

# Metamorphosis Experience

## Abstract

This paper explores the major change or metamorphosis people have experienced in their lives. Using a mixed methodology of narrative, phenomenology and Glaserian grounded theory, this paper investigates on how our participants have encountered these major changes, how they have acted on them and what these experiences meant to them. In this paper, we report on data and our findings based on collaborative coding from the responses of seven participants recruited from the general public. We address our key findings and compare them with previous relatable studies. We also discuss the limitations of our research, the potential applications of these findings and suggestions on further research.

## Introduction

This paper investigates people's metamorphosis experiences for emerging themes and findings. Our initial research question is: *what significant change, or metamorphosis, have people experienced in their lives?* We leveraged Glaserian grounded theory to discover our findings through evidence and comments provided directly by our participants'. In this paper we will address the four key themes that emerged from our data, including a. cross-cultural encounter, b. identity seeking, c. self acceptance and d. the choice of internalizing and acting on a major life change. We then discuss the limitations of our study. We cross reference these emerging things with relatable studies to contextualize our study, and conclude the paper by suggesting potential values and applications of our study for future research and design associated with cross-cultural themes.

What is known	What this study adds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Metamorphosis, or major change is a common human experience.</li><li>• An existing paper suggests cross-cultural encounter as an opportunity for personal growth.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explores potential reasons for and effects of metamorphosis that might not be easily revealed through quantitative study</li><li>• Elaborates on some of the arguments and statements found in the research paper about cross-cultural encounters</li></ul>

Table 1. What is known and what this study adds

## Background

Metamorphosis points to the process of transformation through a major life change and this has been an area of inquiry in classical biology and psychology. Both Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud were concerned with research that understands what drives behavior and development changes in animals and humans, respectively (Marcaggi, 2018). For Darwin, metamorphosis would be motivated by leveraging an evolutionary biological advantage, and for Freud, metamorphosis is motivated by latent desires and anxieties wanting to be expressed by

unconsciously bubbling to the surface. However, this study's purpose isn't to prove these theories of motivations. Rather, this study seeks to understand how people experience major changes in their lives through the stories that they tell about them.

We believe story can provide a compelling and powerful way to frame and understand experience for both the storyteller and the story listener. We also feel that storytelling would illuminate the process of transformation and personal growth in the individual. This type of inquiry through storytelling is becoming common practice:

"The study of stories people tell about their lives is no longer a promising new direction for the future of personal psychology. Instead, personal narratives and the life story has arrived. In the first decade of the 21st century, narrative approaches to personality have moved to the center of the discipline." (McAdams, 2008)

Change and growth are themes that have been widely explored and described in stories of ancient literature, and also embraced in popular culture. Western literature has attempted to describe metamorphosis in famous tomes like *The Odyssey* by Homer, *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carol, or *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka.

Our inspiration comes from popular culture through the metamorphosis themed Netflix show called "Queer Eye". The show has five make-over specialists that tell their personal stories of struggles with growth as the means to build trust and connection with their guests on the show. Considerations in creating trust and connection with our participants was a key aspect in selecting appropriate methodology and methods for our research subject outlined below.

## Methodology and Methods

### Recruitment and Demographics

We recruited our participants by reaching out to our friends, neighbors and fellow students. Our only requirement for the participants was that they were willing to share at least one major change experience that occurred in their lives. The following table shows a summary of the demographics of our participants. Each participant # maps to one individual.

Age range	Participant #
18-19	2
20-29	1, 5, 6
30-39	7
60-69	3, 4

Gender	Participant #
Female	4, 5, 7
Male	1, 2, 3, 6

Table 2. Gender and Age Distribution of Participants

### Methodology

The methodology we adopted for our research is a mix of "Narrative", "Phenomenological " and "Glaserian Grounded Theory". Our research question roots fundamentally in a common human

experience. Therefore we think Narrative and Phenomenological methodologies would allow us to immerse ourselves in the stories of our participants. Furthermore, Glaserian Grounded Theory provides a powerful, iterative way for us to immerse in all data and conceptualize. We discovered our key findings and conceptualized our theories completely based on the participants' direct sentences that grabbed our attention. Hence we deployed a combination of all three methodologies.

