the other hand she was afraid of leaving her grandparents, cousins, and friends. She remembers that feeling
vividly. She said that moving up was “just an adventure” for her little brother whereas she and her mother felt that it was “difficult and scary” thing to do. Most of all, she was influenced by her mother who tried to hide her reluctance to leave her own parents and “trying to be positive,” but “crying at night.” To make the matters worse, her family couldn’t afford many long distance telephone calls at that time. Robin remembers her mother recording herself talking on the cassette tape and mailing it to her own parents, sisters, and brother.

Though her father tried to make the moving an exciting thing for the family, it was not so easy in the beginning. For her, “it was exciting to be with daddy again because we hadn’t seen him for a half year.” However, their first apartment, staying on Badger road, made her think “this is not a city, this is what…?, what are we doing here? Dad really has a job though, so I guess it’s good.” She thought that her neighbors were mean. Particularly, a guy down the road who had dogs was scary. So her first impression of a dog team, and a dog yard, was “horrible and negative.” As a whole her first initial impressions were pretty negative until her family moved to a house on Farmers Loop after three months, which was closer to town. She smiles happily remembering “That was pretty cool.”

The next door neighbors were “extremely eccentric people,” though their daughter has proved to be Robin’s best friend, and the mother of the family became Robin’s mom’s best friend. Her face gets brightened and seems relieved when she says “so it worked out good,” to the degree that “all kids acted like we were brothers and sisters.”
Robin gets more vibrant when she describes the new house, living next to this specific neighbor. She describes how this family “fit into the stereotypes that she had, these crazy Alaskans,” especially the husband, Frank. Her stereotypes of Alaskans are the people who “do whatever they want to.” She illustrates this impression when she relates that “they were up all night long because the light is out in the summer” and she would wake up “at three thirty in the morning to Frank mowing, and his radio playing.” She evaluates that experience as “more positive, but definitely a new thing.” She enjoyed “never stopping playing until one o’clock in the morning” to go to bed. She adds “That was interesting.”

Robin’s examples of “crazy Alaskans” are backed up by another story. She exclaims that these next door neighbors were “bizarre” and “weird” when she found out that they were a divorced man and a divorced woman who had married each other, bringing with them two kids of their own. Further, they didn’t care for or discipline each other’s kids at all, but were only in charge of their own. Robin thought it didn’t really fit her ideal of family, and had never been exposed to a mixed family before – this backed up her stereotypes about them being weird, but true, Alaskans.

Robin’s voice is filled with amusement and nostalgia while she describes how she developed the “extended kinship” through living very closely with this family. Their houses were only a thousand feet from each other, so they just ran back and forth all the time. She stresses the sentence “It was really cool.” She and her friend grew up “like sisters” and Robin’s mom and her friend’s mom worked together during the summer, growing plants together. She describes this “first experience,” which she now realizes,
she says, was an example of chosen-family, but at the time she was just excited being so close to her neighbors. She compares her previous living in the fishing resort where “the only other kids who lived in the resort were my cousins.” She ponders with a lot of emotion as she says “now when I think about it, this idea of chosen family is so much, it’s more real to me than it is to my mom because that’s what I grew up with.”

Robin probes this topic further, relating to her son. She emphasizes the relationships with this family [the neighbors mentioned previously] once again, describing them as “the friends that we have, forever.” She sounds very confident when she states that her brother thinks of Dianna, Robin’s friend, like another sister and Dianna thinks David is just like another little brother. She seems pleased while remembering how her son calls Dianna’s mom, Grandma Nancy. She confesses her conflicting feeling because it hard for her to watch that her son knows “his pretend aunts and uncles much better than he knows his real aunts and uncles down in Minnesota.” She admits that she feels sad about that. However, her voice gets resilient as soon as she begins the new sentence “but at the same time, that makes a lot of sense. It’s very pragmatic. It’s very useful that he would feel connected to the people who are right here.” She ends up by saying “In fact, I am really thankful for the family [including those people, definitely] we have here.”

Robin begins to talk about her son, Eddie. She seems so content and proud whenever she mentions him during the entire of our conversation. I also notice that she has a tendency of relating a lot of issues and topics she thinks of back to Eddie. She is thankful for the fact she can raise her son in this environment, which has “so many
opportunities and diversity” unlike other cities this size in the lower 48. She elaborates her concept of opportunities as being the chance of “meeting different kinds of people and knowing different people, and just all the different experiences he can have.” She illustrates this by telling me an episode that she has had with her younger cousins’ visiting her last summer.

Robin’s conversation with her cousins reminds her how we are not in the main stream in terms of the dominant American culture. “I had the opportunity last summer” she says “to talk with some younger cousins about high school.” Her cousins’ high school does not have African–American students; there are no Asian-American people in their town. She shows her surprises when she realized that her cousins “can’t imagine people from two different ethnicities or races are getting married.” That her cousins are so narrow-minded was “scary and shocking” enough for her already. So, when the cousins said, “that’s just so sick, it’s gross” regarding the intermarriages and gay people, she got upset enough to say to them “Don’t you speak like that in my house.” This experience makes her value “so much acceptance, in general in Fairbanks.” She articulates that she wishes her son to grow up with this way; that he should be married “because he loves somebody,” and not because they are “the right color” or they are the “right religion.” Robin believes that raising Eddie in a community that also emphasizes tolerance and the importance of diversity is an incredible asset for her son. To live in this community is backing up her own lessons for her son.

For a while, Robin describes how many opportunities her son has in this town. Her voice is cheerful while she indulges in talking “we have opera, theater, and painting. He
can do anything he wants to. And yet we have still this small town feeling about it. It’s still safe to go and visit with the cashier at the gas station when you get in.” Her eyes sparkle when she ends up with “Just a wonderful town. It’s just really nice.”

However, Robin’s face gets cloudy for a second when she begins talking about her concerns regarding changes in the town: “it’s getting too big.” Robin’s frowning when she describes how much Fairbanks has changed. First, she points out recent the changes of buildings. She compares the old, small, “more personalized” buildings, which have been owned by “small business people” that got demolished, and the ugly, corporate ones being built in their stead. She tells me how she felt it was huge and exciting when she saw the first Fred Meyer opened when she was yet a child. Now, she thinks here and there, the town is filled with big buildings and shopping centers such as Home Depot, Lowe’s, and Wal-mart, which makes her feel like she could be “anywhere in the lower 48, doesn’t even look like Fairbanks.” She deplores that these changes “rob the people who live here of some of their uniqueness, and some of the community,” because it makes our community look like “any resort town anywhere.” She laments “it’s sad.” In particular, whenever she sees the old buildings being ripped down that her grandfather, father, and uncle have told her stories about, the people who owned the shops, their friends or the people whom they knew, it makes “her wonder if she wants to stay here.”

In a similar vein, Robin laments she that doesn’t know her neighbor any more. She misses the time when she moved into their present house from Farmer’s Loop, she “got to know all of the neighbors, she knew when everybody was having babies, and when everybody was getting married.” She misses the time that “neighbors pop over and have
a barbecue.” She reports that it is only in the last five years that four of the families who were close to her have moved, and everybody’s houses having changed further down the road as people retired and moved out. She sighs as she talks in a low voice “I don’t know these people any more.” She admits that she doesn’t know the people who live one block away, sighing again “I don’t know anything about who these people are.” Now she “never allows her son to play outside alone” like people used to do. She is also concerned about the increasing violence, alcohol, and drug problem in the community. She repeats from time to time during our conversation, “I don’t know my neighbors like I used to.”

Though Robin acknowledges that tourists and the military bring money and job opportunities, she expresses her unwelcome feeling toward them. She thinks it’s not as nice of a community as it was when she first moved up here “when people moved up here because they chose to, whatever the reason, whereas now more are driven by the military base, by tourist industries.” She expresses her conflicting feelings toward tourism and its affect to our community:

Most people I knew, your first job was working at one of the hotels. My first job was cleaning rooms, that’s what I did for the summer when I was in high school. I really value that seasonal work is great for young people. But at the same time, it’s really frustrating because I guess, I just don’t like the idea that we are like catering, we are building our community to cater to other people who don’t live here. I think that a lot of the times, that’s the disservice for those who do live here. The community is spending funds and using resources to bring people up for this
three month window, rather than trying to enrich the community for the people
who are here for twelve months. I am really frustrated with that. It seems like that
everything’s been more about like the surface beautification and making things
more convenient but it’s not really about enriching our community.

Robin gives another example of tourism’s affect on the people who live in
downtown where fancy expensive restaurants have opened recently for tourists, but
which most people in this community can’t afford, at least not the people who live in
downtown. She laments that “the hills around the town have been really built up; there
are million dollar homes now.” She is frustrated by “a lot more outward show and
display of wealth,” than used to be. She criticizes the tendency that “we are more
materialistic.” She is worried about this expanding economic gap “separates people” in
this community, which frustrates her by the fact that “Fairbanks is not unique as it used to
be and we don’t depend on each other like we used to.”

She is also agitated by tourists and the military’s affect on the community “because
people are more transient.” She probes this issue further by sharing her observations of
her high school friends “who dated GIs and got pregnant, had abortions, or dropped out
of school and they got married.” As a result, she has had “a very negative opinion”
because of the arrogance, “we are gonna hunt on your land, we are not gonna pay any
property taxes, we are not gonna help pay for any other schools, we are gonna date all the
young girls and we are gonna leave.” She admits that she has a” really low opinion”
about them.
Though she voices a lot of negative feelings and concern regarding the military, in the later part of our conversation, she changes her tone. She says the military is “a necessary evil” whereas the “university is the core” of our community. She acknowledges the military adding to our community in terms of “providing people, providing a market.” She iterates that her opinion of the military is not as low as it used to be. When she found out someone was military at an earlier time, she wouldn’t even talk to them. Once again she confesses her change through having friends on campus who are military wives and getting to know them has helped her understand “a little bit better.” She asserts that “it’s no longer as powerful a bias as it used to be,” though she still resents the fact that “they are not paying property taxes; they are taking a Permanent Fund Dividend Check; they are not really paying anything but taking advantage of our community.” In a word, she doesn’t like that the military does not “give back like the university does to our community.” She concludes that now, she distinguishes between the fact that she just “hates the military organization and the politics,” and “not necessarily the people.”

When asked about her experience in the lower 48, she mentions her yearly visit when she was younger. She informs me that she visits only every couple of years now, since she has a son. She also acknowledges that her perception is much affected by media, partly because of her limited and short visits. After describing her own visiting experience and the knowledge from media, she suddenly insists that “I still rather like Fairbanks because it’s still better than the alternative, it is still friendlier, and such a
concentration of difference here that I don’t see in other places.” She stresses again: “I still love it here, it’s not as great as used to be, but I love it here.”

After this turning point, Robin completely returns to her main theme of how wonderful the Fairbanks community is from various angles: great job opportunities, a lot of winter activities, various arts activities and events, the fair, optimum gardening conditions in the summer, an opportunity for creating whatever people want, a lot less discrimination than might be found in another place, acceptance of the gay community, and biracial couples, and various ethnic cultures. Her list seems never ending. Finally, she connects these to her son, Eddie:

I want him to grow up where that [ethnicity] just doesn’t matter. You are not brought up to the community where all these preordained ideas about who goes with who and what goes with what. He just goes out and does. And then you will find out if you like it or not. And I want that for him. Because we are isolated, we do have to draw from within our own community. If you want to go and act in a play, you go and act in a play. If you want to go to play soccer, go, play soccer. I think he will have a lot more opportunity up here than he would have, with maybe less competition, but nobody is trying to be famous. I just want him to be able to have some experience.

Robin’s association to the community brings her to her concern as a single parent. She shares the hardship of raising a child as a single mother with her brother, who is a single father. Fortunately, Robin’s brother is a good role model “like a father figure” to Eddie. She seems to be satisfied to co-parent her son and her brother’s child with her
brother. However, she manifests her concern about her brother’s wish to move to a city in lower 48 in a couple of years. Her brother has had difficulties with darkness and coldness. So she admits her conflict between having him go, though her parents are here and she loves them, and his living here. After a pause, she states that “I’d much rather stay in Alaska because I don’t think I can make it in the lower 48.” Robin returns to the topic of her cousins, whose “attitude is just disgusting.” She reiterates that “they’re not bad people but they just have really disgusting attitudes; it’s like ‘if you are not exactly like me, there is something wrong with you’.” I could feel the resolution in her voice when she says:

I will not raise my son in the community that says it’s okay. I couldn’t live in the community that says it’s okay. That unless you are White, Lutheran, heterosexual, and married, and you like to fish and hunt, then there is something wrong with you, and we don’t like you. I can’t live there, and I won’t raise my son in that.

Robin adds that she is going to try to convince her brother to stay here. She says very firmly “I am not gonna move us to some redneck horrible town.”

When I asked her to tell me more about the difficulties with the coldness and the darkness that motivates him to move to lower 48, Robin begins with telling me “a joke about cabin fever.” She describes how people get weird by February. For example, this is the time when “we are like ‘Hey, I should look that up in the encyclopedia.’ And you can be pretty sure that soon you are reading the encyclopedia. ‘This is fascinating, look
at this.” She emphasizes again how people are “just all a little odd by middle of winter.” Then she adds the sentence “It is really hard” with a heavy tone.

Robin explains that the coldness of forty below does not let anybody outside much, “ending up being inside a lot of the winter.” As a result of that affect, many people in her family are clinically depressive and on an antidepressant. She sounds pained as she points out how it is hard when it does get so dark, “especially on the little one.” Taking care of children who can’t go outside at all, she says, sometimes, for a whole week, “drives the parents nuts because they are still crazy.”

Then Robin’s voice brightens suddenly as soon as she speaks a new sentence. She starts with “but at the same time, I don’t think we would be as appreciative for the summer and break up if winters are not so hard.” She smiles as adding “I am so thankful that winter is so hard because I think, it keeps a lot of people away.” She continues “When winters aren’t so hard, when the weather is like now [in the middle of March, beginning of the spring], to me it’s a miracle.” Her tone softens while she is indulging in talking:

When the birds come in, it stirs your soul. We go to Creamer’s Field, and watch them come in. You could feel it in your heart. It’s like ‘Oh, my god, it’s gonna be, it’s really gonna happen. There’s really gonna be leaves again, the garden will really grow.’ It’s this miracle that puts me more in touch with like an ancient side of myself. That makes me more connected to my environment. It’s this that the season is really gonna change and when this break up comes, it really is. You get crazy again but in a positive way.
Robin discusses “crazy” further. She reveals that “if we admit we are crazy, then that makes us little bit more sane than everybody who tries to hide it.” She relates the craziness to living here. She asserts “yeah, we are all crazy, that’s why we live up here. That’s why we all put up with all this nine month blackness and freezing cold because we are nuts.” She perceives “that’s a part of living up here and it’s a good thing.”

Now, Robin’s focus on weather leads her to the connection of nature. She narrates her memory of growing on the ground since she was a baby. She revels that she has “always felt connected to the seasons in that way” of growing something. She stresses she can feel “the amplification of it up here” through two-week long springs, after a month of break-up, and then suddenly it turns into summer. Likewise fall is two weeks long, which is over “with a little blink of the eyes.”

Robin expresses her appreciation of spring at the end of long, dark, cold, and harsh winter when her “soul is stirred, when the sunlight becomes warm again.” Through the feeling of warmth on her face, she appreciates spring “more than I would if it is like that all the time.” She recalls the change of seasons with sweet, soft, and dreamy voice:

The birds are the big part. When we watch the migrations come through, when they come back it’s like joyous trumpets in your heart, it is so exciting because you know you’re gonna go on. And the summer is beautiful. Things grow so fast. They have to, otherwise they would be dead. But then when they leave, birds leave. There’ve been years I cried because I knew what it meant, I knew how long and hard the winter was gonna be. Last harvest, when you clear up the garden, so hard, it’s so sad because I think there is a little part of me that deep deep inside
Robin can’t finish her sentence fully. She seems afraid of spitting out any more words from her mind. We share some silent moments. Then, she swallows her silent words, and refers to the spring again. She knows that the earth will keep turning and eventually it will get warm, “you know that, but you don’t know it yet exactly.” She explains why it’s so exciting and so spectacular when things do start to melt because there is “a little part, the very, very old part inside” that says to her ‘it’s maybe, it’s gonna be like this forever.’” She describes how her heart and soul feel amazed, happy, productive, and excited when she witnessing the hills becoming green. She declares that she does “feel really connected.”

Robin shows her satisfaction in raising her son in this environment. She shows her sympathetic feeling towards city children who she sees grow up with the biggest animals they experience are on the farm or in the zoo. She shares a recent episode when she saw a moose in the yard. She was so excited that she ran to her son and said “Eddie, Eddie, there’s a moose in the front yard.” However her three year old son replies “Oh, mom, I am busy, I am playing blocks, I will see the next one.” To her that is so wonderful and exciting experience because she felt how lucky he is compared to the city children. She lists the activities his son can enjoy here such as going ice fishing very easily, walking in the woods, even just up on the ski trails. She appreciates that nature is “so accessible here.” Most of all, she values the nature we have is “not processed” whereas “city park is all very seriously planned and laid out to look unplanned. She also appreciates the variety of trees, variety of the plant life such as taiga and tundra. She articulates that
Fairbanks is “a real fun place to live just in terms of the different plant life and animal life.”

When questioned about her involvement in the community, Robin begins talking about her previous volunteer activities at the Food Bank, Stone Soup Café, and in the church. She gets vibrant while she describes her recent relationship with *Our Village*, the name of her son’s preschool, which is based on using the resources of our communities. Robin’s mother was actually one of the founders of the preschool several years ago. When Eddie started going there this fall, Robin joined the board. She points out how this group is related to the community: That it is “just another great thing about not only the preschool but for the Fairbanks community.” She adds her opinion regarding the process of being involved in most of groups as a volunteer in Fairbanks community. She sounds cheerful as she states “if you want to be involved, you are being involved; just “Oh, you want to volunteer, that’s fabulous. You could do anything in this town if you really want to do it,” without being bothered by any screening procedure regarding experiences and qualification matter. She expresses her surprise when all of sudden she is on the board of a preschool. Her response is “Okay, well what sort of things am I supposed to do. Well, we will tell you as we go along. So I said, okay.” She describes this experience as “being so connected and so integrated with your community and with his preschool.” She perceives that connection as a “really exciting” thing.

With sparkling eyes, her conversation approaches the atmosphere in our community from another perspective. Relating to the responsibility to each other that goes back to what she mentioned before, Robin stresses “we work hard, and a lot of us
play real hard,” because life is different here by the conditions: “you pack all your daylight in the three months, and then you are left in the dark for nine months.” She emphasizes that it's not just environmental things, people’s “hearts and minds” work like that too. These factors enforce the attitude that “you definitely got to work for what you get, and you take advantage of your opportunities and you are thankful for them.”

Though she reiterates the tolerance in our community, at the same time, there are “some strong values.” For example, she says, “laziness is not acceptable.” She stresses that there is no other additional requirement as long as “you work hard, and you help out, whatever,” one can do whatever one wants. She accepts this attitude as “great,” which makes a “fabulous community.” Finally, she summarizes her point into a few words again: “be responsible for yourself and for everybody else, and do your work and then your life is pretty much up to you.”

Robin describes how this affects her as a person and her work ethics:

Since I spent my teenage years here, growing up here, being able to be a witness to so many different communities, I feel really blessed to have done that and I think it helps me to be more tolerant—not even just tolerating other people but really accepting them. Really appreciating. I think that definitely is part of who I am and my work ethic too. You got to do, you do your very best. If you do not do your best, you are not working at all. It's a huge part of who I am. And I think it's all when you come from a farm, you come up here, that's a kind of really a format for your mind.
Robin relates this attitude to *sourdough mentality*. She notes that a lot of people [old timers or sourdoughs] say to her “you have been here only fifteen years; you don’t know what’s going on.” She says that she thinks it’s silly but she also acknowledges that it implies “you just know that outsiders, like from the lower 48 don’t know: “they don’t know what cold is, they don’t know what dark is.” Related to sourdough’s attitude, Robin distinguishes it into two different aspects. One is that “you feel and that you live,” and the other is “like a bragging sourdough” coming in the bar when they have a drink: “Oh, yeah, you are a cheechako, so you ain’t seen nothing yet…” She appreciates it because “it makes it seem special to live here. You are lucky to live here and you are tough if you can make it. You are a lot tougher than most people if you can survive up here.” She values “having them around,” and even when it’s “just bragging, and joking,” it still makes her “feel proud being an Alaskan.”

Robin associates “sourdough” as a symbol of frontier spirit, to her “sourdough is like a measure of pride” as an Alaskan frontier spirit. She defines *frontier mentality* where you are helping “to carve out something new, and different.” She compares what luxury we have such as 24 hour supermarkets and frequent flights with what the old timers have been through. However, she believes it still is exciting, still different to live in a town “where in the winter, you might not be able to drive out because of there have been avalanches on the highway or something.”

Robin further delves into this topic in terms of “heritage.” She almost feels it’s “like a step back in time.” Robin also refers to the commonality the frontier experience regarding isolation: “there is no way out of here unless I’ve got two weeks to drive to the
lower 48, unless you want to jump on your canoe and head down to Yukon. You are very isolated. It is different here.”

At the end of our conversation, Robin shares her feeling toward her son once again. She confesses her view got totally changed after having her son. While she was a teenager, she was a little negative about everything; particularly negative about how there’s nothing to do in Fairbanks. She wanted “to get out in order doing something else.” Now, her son becomes “her drive, her motivation, and her goal.” And as a young mother, “it’s really important to her to make sure her son understands how many opportunities he has in Fairbanks.” She values our community more now than she did before in a lot of ways. She asserts that the way of contributing to our community is “not all necessarily big chunks of money” but just “being devoted to something, and putting your time into it.” She hopes her son will not waste the opportunities he has in this community. She concludes: “so I am more supportive of the community.”