## Methods

Our participant's flow is shown below:

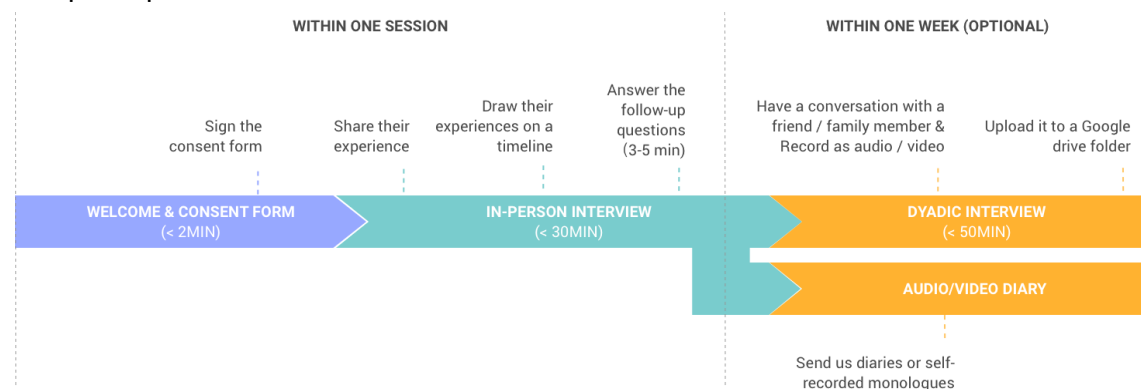


Figure 1. Participant flow

**In-person Interview:** We first recorded in-person interviews with all seven participants for no more than half an hour each.

**Dyadic Interview:** We conducted dyadic interviews on two pairs of our participants (P1 and P2, P3 and P4). Dyadic interviews allow participants to stimulate ideas off of each other that might not have been remembered by themselves (Morgan, et al. 2013). Thus we believe this method allows us to acquire richer data for grounded theory.

**Narration:** The majority of the data we collected came in the form of narrations about the participants' own metamorphosis experiences.

**Drawing the Experience:** During the interview sessions we handed the participants blank sheets of paper for them to draw their experiences on a timeline, or anything they have in mind.

## Analysis

The analysis was done through Glaserian Grounded Theory. We immersed ourselves into the raw data by listening or watching the interviews repeatedly over a few days. After immersion we identified the most interesting "grabs" based on our own views and experience, and performed debriefing together to find emerging themes. We performed literature reviews on these emerging themes for relatable experiences and conceptualization.

## Findings

### 1. Cross-culture encounter

One key insight surfaced from our interview sessions, is that most of our participants mentioned a cross-cultural encounter when they were discussing their metamorphosis experience. P1 mentioned his pursuit of college education enabled him to move from Seattle to Los Angeles and it exposed him to an unfamiliar environment where people held beliefs other than where his family came from. P6 said that he moved from Mainland China to Singapore for high school and college, and came to the U.S. for graduate studies. This triggered him to adapt quickly for life changes. P7 also mentioned that she moved from Palestine to the U.S., and she willingly adopted a new set of cultural standards for women with vocation.

In addition, P2 mentioned he came to the U.S. from Vietnam when he was 3 years old and he had a struggle to deal with his remote family members who are more established in the American culture.

*“My (major) change is allowing a stigma to overwhelm me, the stigma of not belonging in this country, not speaking the English language, and not being one of the dominant American culture.”*  
-- P2

P3 and P4 talked about how it was a cultural shock experience for them when they travelled to Burma, (Myanmar) and learned the drastic political and cultural differences.

We found these evidence suggest positively on some of the views and statements in the “Cross-cultural encounter as an opportunity for personal growth” paper, which we will discuss in the discussion section.

### 2. Identity Seeking

One theme emerged from the interview is how metamorphosis is associated with self-identity seeking, discovery, and reflection. Participants going through a series of life changes reflected in the interview that they have experienced a shift in the perceptions toward their self-identities. Those changes may initially bring struggles and confusions, but over time some participants mitigate those struggles by integrating into the new cultural environment or gradually obtain a higher level of self-acceptance through interactions with others in active self-discovery.

*“When you start to expose yourself to other people and open your mind, it’s like a ball that never stops, it keeps rolling and never stops.”* -- P1

New identity can emerge when participants went through changing environments. In particular, travel and living abroad was mentioned as a key driver in enabling change to occur. For example, for P1, going to college away from home freed them from traditional family expectations.

*“I’m the one in my family that really branched out, I feel like a child of the world.”* --P1

This freedom, that P1 described as “breaking the bubble”, allowed P1 to choose to come out as queer and join campus queer social group. For P3, witnessing of the human rights violations

while traveling in Burma prompted a shift into volunteer work in refugee camps in Burma and assistance organizations in the U.S. “It gave me a purpose I didn’t know I had.”

### 3. Self acceptance

Another key theme surfaced from the interview was how discomfort and shame towards one’s own identity shifted towards more acceptance over time. Those discomfort and shame may stem from unfamiliar environments, lack of inner mental power, or mainstream social expectations. Though struggled initially, over time our participants were able to gradually accept their self-identities.