Through the conversations with my co-researchers, I have shared the descriptions of each co-researchers’ lived experience regarding my research topic. These can be grouped under four categories. These categories are not linier sequentially included in each co-researcher’s experience. The order, focus, emphasis, and length of narrative used to tell the different contents, as well as the emphasis, is different in the capta from each co-researcher. However, all the co-researchers relate similar experiences, which allow one to create a research narrative which is inclusive of their individual experiences.

The first theme addresses what brought co-researches to Fairbanks, what their previous knowledge was about the Fairbanks community, from what sources they gained
that information, what were their expectations of community prior to moving to Fairbanks, and how they reacted to the moving itself, emotionally. The second theme includes what their living experience has been in the Fairbanks community since moving here, how they have experienced the difference from their expectations before moving to the Fairbanks community, and how they have experienced both satisfactions and hardships. The third theme reflects how my co-researchers developed attachment and commitment to Fairbanks and also developed the motivation to contribute to the Fairbanks community. The final theme reflects their community identity through their actions toward the Fairbanks community.
CHAPTER 5

Narrative Analysis

During the interviewing and the transcribing of the recorded interview, I knew that something important, valuable, and insightful was appearing through this process. Definitely, there were repeated and coherent meanings everywhere in my data. At the same time, there seemed to abound contradictory and sometimes irrelevant details. Some stories that were regarding the same type of topic or experience appeared to be leading in opposite directions. At times I had some difficulty making sense out of the data. I had to ask myself “what’s going on here?”

Partly, the confusion was attributable to my own assumption. My concept of community was grounded in the idea of sharing the same physical space and environment. My perspective about community was based on my cultural learning and experience from Korea and Japan, where physical space serves as a boundary between different communities. I did not realize this assumption at all, until I recognized that my first co-researcher’s concept of a community was based on shared interests and goals. In fact, until I finished my transcription of the interview with him, I could not understand the impact of my own assumption and how it affected my research. Thanks to his teaching, I have been able to adjust my approach to the concept of community with a more open-minded flexibility. Still, the effect of my assumption popped out once in a while when I was facilitating my co-researchers’ exploration of how they perceive and define community.
Not only the confusion caused from my assumption, but also the conflicting information created a challenge with which I had a hard time coping. Once in a while, I was tempted to discard “bits and pieces” of incoherent data by justifying them as “insignificant” information, thereby making my analysis more coherent. On the other hand, I discovered additional literature after finishing my initial literature review section which has added another conflict regarding whether to rewrite my literature review or ignore the new information. In particular, the abundant literature found in the fields of environmental psychology and social ecology regarding community put me in a dilemma of whether to stick to the limited literature I had discovered in the Communication discipline or to add these new resources to my literature review.

Even after the emergence of “the repeated voice and description” among my data, I was challenged by how to understand the data as a whole. Some of the pieces looked so disconnected and separated, yet each individual topic made perfect sense. Solving this problem happened rather suddenly after many days of anguish and vain trials in an effort to combine them by sheer willpower. One afternoon in my room, while I was reviewing the grammatical mistakes in the latest interview transcription, I was struck by the image of all the scattered themes fitting together as if I were watching the slow rewinding of scene of breaking mirrors.

My last hurdle was how to organize, in other words how to rewrite my own narrative of the findings, most effectively. The more thoroughly I understood the way the themes fit into a whole; the more I could see organizing alternatives. Different foci and different emphasis need different organization as optimum structures to unfold the story
for my audience. Another concern has been how many themes can be integrated since I have determined so many sub-themes to substantiate and enrich the main themes. The integration dilemma came to seem exactly the same to me as trying to find my way, or create a way, in a trackless Alaska wilderness. Since that illumination, I have frequently talked about my research and findings with many people; not only with my co-workers, but also with many people in mundane reality such as on the bus, with taxi drivers, and with people I met at a party. Such discussions helped me, by confirming the insight of my findings. Many people here readily say “That’s why I stay here in Fairbanks” or “that’s why I live in Alaska without returning to [the name of their hometown or State].” Even then I puzzled over how to organize my data in the final analysis; in my story.

Throughout this process, I have experienced small journeys inside the larger journey of my research as a whole. Through this experience, I have gained an insight into how each journey or each step is an ongoing exploration and adventure, full of joy, pain, more sharing, and more understanding - including for myself, my human friends, my natural friends, and my connection with the cosmos. At the end of this particular journey, I recognized four emerging main themes: Getting Away, Fascination and Challenge, “Real” Alaskan, and Creating the Ideal Community.

5.1 Getting Away

Most of my co-researchers spoke of what motivated them to come to Fairbanks or to Alaska. They describe their making of decisions, their motivation or reasons for moving here, their prior knowledge of Alaska and their sources of that information, their expectations, and what they were feeling before moving up to Alaska or Fairbanks. First
they describe how they were motivated to move to the Fairbanks community, and then they elaborate the decision-making process and reasons for moving. My co-researchers also point out what their expectations were of Alaska and their emotional reactions regarding the moving itself. I describe three sub themes which I find are related to this main theme, Getting Away. I have labeled the three: Volition, Motivations and Expectations, and Jump into the Unknown World. These sub titles address the various degrees of willing involvement of the co-researchers in the decision to move; their expectations, and their emotional reactions prior to moving itself.

5.1.1 Volition

For my co-researchers, the choice of voluntarily moving to Alaska or Fairbanks is an emerging sub-theme. In fact, there are three groups of people in regard to the degree of will in making their own decisions. The first group consists of people who have decided to move to Alaska based on their own confident decision, often with sufficient knowledge and reasonable expectations, about moving to Alaska or Fairbanks, as well as being certain of their own preference as to what type of community they desire to live in. Mary, Judy, and Cathy belong to this category, all having had the experience of previously staying in or visiting Fairbanks. Mary had the opportunity to stay for a comparatively sufficient time because she accompanied her husband here while he did research. In particular, when she decided to return to Fairbanks after trying to live in California for years, her volition was decisive and very strong. Judy’s previous exposure was shorter than Mary’s, but she had gained a first-hand impression regarding the people here and the natural environment during her visit for a job interview. Cathy had frequent
conversations with her best friend who has lived in Fairbanks for a long time, and she had also visited the southern part of Alaska.

The second group is the people who had to decide to move to Alaska without being confident regarding their decision, often with insufficient knowledge and unrealistic expectations as well as little certainty regarding their preference of community types. Gregory and Bob fit in this category. Gregory had some confidence regarding his preference of community based on affluent living experience in many different types of community countrywide. He had limited actual knowledge. He made his decision after listening to a colleague who had once lived in the Fairbanks community. Bob also had some second-hand information through intensive research using books, journal articles, and on-line research without considering preference for type of community except for a vague awareness of a desire to get away from the city where he had been living.

The third group is people who had to move to Alaska without having any choice or any involvement in the decision-making process. Robin belongs to this as group as do most military families; a fact which is mentioned frequently by my co-researchers. Although Robin’s father was not a military person, his job situation led him to decide to move and to bring his family here. Thus, Robin was not involved in the decision making at all. She was only seven years old at that time.

5.1.2 Motivations and Expectations

Each co-researcher had a different motivation to choose to move to Fairbanks. One was looking for new experiences related to living in a different environment. More or less, these people looked forward to experiencing change by moving and living here. The
degree of intensity in looking for change varies. Cathy occupies one end of the extreme. She “really wanted a new life, did not want to continue the way [she] was living at that time”. However, she did not have a firm expectation about her new life here. On the other hand, Bob, Judy, and Gregory had some degree of expectations as well as expecting a general change through living here. Bob “wanted to go live somewhere else” [because] he was ready for a “change from living where it is very hot.” He also had a fairly firm expectation of what living here would be like. As he says [He knew] that “Alaska wouldn’t be like the rest of the states; it was almost like living abroad.” Judy and Bob had a more substantial expectations regarding the environment and the people who they would be working with, but had very little idea about what degrees of change, as a person, they might go through since they had formed their life philosophy and values firmly prior to moving. It is rather that they chose moving here based on their value system. Robin is situated on the other extreme because she did not have very realistic expectations for living here even though she had an image of “crazy Alaskans.” She was reluctant and afraid of change because she did not want to leave her grandparents and cousins. She was aware also that her mother did not want to leave their hometown. Thus, she did not expect much of living here except for being reunited with her father and finding a more stable economic situation based on her father’s new job.

5.1.3 Jump into the Unknown World

Co-researchers’ feelings regarding moving to Alaska also vary in their degree of intensity. These emotional reactions are closely related to factors such as expectations, prior knowledge, and motivations. While Cathy experienced extreme excitement and
fear, Gregory, Mary, Jane, and Bob expressed feeling positively excited without having any negative emotion. Cathy expressed her excitement as having an opportunity to "step off into the unknown, to be able to realize some of [her] dreams" yet she feared independence as someone who had been dependent on "somebody else to make sure everything is all right for her." On the other hand, Robin described both positive and negative feelings: extreme uncertainty and sadness as well as relief and hope. Her uncertainty and sadness were a combination of her own reluctance to leave her relatives and the influence of her mother's reaction. However, she also experienced relief and hope because she knew that her father had a stable job, "one with a paycheck the family could count on," and she also became hopeful that she would have a more intimate relationship with her father who had been away for some time. Thus, Robin experienced ambivalent, conflicted feelings in regard to moving prior to the move itself.

As a whole, all the co-researcher's narratives addressed the issue of their motivations, their expectations, their prior knowledge and its source, and their emotional reactions regarding the move to Fairbanks or Alaska. Although the degree of intensity and other aspects vary, they all describe the stage prior to moving and their concern for moving as an important aspect of their entire living experience of the Fairbanks community. Thus, based on the recurring mention and commonality of the experience, I decided to include this as the first of the following three main themes: Fascination and Challenge, Toward Becoming a Real Alaskan, and Creating an Ideal Community.
5.2 Fascination and Challenge


Challenge and fascination are two sides of the same coin. It is a matter of the viewer’s selection of focus and scope, perception, and interpretation that determines which side of the coin they choose to view. The experiences are totally different depending on which of these three contexts they consider in regard to the Fairbanks community. In most cases, their fascination has something to do with the time of arrival (spring and summer would affect one positively unless one favors extreme cold and darkness) as Cathy expresses, when she arrived in Fairbanks: "... sun shining in our faces as we arrived. It was wonderful. It was an adventure." Another factor is how much time has passed since one’s arrival. After a certain period of fascination, one begins to realize the harshness and the hardships in this natural environment. Those who choose to stay accept it as a challenge, or trial, or a test for living here longer. However, there are some rare new comers who like both sides of the weather from the beginning, without changing their perspectives at all, but rather enjoy the harshness as well as the enjoyable side.

All of my co-researchers describe their experience with nature, human relationships, and social atmosphere from the positive or negative perspective. In other words, they perceive and interpret these experiences in these three contexts as an advantage or disadvantage. Mostly, in the stage of fascination (or the initiation period) without having had exposure to entire seasons and especially without experiencing the winter, new comers engage in appreciating the positive and novel aspects of nature,
human relationships, and culture existing in Fairbanks. However, after a while, especially after experiencing the winter, they discover that their naive infatuation is challenged by unexpected difficulties and the harshness. My co-researchers assign this coping or experiencing of harshness and hardships as a challenge, or a trial, or a test.

5.2.1 Fascinating Nature

The majority of my co-researchers describe their experience of the natural environment around Fairbanks through a new perspective in the sense of their physical involvement in nature. In particular, they describe their interaction with nature through sensory experiences such as visual, audio, olfactory, and tactile. Such experience is expressed as a distinct contrast to their previous experience, especially in the visual sense. They explain their experience of the coldness and darkness using physical reactions rather than perceptual knowledge acquisition. Bob states that:

The idea of winter, for me, wasn’t just cold and dark, but being so cold and dark and that your body would go through this change; that it’s almost like you have to fight it to be able to function. The same thing in summer.

Gregory describes this sensory appreciation as “seeing stars, the aurora borealis,” and the “mountains in the wintertime,” and being able to “walk across the tundra, smell things that we hadn’t smelled before, being able to touch different things that are unique to the area.”

Cathy also experiences the cold through such funny episodes as “spraying window cleaner on the window” in December, which failed to clean the window because it froze as soon as it hit the cold window pane. She recalls “leaving a cup of coffee” which froze
in her car, and experiencing the cold air because of her habit of “leaving the bedroom window open year-round.” Robin feels the change of season through “when her soul is stirred, when the sunlight becomes warm again through the feeling of warmth” on her face.

My co-researchers describe their direct, and first hand experience compared to the processed, filtered, and instant version of Alaska through media. Robin witnesses the hills becoming green and Bob compares the differences in “seeing a beautiful picture in front of you” and being in the picture, where “suddenly everything turns green in a matter of two or three weeks in spring.” Bob describes his not knowing “the difference between 30 below and 20 below” and what it meant to go hiking and camping before his moving here. He compares working indoors and outdoors, “feeling constricted” versus “feeling a sense of fulfillment and more enjoyment, in other words feeling better physically and emotionally.” He also compares direct engagement to the indirect as being “in a picture” versus “in front of a picture.” Robin points out how her son experienced seeing a moose in her own front yard compared to the city children who only see wild animals in the zoo. Most of all, she values the fact that nature in Alaska is “not processed” whereas “a city park is all very seriously planned and laid out to look unplanned.” Further, she appreciates how she experiences “walking” in the nearby “wilderness” and “tundra” or enjoys ice fishing in the nearby frozen lake.

The uniqueness of the natural environment of Alaska is also a distinct factor in experiencing nature for my co-researchers. They mention the “vastness of wilderness” that surrounds Fairbanks as well as the “aurora borealis, tundra, taiga, abundant wildlife,
permafrost land,” and huge flocks of “migrating birds.” They point out nearby Denali National Park and its size. Another unique natural factor is “extreme cold, darkness,” and long “daylight” in the summer time. The majority of my co-researchers also mention that the “undisturbed, unpolluted, pure, primitive, and natural” condition of the wilderness is another unique aspect worthy of appreciation. Gregory says that:

There is no place else in the world or in the United States that I know of where you can have, between summer and winter, a 150 to 60 degree temperature change and a [seasonal] difference between four hours of daylight and 24 hours of daylight.

One of the other main factors influencing co-researcher’s enjoyment of nature is an easy accessibility with plenty of time, in other words, day to day experience. Gregory and Bob assert that time consuming traffic in a city spoils their appreciation of nature, while they appreciate easy access to it here. Gregory states that it takes “several hours” to get to the mountains from a big city, through “traffic and pollution” and that the need to go through the same “hectic process” again afterwards reduces his enjoyment of experiencing a taste of nature. He argues that here “[people] can really enjoy being in a natural setting easily.” Bob describes his amazement that “within five minutes walking,” he is already in the wilderness. Robin also repeats how easily she brings her son to the various natural settings here. Co-researchers also show their appreciation of long-term home-base experience rather than living for a short visit or a touring stop. Bob expresses this eloquently:

I didn’t want to come to Alaska and be a tourist. I wanted to know what it would be like to actually stay here; live here, and know that I was going to stay here year
after year, and that I didn’t get a choice to go in summer when it was beautiful, or in winter to experience the cold. It wasn’t so much that I wanted to have a temporary experience. I wanted something more permanent. I wanted to see it from the inside and not just see the surface.

Lastly, all the co-researchers describe their experience of nature as inspiring, positive experiences; emotional and physical well being; aesthetic appreciation of beauty in nature; and a calming down effect, inducing peacefulness. Every single co-researcher expresses their appreciation of beauty at least three or four times. Most of them repeatedly remark on sensing the beauty of the scenery, the wildlife, birds, mountains, terrain, and other natural phenomena such as the aurora borealis and the snow in the winter.

As a whole, most of my co-researchers describe their experience of our natural environment as being unique, extreme, genuine, accessible, real, direct, beautiful, huge, vast, vivid, and mundane experience.

5.2.2 Fascinating People

The majority of my co-researchers experience different personal relationships since moving here. The most distinctive characteristic pointed out by all of them is the support and caring each receives from other members of community. All of them express excitement and satisfaction when they describe either themselves or someone with whom they are close being helped and helping others. In particular, the prompt and voluntarily approach to helping someone who has car trouble is a frequent description. Gregory relates his own experience in the lower 48 where he had car trouble on the highway and
he was helped “after half an hour by Australian travelers” not by Americans, who he recalls drove consistently past him. He contrasts this example with his daughter’s experience when she had a car problem in Fairbanks and it took only “two minutes” for her to be helped. Judging by these episodes, he asserts that “[people here] are more aware of what’s going on, which leads people to take care of someone if something has happened to them; they expect somebody also to help them out.” Putting it differently, “the people here are aware of physical needs and take care of others more readily.”

Another good example is from Cathy’s story about “[her] car breaking down on the Alcan Highway;” and being helped within “a minute and a half from somebody, three somebodies, in pick-up trucks.” Another episode of Cathy’s is noteworthy when she confesses her “first immersion into the attitude” of people who live in Fairbanks being the example of her neighbor who washed and polished her dirty car. She repeats how she experiences that “[people here] care about each other; most people here care about each other.” Mary also describes this as “most people feel that they do belong together.”

Through these helping relationships and support, people in this community feel the “relatedness, connectedness, togetherness, and interdependence.” This feeling of “camaraderie” is well described by Cathy when she states that:

The physical feeling, the emotional feeling, and the spiritual feeling on the plane between Fairbanks and Anchorage, and between Anchorage and Seattle, and Anchorage and St. Paul, or Anchorage and Phoenix, wherever you were going, was totally different. The plane could be absolutely full from Fairbanks to Anchorage and yet there was a camaraderie. Everybody would talk to everybody, ‘oh, hi back
there;’ yeah, you know, we all didn’t know each other, but we ‘knew’ each other.’

Secondly, my co-researchers articulate how they often experience intimacy as a
new form of kinship through chosen, “extended family” relationships. Mary describes
her relationship her family has developed with other people who built their own cabins as
her family did. She describes this relative-like relationship by telling how this group of
people visits each other for housewarmings and holidays such as Thanksgiving. Gregory
also shows his intimacy with and affection for his Irish music club. Two examples may
be drawn from Robin’s narration. One is her observation of her next door neighbors who
were a divorced man and a divorced woman who had married each other, each bringing
with them two kids of their own. When she discovered that this couple didn’t care for or
discipline each other’s kids at all, but were each only in charge of their own, Robin was
surprised because she thought it didn’t really fit her ideal of family as she had never been
exposed to a mixed family before moving to Alaska. However, when she herself
developed “extended kinship” through living very closely with this family, she regarded
“[that] was really cool.” She and her friend grew up like “sisters.” She describes this as
her “first experience” of an example of “chosen-family.” Robin thinks this idea of
chosen family is “more real to her” because she grew up with them. Not only Robin, but
also her brother, David, thinks of Dianna, Robin’s friend, “like another sister” and
Dianna thinks David is “just like another little brother.” Now, Robin’s son addresses
Dianna’s mother as “aunt.” She acknowledges this relationship as being “very pragmatic
and very useful” because her son would “feel connected to the people who are right
here.”
Thirdly, my co-researchers express their positive feeling of having both privacy and sharing with their neighbors. Gregory explains this relationship, which is based as much on helping as on sharing with each other. His example describes this:

One of my neighbors works here at the University and we’ve talked; when we had flooding a couple of years ago we helped each other out. So when it comes down to common things - that you help each other when you really need it. You know that you’re there for each other and if you want to share stories, you can do that, otherwise you just go on your way and just do whatever you want to do.

Additionally, experiencing human relationship in Fairbanks is characterized by intimacy, familiarity, and recognition through frequent interaction - combined with friendly and supportive interaction. All the co-researchers appreciate how they enjoy “finding someone who is familiar” and at the same time enjoy being recognized by others without being bothered by the feeling of “everybody knows everybody” as it was in Jane’s hometown. Her description of bumping into people who are familiar to her in the airport or in the shops, shows how people enjoy relationships here as satisfaction, trust, and a feeling of networking. Another good example is drawn from Mary’s talking about her father’s satisfaction. Mary’s father, who came to live in Fairbanks after her mother’s death, states that “this is a wonderful community for older people and a wonderful place to grow old” because he was well treated and the recognition of his “being” from doctors and from other members of his orchestra. He even “made friends among the audience” of his concerts within a few years. It is a big contrast to the fact that he never made any
friends among the orchestra audience while “he spent 25 years in the orchestra” of his former city.

As a whole, my co-researchers express that their human relationships in this town are quite different from other places of similar size and they show satisfaction regarding the close, connected, supportive, familiar, and intimate relationships which at the same time do not impinge on their privacy.

5.2.3 Fascinating Culture

My co-researchers point out several distinctive characteristics of the Fairbanks community. First, most of my co-researchers articulate how much diversity we have in this community. Bob exclaims his amazement when he finds “all these radically different groups of people living together in this same small space.” He asserts that he actually finds all kinds of people here; altogether, that this is a very atypical small town which cannot be judged by the size of the population. He asserts that “[people] might expect Fairbanks to have small town mentality because of the size.” He insists that “in fact it doesn’t because we get all kinds of people; there are a variety of people . . . met that come from all different walks of life and very different systems of beliefs.”

The second characteristic of community lies in acceptance of diversity regarding ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, social attitude, political opinion, community, recreational activities, socio-economic class, material value system, and life philosophy. Robin points out there is “so much acceptance,” in general in Fairbanks regarding race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. She points out the existence of a gay community and the general acceptance of interracial married couples. Gregory, Cathy,
Jane, and Bob describe the acceptance of our military community by the university community as well as by the larger Fairbanks community. Jane expresses that diverse political orientation is accepted. In particular, Cathy explains how the seemingly opposite political tendency between military and university people (red and blue), is accepted without much collision in the Fairbanks community. Jane and Cathy mention the existence of a downtown community, which is not excluded although it includes many people who have alcohol and drug problems, as well as being low income. Cathy asserts that “three main players in town - the university, the hospital, and the military - all work together to make the community what it is, instead of existing separately because we are too big a community to just have one segment dominate over the other.” She doesn’t see that one is over any other. She believes “[they] are co-cultures.” Mary further points out the acceptance of anti-social or hermit-type people who do not want to interact with neighbors or do want to be involved in the community.

The third unique aspect of the Fairbanks community lies in its loose set of norms and customs. This is partly a product of the short history of the town and partly a matter of frontier spirit. Robin describes this aspect as: people here do “whatever and whenever they want to do.” Thus, “frontier spirit” or a “Wild West mood” is prevalent in this community, according to my co-researchers. This requires the community culture to be more self-reliant without depending on the government for help. People here, my co-researchers say, prefer less control by the government. Gregory mentions that our community does not have the “true Big Brother concept” compared to the lower 48.
Cathy expresses her belief in the people of Fairbanks who have the self-reliant attitude of helping themselves rather than depending on the “government welfare system.”

My co-researchers say that another distinguishing aspect of the Fairbanks community is its members’ easy access to becoming involved in community events or activities and their satisfaction with contributing and being appreciated. Again, Mary’s narrative of her father is a good example. The majority of my co-researchers point out how easy it is to create new events or clubs as well as joining pre-existing ones. Robin delineates her experience of being involved in many types of volunteer work without being screened at all regarding her experience or skill. She gives as another example of how quickly and easily she became a board member at her son’s preschool. Robin also gives an almost endless list of activities for her son to get involved with if he wants. She illustrates the possibility of creating an art group with the example of her former high school classmates forming a band and becoming popular locally. Mary mentions her various involvements in many events as a volunteer and being much appreciated, contrasting that to her previous experience of lack of appreciation in the lower 48.

Additionally, there is a tendency toward a much less materialistic attitude which is much appreciated by my co-researchers. Jane is content with her children picking up that attitude while they were growing up here. Cathy confesses that her view regarding material possessions and their value has changed since living in this community. Gregory, Bob, and Robin all agree on how much they appreciate the less materialistic atmosphere shared by community members in general.
As a whole, my co-researchers' experience the various characteristics which are unique in this community: diversity and its acceptance, easy access to community activities, less government regulation and more self-regulation or self-reliance, and a less materialistic attitude than mainstream American culture. Jane and Robin associate these factors with an ideal environment for raising children and with making our community more family-oriented by emphasizing the sense of safety in this community.

5.2.4 Challenging Nature

To live, to function, and to enjoy this natural and social environment, one needs physical and mental strength, social capacity and skills, and adaptability. One of my co-researchers specifies the challenge and hardship, saying: “These [specific people] are the only people who really enjoy Fairbanks, those who are young and enjoy outdoor sports even in the winter time” without being disturbed by the coldness and the darkness. Few of my six co-researchers are such a rare exception although two of them are very young. One athletic young co-researcher prefers the coldness of winter here to the hot temperatures he experienced in his previous living place. The other five express their difficulty dealing with the cold to a greater or lesser degree, but all recognize the harsh weather as common to the experience. Darkness is the common factor that all of the co-researchers consider a hardship, particularly when combined with coldness.

5.2.4.1 The Cold.

All of my co-researchers posit the harshness and related hardship they face with cold in this environment. The most devastating characteristic of this cold is its extremity. The temperature in Alaska’s Interior sometimes goes down to minus forty five or fifty for
periods during the winter time. This extreme cold causes ice fog, which adds another level of difficulty for drivers to the icy, slick road conditions. Even pedestrians who do not own a vehicle experience helplessness when they can not walk to their destination because of the extreme cold. They have to depend on either a cab or the city bus. Fortunately the city bus is free between November and March. Thus, many people use the bus even though they have to wait for the bus in the harsh temperatures.

Cold affects the daily life of residents in many ways. An easy example is people who have to plow (or shovel) snow from their driveways in the cold in order to drive their own vehicle. Further, people have to not only know how to organize their living in the extreme uncontrollable and unpredictable cold, but also implement that knowledge. The people here have to take care of their home heating systems, communications, transportation, food, and especially their water. On the other hand, they have to think about maintaining their mental and physical health because exercise and activities outside are constrained by the cold weather. This constraint can cause mental health problems known as “cabin fever.” Cabin fever has the most serious effects on children, old people, parents who have small children, those who do not have a vehicle, those who live in a cabin without such comforts as running water (this means hauling water for cooking, using an outhouse in the coldness, and taking a shower and doing laundry at some other location), or a gas heater (which means depending on a wood fire), or electricity. Robin delineates how tough it can be to handle the cold weather here when she says simply, “It is really hard.” The rest of the co-researchers also describe this hardship using terms such as “tough, hard, harsh, challenging, difficult, and depressing.” Robin points out the
fact that the cold of forty below does not let anybody outside much, which enforces "being inside a lot of the winter." As a result of that effect, combined with darkness factor, many people in this community are "clinically depressed" and "on an antidepressant." My co-researchers are all actively aware of this experience.

5.2.4.2 Darkness and 24 Hour Daylight.

Darkness in the winter time is strongly expressed by all the co-researchers for its being difficult to handle related to its strong effect on their bodies and minds. Most of them mention the "4 hour daylight" and long darkness in the winter time. They posit the worst effect as the combination of darkness with cold. Darkness itself is difficult to handle, thus the combined effect with cold can be intimidating to residents here. The worst feature named is the nine-month long winter, which means long hours of darkness. Darkness prohibits and shortens daily outside activity. It also affects the body even though people live inside buildings. Induced "sleepiness" and a "lethargic feeling" is pervasive. The dark also limits the growing of vegetables and plants. Most seriously, it affects the mental and physical health of people. My co-researchers describe their own or family’s or friends’ reactions to the darkness using terms such as "depressed, isolated, deprived, sad, crazy, helpless, and hopeless." Robin’s brother tried to move to the cities in the lower 48 because of the "coldness and darkness."

Another challenge is from the daylight in the summer time. This is exactly the opposite of the long darkness in the winter. The three-month long summer offers extremely bright, almost 24 hour daylight. Whereas five of my co-researchers express their enjoyment of this as prolonged playing time (until early in that is visually the
morning) or the joy of rapidly growing plants, Gregory postulates the hardship he and his wife go through with extreme exposure to daylight because they are light sensitive people. Extremely increased energy stimulated by daylight can cause difficulty in getting to asleep for some people. The effect of daylight here is well discussed by Bob; he describes:

The idea of winter, for me, wasn’t just cold and dark, but cold and dark and that your body would go through this change that it’s almost like you have to fight it to be able to function. The same thing in summer. They say it will be bright. That means you won’t get a lot of sleep and your body will have this amount of energy that will be the complete opposite from winter.

As a whole, my co-researchers repeatedly and elaborately expressed the effects of coldness and darkness here. These factors make living in this environment tough and challenging. They also make people experience, think about, and accept the uncontrollable and unpredictable aspect of nature.

5.2.5 Challenging People

My co-researchers emphasize the different human relationships they have been experiencing in this unusual natural and social environment. All of them came from the lower 48 “without bringing their family or relatives” except Robin. Bob is alone, like many residents here including myself, other university students, and many military people. Most people here could not bring their friends, let alone their best friends. They could not bring their neighbors either. Thus, many people feel the need and desire to develop new relationships with others such as friends, and neighbors. Some people such
as Robin, Mary, and Gregory are lucky to have developed a new human “network” successfully. However, not everybody is so fortunate and is able to achieve this. Some of them are frustrated not only by their lack of social skills, but also by the limited and unpredictable length of time people stay here. The variables regarding the time apply strongly to military people and their families who are regularly deployed to new duty stations.

People here are also often frustrated by isolation in terms of physical, mental, and cultural distance from the outside world, which mainly refers to the lower 48, where amenities such as shopping, art galleries, entertainment, public transportation are more convenient, close, and approachable. Some of my co-researchers feel frustrated by the limited resources this town provides in the way of material goods and arts events by lack of both quality and variety. In particular, one of my informants expresses her frustration regarding the poor quality of cultural items such as opera, art galleries, and clothing attainable in this town. Fairbanks has only one theater and one general hospital aside from a military facility. Many people, therefore, have to go to Anchorage or to the lower 48 if they have a very complicated illness or require a special surgery. The option and quality of higher education is very limited, which worries some parents.

Fairbanks has all different types of people, some of whom are pretty unsociable and reluctant to interact with others. One of my informants points out the difficulty of socializing here because she thinks this town has a “higher proportion of weird people” than anywhere else in her experience.
Another factor which challenges the development of human relationships here is the frequent and extensive coming and going of the population. As Jane mentions, "half of the students in the school [her children's high school]" do not return the next year because of moving out. The difficult natural environment and also military and university organizations that involve a high percentage of the population of this town influence the residents' moving. Many university students come from the lower 48 attracted by the special natural environment and the lower tuition, but after graduation, most of them leave. In the case of the military, most people have little choice of transferring to here or to other places. Additionally, limited job opportunity often affects transition of the residents. As a result, some residents are frustrated by their friends, colleagues, and neighbors frequent and constant moving out. Some people handle this problem well. Mary does not make new friends who are not committed to this community based on her long term living wisdom. She says she can predict that these people have a high probability of moving out soon. Robin laments her neighbor's rapid turnover, which deprives her cultivated relationships with her neighbors.

5.2.6 Challenging Culture

My co-researchers describe several cultural norms and rules in this community. Most of them are invisible to the long term residents because they have had to adapt to them already. However, some aspects still affect the long-time residents as well as the new comers.

Many co-researchers point out that our community economy is dependent on the military and tourism too much. Robin describes this:
But at the same time [after acknowledging the benefit of seasonal job opportunity], it's really frustrating because I guess, I just don’t like the idea that we are like catering, we are building our community to cater other people who don’t live here. I think that a lot of the times, that’s the disservice for those who do live here. The community is spending funds and using resources to bring people up for this three month window, rather than trying to enrich the community for the people who are here for twelve months. I am really frustrated with that. It seems like everything’s been more about like the surface beautification and making things more convenient but it’s not really about enriching our community.

A few co-researchers express another challenge regarding the effect of military people and tourists. This aspect is pointed out by following lists: “spoiling” the natural and social environments “taking away [those] benefits” without returning or contributing to our community, affecting the younger people by showing their arrogance, bad manners, and inappropriate behaviors, and corrupting the community value system moving it toward a “more materialistic direction.” In particular, recent “big shopping centers” are mentioned benefiting to satisfy the needs of a transient community rather than for the stable residents in this community.

Another socially challenging factor for my co-researchers is the physical change in this community. They voice concerns about the big shopping centers, a hotel being built on the location of demolished small-business buildings, and the estranged neighbor relationships causing a less safe environment, especially for children. They also worry about a weakening value system, which has been what distinguishes and makes the
Fairbanks community worthwhile to live in. This value system emphasizes the importance of “work ethics [do one’s best for their jobs], self-reliance,” an atmosphere of “cooperation.”

5.3 *Becoming a Real Alaskan*

By experiencing the natural environment, human relationships, and community culture, newcomers begin to learn, adapt, and transform their view and values. I categorize this process of going through metamorphosis under the description of *Becoming a Real Alaskan*. I could not fully realize the meaningful nature of their experience though most of my co-researchers repeated it in the various ways until I experienced my own mini version through the challenging journey of this research. Only after experiencing the difficult, complex, confusing, and conflicting struggle to find what the raw materials really means, could I reach the stage of finding my own interpretation of what my co-researchers are trying to share with me regarding the meaning of living in Fairbanks. My search is based on my own experiential perspective and has developed here because my co-researchers were willing to share their experiences.

Through repetitious reading of the Narratives offered by my co-researchers, I discovered how they each came to their awakening and their reconstructing their view of nature and of themselves. My co-researchers achieve this transformed view from their constant struggling and interaction with nature and other members of this unique community. This thematic section recognizes the process of finding meaning based on my co-researchers’ living experiences (described in the previous section). I will recount from the perspective of experiencing nature first and then move to a discussion of
personal metamorphosis from the perspective of human relationships, although both are interconnected and intertwined.

5.3.1 Re-conceptualizing Nature

First, my co-researchers experience first hand the harshness of the natural conditions of Alaska such as cold, dark, 24 hour daylight, the gigantic and overwhelming size of the wilderness immediately surrounding our community, which frighten them. They mention not only mental anxiety, but also physical dysfunction through these experiences. Most of my co-researchers constantly describe how “hard, harsh, tough,” and “difficult” mentally and physically it is to survive in this natural environment. In particular, a comparative newcomer like Bob postulates this aspect many times to great length and in detail. He points out from past experience “how difficult and expensive it is to get to a lot of places to see [nature with] time consuming preparation.” On the other hand, the longest-term resident, Mary mentions this but not so much in terms of frequency and emphasis. Mary describes her experience of Alaska nature as “withstand[ing] the challenges of weather.” Cathy, Jane, and Gregory posit this as the hardship they experience at a moderate level in terms of quantity and intensity.

Then my co-researchers describe how they are frustrated by these difficulties and how they struggle to adapt themselves to these aspects of the natural environment. They realize, acknowledge, and admit the power of nature through their stories of their struggles to overcome. In particular, they begin to realize that they cannot control or predict the weather. To survive in this environment, they have to learn the living skills that nature demands: how to dress properly in the winter, and how to create their own
entertainment, for the sake of mental sanity on a daily basis. They also experience the power of nature through their physical engagement: as in camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, cabin living, house building, skiing, sledding, dog-mushing, ice-fishing, ice sculpting, growing vegetables, and simply walking in the nearby forest.

Their awakening also comes from their observation of and sensitizing to seasonal changes in nature such as a “two week long spring and fall, the bird migration, the hills becoming green, and rapidly growing plants and vegetables in the summer.” Also, “break-up” is in the spring. “Break-up” is a period in the Alaska Interior when winter is making a rapid exit. Snow and ice are becoming eventful as slush, mud, and run-off. Daylight is increasing by 6 to 8 minutes a day. Not only is it break up in the natural outside of their living space, but also in their everyday exposure to the birds singing, moose in the front yard, trees budding, and ice sculptures everywhere in town. Finally, they accept the unavoidability, uncontrollability, and unpredictability of nature. Bob explains this personal adaptation eloquently: “we cannot just adjust nature so it works for us. We have to do that.” At the same time, they appreciate the “coherence, repetition, pattern,” and the “rhythm” of nature. In particular, seasonal changes give them the feeling of coherence through their repetition as demonstrated by the change of the trees, migrating birds, returning salmon, and returning spring after the long winter.

The acceptance of the uniquely strong power of nature affects people’s awareness and attitude. In this sense, their going through the “first winter” here is symbolically significant because they have faced the tough challenge of nature regarding cold and darkness, and they have also experienced an increased appreciation of the thrill and
excitement that survival until spring brings. Through the acceptance of their human capacity in the extremes of weather and some uncontrollable aspects of nature, residents begin to have more flexibility to admit human limits in the face of nature instead of further resistance. Such acceptance helps them to develop a reflective mode in which to ponder about nature and their relation to it. This is contrasting experience and for the most part unexamined in their previous living experience in the artificial, superficial, modern, technological, material, and comfortable city life of most of my co-researchers. Only Jane has specifically chosen her living environment for the condition of having a good “natural environment.” On the other hand, Bob experiences this amplification more dramatically because he had lived in and just moved out of a large city in California. Gregory describes this mental and emotional influence as getting “more spiritual.” Others mention this using such terms as becoming “humble, peaceful,” and “respectful.” At the same time, people feel more confident while realizing the importance of “self-reliance” and “cooperation,” expressed by “relatedness, connectedness, togetherness, dependence” on others in the community. As a result, they have more confidence, sensitivity, self-esteem and awareness of others’ needs in general. This is recognition of community expressed by “caring about,” and “caring for” each other.

This reflective mode is powerful when combined with an appreciation of the unique beauty of Alaskas’ natural environment. All of my co-researchers acknowledge and praise the unique natural beauty we have in our Alaska environment, such as our wild flowers, trees, rivers, mountains, snow, glaciers, the aurora borealis, wild animals, fish, and birds. They emphasize the aesthetic experience of life in Interior Alaska and its
influence on their appreciation of and perception of nature. Thus, the aesthetic value of nature induces people into a deep reflective mode which contributes to the “slow pace” of life in the Fairbanks community as compared to the pace of life in the lower 48. Some co-researchers are strongly conscious of this change; more so than others. Gregory and his wife deeply appreciate this reflexive mode because they believe they are “spiritual people.” They also experience reviving or returning to the “old, ancient, deep, deep inside, pristine, instinctive, intuitive,” and \textit{primitive} side of human nature. This deeper level of connection to nature gives them the feeling being fully “alive,” having a “more real life,” and being more “connected to the earth.” Robin too describes her “feel[ing] [of] being really connected” many times.

From experiencing a reflective mode, these people reconsider their lives; value their systems, and their perceptions about human relationships and nature. They see the alternative life style as a choice, a more opposite the direction of its mainstream American culture in terms of materialism, fast pace, goal orientation, competition, and manipulation by media. Bob describes this self eloquently:

I know I don’t want to live in a big city; that if a job offer came up in LA, I wouldn’t take it because now that I’ve been here, I don’t want to go back to that. There’s a sense of comfort in Alaska, for me that I didn’t always get anywhere else. It changes my view. It makes me appreciate things a lot more in terms of my identity: friendships, people, transportation, and availability of products, food. It’s not like everywhere. You have to do with what’s out there. It teaches you to adjust your life and inevitably it shapes your identity. I couldn’t go back to live in
hot weather. I knew I hated it, but I didn’t know how much I would like cold weather. Suddenly I had this very strong liking for cold weather. That changes my identity, too, because it limits the places where I am willing to live. I don’t like traffic. I can’t live in a big city.

At the same time, my co-researchers experience a sense of well-being. They describe this as a: “sense of fulfillment, feeling better physically and emotionally,” and “feeling pleasure.” This sense of well being and increased physical strength through various physical activities, gives these people more confidence and self-esteem. Two of my co-researchers describe this transition as moving toward a “balanced life.”

Most importantly, people in Alaska respect each other because as my co-researchers say they know “only a certain type of people” can overcome this challenge. Residents realize how important it is to help each other and how dependent they are on each other in this community from experiencing both the harshness and the benefits of this unique natural environment. People who have shared common hardships feel closer and have more trust in depending on each other.

5.3.2 American Social Paradox

Most Americans have a strong sense of individuality and value individuality as an essential part of self-identity. Most of my co-researchers emphasize how “fiercely independent” they are as individuals. However, from learning by living in this environment, each individual realizes the importance and necessity of helping each other. In other words, people begin to develop a sense of obligation, responsibility, and commitment to support, trust, depend on, rely on, and cooperate with other members of
the community. The boundary between self and others is reflected in different definitions of the Fairbanks community. Such definitions vary from the university community to the artist community to the Ester community to the surrounding area, from which people drive to Fairbanks for shopping and the native villages from which people fly, mush, or boat for some special events or medicines.

Residents in the Fairbanks community also feel the necessity of sharing such information as living skills and tools needed. Residents are willing to give a hand and help, sometimes even without being asked. The easiest and most frequently mentioned examples are helping others who have car problems. Other examples frequently mentioned and observed are how people demonstrate kindness and friendliness in Fairbanks. These traits are more frequently mentioned by outsiders or visitors rather than the residents of Fairbanks. For example, if some one (mostly newcomers or visitors) asks directions or the location of some place on the bus route, at least two or three passengers begin to help them, let alone the kindly bus drivers. I became personally aware of this and have begun close observation of this phenomenon since I began this research. I heard many times how Fairbanks policemen were kind enough to call many places to find the information for which a tourist asked casually. The residents in this community have become so accustomed to these matters that they do not realize them any longer.
My co-researchers also discover their "stock of Frontier Spirit" through adapting to and overcoming the challenges of the natural and social environment. These realizations that come from sharing the similar experiences of enduring extreme connect them mentally to the Frontiersmen who lived in this environment in tougher times and with more limited resources and equipment. People relate to and connect with the past by associating themselves with the frontier as symbolized by great grandparents, as in Cathy’s case. This change of mental frame also affects their relationship with “old timers, Sourdoughs,” and people who maintain “subsistence life style,” living far away from town with little modern comfort, or who even live in cabins near campus. Community members begin to respect more and feel more relatedness with old timers and Sourdoughs as well as Frontiersmen who lived here long time ago. With the combined learning of acceptance of nature as it is, along with the pioneer spirit, people develop deeper connections to and acceptance of other “co-cultures,” and community members.

In Fairbanks it is evident in the shared experience of my co-researchers that there is a great appreciation of living in a community where people have similar attitudes, value nature, challenge the hardships, and enjoy the outdoors. People also note that they appreciate living in a diverse, safe community with increased trust of other community members.

Consequently, the newcomer who came as an individual realizes, appreciates, and practices collectivity or the collective mindset without losing the value of self-reliance and independence. Thus, people develop new frame, or mind set, appreciating both
independence as an individual and dependence as a member of the collective in this community. Mary describes this:

I think I'm a lot healthier because I can get outdoors and exercise more, and I think my life would have been really different if I hadn’t come here, but I would have become much more of an ivory towered intellectual than I have become in Fairbanks because there are so many opportunities to develop other aspects of my life, like ice sculpture.

As a whole, my co-researchers experience the attraction to the unique nature of this place, confronting the challenge, accepting human limits, and appreciating the reflective opportunity to reconsider their perspective and value system regarding nature, other humans, and themselves. They transform through this process and become more humble, respectful, trustful, intuitive, spiritual, sensitive, tuned with the nature, and flexible to the social and natural milieu. At the same time they realize and accept the diversity of their neighbors and the necessity of dependence on other community members.

5.4 Creating an Ideal Community

The experiential transformation I described in the previous section leads my co-researchers to more affection for and attachment to the value of this community. People in Fairbanks try to uphold and contribute to the positive qualities of this community. Each individual co-researcher has a different concept, and seeing the good values of our community, each has different levels of commitment as well as different levels of consciousness of the driving desire to keep the community values. As a matter of fact, the more they are attached and appreciative of Fairbanks, the longer they stay. They tend
to have more commitment and feelings of responsibility for preserving and defending our community values. Mary describes her example of an ideal community: “To be American, to live together, work together, pray together, and solve their own problems together seems an ideal community.” Although each co-researchers’ views vary regarding the ideal community, consciously or unconsciously, their attachment and affection for Fairbanks drives them to join in the role of creating, developing, and perpetuating their assigned values for this community. Despite their differences, I discovered some common values and ways to work for them among my co-researchers.

They are sub-titled *Expectations for a Fairbanksan, Mentoring, Contributing*, and *Reinforcing through communication* under the title of *Creating an Ideal Community* because I discovered that these sub-themes are interconnected with creating and maintaining the values and norms in Fairbanks.

5.4.1 *Expectations for a Fairbanksan*

The first qualification and quality required to be a member of the Fairbanks community is *self-reliance*. Self-reliance is a prerequisite for surviving and adapting to this environment and the community. Only certain people who have a certain degree of self-reliance, independence, and living skills have an opportunity for further developing these aspects of their lives here. Otherwise, they do not or can not adapt or live here. This is why most people who come here leave soon.

The second condition is a norm of sharing, helping, and returning the support to other members of the community. Sometimes this norm is invisible and unspoken to the newcomers until they hear the related stories or have the experience themselves.
However, this basic norm is very firm and reinforced by many ways, such as communicatively sharing the direct and indirect experience. The most usual example is to help and to be helped when one has car problems. Often this norm of sharing is expressed by “we are all crazy, that’s why we live here.” Sharing even craziness illustrates that dependence on others is an affectionate joke among co-researchers and community members.

The third quality is a work hard and play hard attitude. This is important to keep the community members functioning and keep mental sanity because of the limited possible working time and playing time outside due to the climate and daylight restrictions. People emphasize their enjoyment of various amateur arts groups and encourage others to join them or to create other opportunities this community might not have yet.

The last quality is the accepting of the diverse cultural backgrounds and life styles. This is one of the most important parts of getting along with each other in this community because there are many diverse ethnicities, political opinions, religions, and life styles. As a whole, these often invisible and unwritten cultural and behavioral expectations and norms are utilized through the interaction with friends, old timers, hobby club members, long time residents, and neighbors.

5.4.2 Mentoring

The expectations of mentoring are demonstrated behaviorally by previous residents, long time residents, and Sourdoughs. In particular, Sourdoughs function as role models, reminding and connecting younger generations with the pioneers who lived
here in tougher and harsher conditions. Though Sourdoughs do complain about the more transient residents and lament the recent changes in the community, their simple habit of making jokes, and exaggerating their experiences, contribute to make people feel proud and special to be Alaskans. Those aforementioned seniors regarding their living experiences, set the certain expectation bars, and goals for possible accomplishment for the juniors. These seniors also show their knowledge regarding the environment and the community. They explain the meaning of unique and historical events such as the origin of Iditarod. They explain the significance of old buildings such as the Malamute Saloon. They also demonstrate their wisdom of adaptation to and living skills in this environment. Thus, they mentor and guide newer members of the community to adapt to this place and encourage their commitment to the Fairbanks community.

5.4.3 Contributing

Newcomers who have developed their affection, attachment, and commitment both to Fairbanks by their own experience and by the encouragement from others, begin to feel some responsibility to carry on the role of contributors to the community. Often, they begin or increase their involvement in the arts, in events, in outdoor sports, in volunteer work, and in various hobby groups. Some juniors are motivated to create new support groups and networks. People also contribute this role by talking the community news to their friends and classmates. They show their interest in and concern about the community by sharing the recent news or some important information.
5.4.4 Reinforcing through Communication

I have realized the essential role of communication as it is used to keep, maintain, and cultivate our community values through verbal and non-verbal communication among members. Prior to coming to this town, I heard about both its friendliness and the extreme coldness of weather from other people who I met in Anchorage and Denali Park, which motivated me to visit Fairbanks rather than returning to Anchorage in preparation for my next trip. I also heard about a lack of variety of goods and more expensive food. Likewise, both the residents in this community and visitors describe their impressions and experiences to insiders and outsiders. This is sharing important in order to attract new community members.

Residents’ or visitors’ talk functions slightly differently. Fairbanks residents exchange the necessary information for living here, confirm their affection and appreciation for Fairbanks, and strengthen the norms and commitment to the community. Visitors’ talk is more informational and short-term experience based.

Talking about the hardship and harshness of living in Fairbanks may be intimidating, screening some newcomers or visitors who are frightened away. At the same time, talking about the community life sets the norms and rules among the members and can also attract newcomers.

Most of my co-researchers admit to talking about or even bragging about being an Alaskan when they meet visitors or when they visit the lower 48. They often recall how the listeners’ reactions are different than the community members’ here. While Fairbanks community members see the others as “comrades” or “cool” when they boast
about their experience, people in the lower 48 people often consider Alaskan as either “adventurous,” or “losers” who fail to live in or find a job in the lower 48. In fact, sharing and laughing together while talking about their experiences of being treated as losers or failures among their friends and relatives in the lower 48, is one of the favorite topics Alaskans like to discuss and enjoy. On the other hand, another favorite topic, talking about the returning students from the lower 48 universities and ex-military families who were stationed here for a while and return, adds to Alaskans’ pride and our ability to look at each other as “cool.”

Various events such as Golden Days and the Iditarod offer the opportunity to strengthen the connection among community members, who both experience and talk about the events. Additionally, the iconic effect of old buildings such as Musher’s Hall and historical places such as Pioneer Park scattered in town facilitates communication. As a whole, talking with other members of the community such as the Sourdoughs or old-timers offers a learning opportunity and makes the residents feel proud, enforcing the expected norms to keep of being uniquely Alaskan or Fairbanksan.

In this section, I describe four main themes: Getting Away, Fascination and Challenge, Real Alaskan, and Creating the Ideal Community through meta-narrative analysis. Residents in the Fairbanks community move here for a variety of reasons such as job opportunity, study, transfer, adventure, changing life style, and enjoying the outdoors. Their intensity of motivations is also different. The most unique motives I found in this research are attraction to the people, to a unique nature, and to community culture, which then has led co-researchers decide to settle down here.
All of my co-researchers are fascinated by Alaska's unique natural beauty, by the friendliness of people in Fairbanks, and by a community culture that is not so tight and constrictive compared to their previous experiences. However, sooner or later, they experience the hardship caused by extreme weather conditions, different attitudes of various local people, and diverse social norms and expectations in the Fairbanks community. This stage is a challenging trial for new comers.

Through overcoming the hardships and acquiring the necessary living skills, my co-researchers learn the culture in this community. Newcomers begin to transform their identity in becoming real Alaskans. They value independence, mutual support, and self-reliance, persistence, accepting diversity, balanced life styles and being functional and practical. Their concept of the Fairbanks community is different in terms of their length of time living in the community. However, all of them are proud to be members of Fairbanks community; although each still recognizes the little circles and pockets of culture they belong to more closely. Their interpersonal relationships are also affected by their transformed identity. Their view about life regarding what's important, what's not important, and who they want to be, all have been changed or confirmed. In other words, their value system and identities were transformed by their living experience in this community.

Through their newly or confirmed realization of community value and love for the Fairbanks community culture, they try to keep the characteristics they value and appreciate. The members show different approaches to contributing to maintaining their pre-existing values and further, try to develop toward the direction of their ideal
community. There are many ways to achieve this goal such as talking about positive living experiences that they have had and have heard, contrasting the benefits they appreciate in this community culture to the lower 48, and being more actively involved in community activities.

5.5 Summary and Conclusions

This study is limited to living experience in Fairbanks community as expressed by people who moved here and decided to stay here as a resident by their own will. The qualification of the co-researchers is limited to people who have lived at least three years in Fairbanks since their move from the lower 48.

The goal of this research is to understand the living experience of the Fairbanks community and how co-researchers’ experience affects their identity. I adopted Constructionism as an epistemology for this research because I think this is the best fit for my research topic. In particular, I believe that everyone’s living experience that I pursue in this research is based on each individual’s perception, selection, and interpretation. I adopt Narrative Methodology because this methodology offers me the best access to what I am trying to understand in this research. In order to collect data, I utilized a Conversational Interview method, which allows me to delve into the co-researchers’ views and interpretations about their lived experience. This method is also effective in the sense that I can explore further my co-researchers’ meanings of their living experience through our mutual conversation.

Through the narrative analysis, I developed four primary emergent themes: *Getting Away*, *Fascination and Challenge*, *Real Alaskans*, and *Creating the Ideal Community*. In
the analysis section, I posit the relationship of these main themes as well as postulating how various sub-themes intertwined and interconnected to give a full picture of each main theme.

This research itself was a journey similar to the connections of main themes I have found through this research. I began my journey with a Mile Post of literature review. In the beginning stage of my journey, I was very excited and thrilled by my own experience, which was not written in a guidebook. However, in the middle of my research journey, I was challenged by many contradictory stories and views from my co-researchers. I became confused and frustrated. Only after being astray for a quite while in the abyss of the capta, could I begin to see the interconnections of meaning in the seemingly different and disconnected stories.

I realize how I personally came to feel comfortable in this community after many visits and living experience in different communities. Similarly to my co-researchers discovery, I too found my home in the Fairbanks community. The people of this community are independent and collective at the same time; the community culture is accepting of diversity without constricting and imposing its customs. The unique natural environment is amazingly beautiful and challenging. This community offers me everything I want to live as I am, what I am, and what I want to be. I feel a connection to nature, to other people, and to myself in this community.

At the end of this research journey, now I can understand the conclusion of Kate’s story from my childhood. Kate’s journey started in her search for a medicine her best friend K. K got crazy because of a piece of devil’s shattered mirror came into his eyes.
After being attracted to a distant land far to the north that is sparkling and shiny, Kate had to go through many trials and hardships. Then she met the queen of the snow, the only person who had a medicine to cure K. Kate was disappointed when she got the icicle rather than medicine from the queen. However, thanks to her learning to respect and trust others through her harsh journey, she followed the queen’s instruction of the way to give it to K. When she returned to her home, she reflected sunshine on the icicle toward K’s eye. The brightly amplified sunshine melted the piece of the devil’s mirror in K’s eyes, and then he became normal and returned to being a best friend to Kate, just as he used to be.

Kate’s journey started with the estrangement of her identity, symbolized by her other self, K. Through her search for a way of integrating her confused self, she had opportunities to be exposed to new environments and people. She was helped and helped others during the harsh journey. She felt frozen in her flimsy clothing in the snow land. At last, when she met the snow queen, she had to accept a different solution than she expected to get. Her intention and effort to help and save K was in fact saving herself. Finally, her damaged, divided selves integrated into one. Her identity was transformed.

As in most fairy tales, this story stops here as a happy ending, “happily ever after.”

Until now, the underlying structure is similar to the adaptation model regarding immigrants who come to a new culture, adapt, and feel comfortable in the host culture. The criteria of successful adaptation to the host culture are judgments of the degree of this final integration state. This model does not allow newcomers involvement in creating new culture through their contribution. However, the Fairbanks community
changes the story because of four main characteristics of the lived experience of this community: a large in-and-out population fluctuation, their choice to come, unique social culture and norm based on the combination of strong independence and cooperation, not tightly formed social rules and cliques, and ideally valued Frontier Spirit, and less influence from the main stream American culture caused by the great geographical distance. So, the journey of the members in the Fairbanks community is ongoing toward creating a better community unlike the finalized "happily ever after." We, Fairbanksan, Alaskans are still metaphorically digging the permafrost ground to find a gold nugget.

5.6 Discussion of Lived Experience Analysis

Riesman (1993) delineates five steps in order to achieve representation of experience: attending to experience, recording a telling about experience, transcribing the recordings, analyzing, and reading [by reader or audience as a written form]. (pp. 9-15) The first three phases are addressed in the previous chapters. I very carefully transcribed my own data tapes adding significant interpretive information (non verbal expression) as I transcribed. I followed saturated listening and reading process prior to the final analysis stage. Mishler (1986) proffers "an accurate description, the basic requirement for reliable and valid analysis and interpretation, depends on tape recordings and careful transcription of interviews" (p. 138). In this section, I will unfold the process as an interpretative one from the perspective of myself as a researcher.

Polkinghorne (1988) defines the purpose of descriptive narrative research as "to produce an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organization meaningful" (pp.
161-162). He emphasizes the necessity of making up the interpretive construction of new narrative based on the existing narratives that were told by the co-researchers. (p. 162).

Riessman (1993) also points out the researcher’s unavoidable task as a representational decision-maker for the narrative analysis based on the stories collected from the interviewees. (p. 8)

Thus, the researcher reconstructs a new re-presentational narrative from the collected capta. In the same context, Mishler (1986) suggests the role of the researcher as an analyst to be aware of the stories of the co-researcher as forms of their claiming of self-identity. The analyst then focuses on searching the underneath meaning related to the story teller’s identity throughout the story. (pp. 233-255)

My first step in the final analysis begins with my examining of the stories retained in the fluid, oral form of the tapes as well as in the transformed written form (transcription) created by the researcher. I paid special attention to recognizing the main, overriding, holistic unity among stories by adopting Polkinghorne’s (1988) suggestion, that “the researcher first tries to discern if there is a single, overriding story that gives a unity and wholeness to the events of that” experience (p. 166). Through examining the capta carefully for the similarities and dissimilarities of content, I began to discern and represent meaning, which became first various sub-themes such as The Cold, The Challenge, The Daylight, The Spirituality, and The Mentoring. Then I examined the relationships among these sub-themes. I could determine that some of the sub-themes were more closely related to each other than the others. For example, I realized that the sub-themes of The Challenge, The Daylight, and The Cold were related to each other
closely in terms of expressions of hardships. These sub-themes clearly support the overarching theme of *The Challenges*. However I also realized these sub-themes support the exciting, positive aspects of committing to place. Its double-edged nature led me to include these sub-themes under the umbrella of one of the main themes, *The Fascination and the Challenge*.

By deriving the meaning of the stories from capta, specifying them as sub-themes, and examining the relationships among the sub-themes, I found that there are four main themes. Polkinghorne (1988) posits the importance of plot for narratives. He says that "there is no single typology or system of categories to describe plots" and he indicates "the way in which an array of plots is divided appears to depend on the particular perspective of the researcher or the interest of the discipline" (p. 167). Based on my perspective of the perspective of the Communication discipline, and the theory of Social Construction of Reality I adopted for this research, I looked for a possible plot to connect these main themes as a coherent, whole story, which can be read easily by my readers. My identity as a traveler, adventurer, explorer, and immigrant are essential to my perception of these main themes from a conception of place developed over a life time of traveling. My own story fit the plot and connected these main themes from the perspective of a transformation of identity and its metaphor here of the journey. I interpreted the four main themes as preparation for and expectations of the journey, experiencing the new world, embracing the attractions and confronting the challenges that affect changing the worldview and identity of the travelers, and the subsequent behavioral changes due to the newly acquired community identity. Then I adopted more
symbolic and metaphorical titles for each main theme based on each theme's content in order to make more sense as a coherent traveling plot to readers.


All these Communication theories focus on the communication as the main locus of constructing various levels of identity. However, I particularly focus on the "communal layer" which describes how "common group characteristics and history function to form the contents of the group's identities" (Hecht, Warren, Jung, and Krieger, 2005, p. 263). This view helped me to integrate the main themes. The identity of the communal layer was the most frequently repeated in the capta when my co-researchers describe their identity changes since living in the Fairbanks community.
From the careful, final re-examination of the capta, I discovered the importance of this common layer of identity as the place where my co-researchers experienced, appreciated, and valued the shared common characteristics as community members. Recognizing that the stories my co-researchers told regarding community identity as a significant, self-recognized change in their thinking, were stories refined in multiple, previous telling, I used probing questions directed toward revealing the experience of previous “storying” of that experience. I found that my co-researchers had often discussed “becoming Alaskan” and/or “becoming a member of the Fairbanks community.” Family, friends, and acquaintances are evidently curious about the choice to stay and make a life in Fairbanks so my co-researchers had indeed constituted their membership identity in considerable communicative interaction before this research. The communal layer of identity, then, was the foundation for co-researchers establishing a common, collective group identity as members of the Fairbanks community.

The first main theme, The Getting Away was the initial stage of moving to the Fairbanks community. Although most of the co-researchers did not immediately experience the significant change in their identity at the communal level, their personal, emotional levels of identity was stirred and roused to consciousness, which could be the base line regarding the following experience in changing their communal level of identity. Most of them described and delineated their cognitive, informational, emotional reactions and preparation. At this point in the co-researchers’ narratives only Jane mentioned community identity.
The second main theme, *The Fascination and Challenge*, is the stage that most co-researchers pointed out their conscious experience of community identity. However, they did not extensively develop this level except recognizing their appreciation of being part of a community collective and enjoying support from other members of the Fairbanks community. In the fascination phase, they were attracted to the benefits of being close to nature, and finding the accepting attitude in the community regarding the diverse ethnicity, life styles, and political views. Through experiencing the hardships of the uniquely harsh environment in the Fairbanks community, my co-researchers realized the necessity and importance of the mutual support and connection developed in order for members of the community to survive in this environment. Thus, the second main theme covers their lived experiences through related episodes and stories to the exciting and challenging difficulties with which they had to cope. Although capta shows that frequent appreciation of collective support and community values, there are also plenty of assertions in assuring the importance and existence of a personal level of independent and individualistic identity. In this stage, my co-researchers are in an ambivalent state between a typical and traditional American attitude, which values the individual, independent identity and a newly conscious appreciation of the necessity, and the value of community membership and its associated identity.

The third main theme, *Becoming a Real Alaskan*, describes how co-researchers overcome this identity tension, each in their own way, and how they achieved a newly transformed identity, which integrated both personal and communal layers without the experience of conflict. I discovered that there is a comfortable balance and integration in
the conflict between the personal layer and common layer of identity. As Philipsen's (1976) description of the construct of speech community, in which “the attention paid to participants’ use of, and meaning attributed to, the spaces and places they frequent” (cited in Milburn, 2004, p. 421), emerged as an important part of each co-researcher’s identity. As Philipsen (1976) mentions “the commonality of a culture in a speech community” influenced each co-researcher as a member of a common spoken culture in the Fairbanks community. These common aspects of symbols, meanings, norms, and expectations pertaining to the Fairbanks community begin to increasingly affect each co-researcher’s interdependence as a member of community. In particular the talk ritual of commonality (as a community member in the harsh Fairbanks environment) contributed to the developing of “a cultural code of speaking,” which consists in “a socially constructed and historically transmitted system of symbols and meaning pertaining to communication” (Philipsen, cited in Milburn, 2004, p. 8). This is the stage in which different dimensions of identity affect each other and reshape each co-researcher’s entire self-concept.

Philipsen (1976) describes this as: “personal identity, social reality, and social action [all] constituted in-created, negotiated, and transformed, as well as reflected in the communicative conduct of which speaking is a part” (p. 15).

The fourth main theme, Creating an Ideal Community, addresses the strengthening of each co-researcher’s community identity. Each recalls her or his attempts to begin to contribute to the Fairbanks community, motivated by their newly developed appreciation of the people and place of Fairbanks, Alaska. Through more active participation, such as volunteer works or support groups for the needy of the community, each co-researcher
develops and strengthens further the new sense of their community identity. This is also implemented by increased communicative interaction with other community members regarding the topic of the Fairbanks community.

As a whole, I discovered that community identity emerged and developed since the co-researchers’ living experience in the Fairbanks community. Then the newly developed community identity affected the personal and interpersonal dimensions of identity. These three dimensions are interconnected and interactive. Through ongoing, interactive communicative relationship with other community members, each co-researcher redefine, negotiate, and reconstruct their self-identity. In particular, the community identity is a significant part as a core basis for members of Fairbanks community. This dialectical relationship between personal level and community level identity is also characterized by its changing, dynamic aspect regarding achieving the balance. In other words, a community identity is Co-created (Hecht et al. 2003) and negotiated through development of an interpersonal relationship (Cupach and Imahori, 2005) among the Fairbanks community members.

As a result, most of the co-researchers showed “the feeling of being understood, the feeling of being respected, and the feeling of being affirmative” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 228) from other members of the community. Most importantly, most of the co-researchers showed shifted loci of identity form an individual’s psyche to a more relational, community interaction as Carbaugh proffers the social identity “contingent upon particular cultural orientations or social structural positions with the life of a society” (p. 22). The members of the Fairbanks community realize the importance of
other members. Shotter (1989) describes this as "the way in which we are created as the individuals we are by others around us" (p.144).

The unique geographical and natural environment in the Fairbanks community functions as Orbe’s (1998) "shared oppression," which forms a strong alliance among shared identity among group members. This geographical and natural environment does not belong to Allen’s (2004) eight main categories for classifying groups of people: skin color, gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, and age.

In conclusion, I have learned and confirmed that Fairbanks community members perceive community identity and sense of place differently since their living in the Fairbanks community. The community members create new sense of community identity, assign different meanings on it. Then they value their community based on their changed identities. All this process and transformation happens through communicational interaction among the community members. Through this research, I verified the value of the theory of Social Construction of Reality and Identity by exploring the jointly created community identity and the sense of place.

5.7 Implications for Future Research

This research offers a unique view in understanding the lived experienced community identity and its learned association through a sense of place. This piece can complement the quantitative research regarding these same topics, which is often focused on a different level of experience. Particular lived experience can put a face on the statistical findings of social science.
A limitation of the research is that most of my co-researchers are related to academia directly or indirectly except one. It might have been more fruitful, that is, my story might have been different, if I had included more diverse co-cultural groups such as persons from the military or from the Two Rivers community where many dog-mushers and farmers live.
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