During the interview, P2 drew an eye on a piece of paper, which we believe indicates that he is viewing his identities through either his own or others’ eyes. He mentioned that after him sharing his experience with others, he realized that he could accept his Vietnamese identity while keeping the American immigrant identity. The acceptance allowed him to view the world from two different lenses and encourage him to help those with similar backgrounds and whose voices are often neglected by the society.

The acceptance of self-identity may also come from the exploration of one’s inner world. Participant #5 (P5) shared her story as a person who “steps outside of the social routine”:

*“Almost everyone I know that’s at my age are married and have children, or are very advanced in their careers, and I am neither of those things. So I felt ashamed for a long time about not doing the right things at the right time.” -- P5*

In spite of feeling shame for a long time, over time the participant #5 were able to shift her attention from the outside world and others to the inner world of herself.

*“After lots of practice of listening to myself, I’ve come to understand how to connect with and draw from my inner sources.” -- P5*

By really focusing on what she wants internally, P5 eventually accepts her identity and views it as a manifestation of unique experience, allowing her to be able to step outside of the social routine and take her own path.

### 4. The choice of internalizing and acting on a major life change

Another key theme emerged from the interview was participants’ ability to view internalizing and acting upon major life changes as opportunities for self-growth.

Reflecting upon his major life change, P2 said ever since he discovered and embraced his AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) identity, he has been using his story to inspire and uplift other people in the young AAPI community. He mentioned in the interview that he is in a constant journey continually discovering who he is, so change is inevitable for him. However, whether or not acting on those changes is a personal choice.

*“ Change is inevitable but growth is a choice” -- P2*

P3 and P4 talked about how the political persecution they witnessed in Burma has impacted them so much that they felt like they had to share their stories to others. Instead of being

indifferent to the change, they chose to process and act on the change in their known cultural environment by reaching out to Burmese political refugees in Seattle.

*“So the way that same experience can be both the change we choose and to witness change that is imposed upon you.....” -- P3*

*“I think that change will always happen to us. It doesn't mean we will actually change within ourselves, we may not completely change our perspective on something.” -- P4*

We found that how participants reported internalizing changes can to some extent be explained by how people internalize new perspectives, which we'll discuss more in the discussion section.

## Limitations

We only recruited participants through our peer groups for easy access, thus we might have not been able to achieve fully diversified sampling. We might get interesting insights from people who we do not know. Also if we have adopted a wider range of methodologies, such as fly on the wall observations or video diary, we may find interesting progression of metamorphosis within a period of time or more corroborating evidence on new findings. We are also limited by our experience in doing ground theory, hence we are not sure our findings have reached the full richness of the entirety of the data that we gathered.

## Discussions

Cross-culture encounter became the first emerging theme of our paper, since it appears to be a common trigger to the metamorphosis experiences for some of our participants. We find this phenomena elaborates on the view that cross-culture encounter poses an opportunity for personal growth (Montuori & Fahim, 2004, p243). Certain aspects of our own culture and our cultural patterns are quite hidden and invisible to us. We too often take them for granted as we were born and raised from it (Montuori & Fahim, 2004, p245-246). Therefore the life metamorphosis described by our participants should be viewed as a result of the loss of a familiar frame of references, when they encountered a new culture and had to reexamine what their own culture had planted in them.

Identity seeking is another dominant theme, as most participants associated metamorphosis with self-identity seeking as they were reflecting upon the major life changes. Identity change often occurs when one's identity, whether social, role, or biosocial individual, is challenged in a situation (Cantwell & Martini, 2010). The metamorphosis experiences our participants described posed a challenge to their original identity, and motivated them to enrich and expand their identity. For example with P2, by drawing on an expanded sense of identity, he became more accepting of his original family and culture, socially engaged and willing to support others with similar challenges.

Our last finding, internalizing and acting upon major life changes, can be linked to the internalization process of a new perspective. The change in identity, value and personality trait is internalized not through passive exposure, but by becoming involved in the activity relevant to the change (Wicklund & Brehm, 2007). Our participants chose to internalize the changes that happened in their lives by becoming active with respect to those changes, whether it being discovering new identity or shifting personal values.

## Summary

In summary, our study was able to gather insights from participants about how they experience metamorphosis and discover emerging themes. Regarding real-life implication, institutional products, programs and interventions designed with cross-cultural experience in mind can leverage our study to help people, such as new immigrants, minorities, etc., to gain more understanding and acquire mental well-being through their metamorphosis experience. As mentioned in our limitation, further research can look into the progression of metamorphosis within a certain timeframe. Since metamorphosis is likely to be a universal human experience, we expect that more interesting findings will arise if future research is done with samples from more diversified backgrounds.

## Reference

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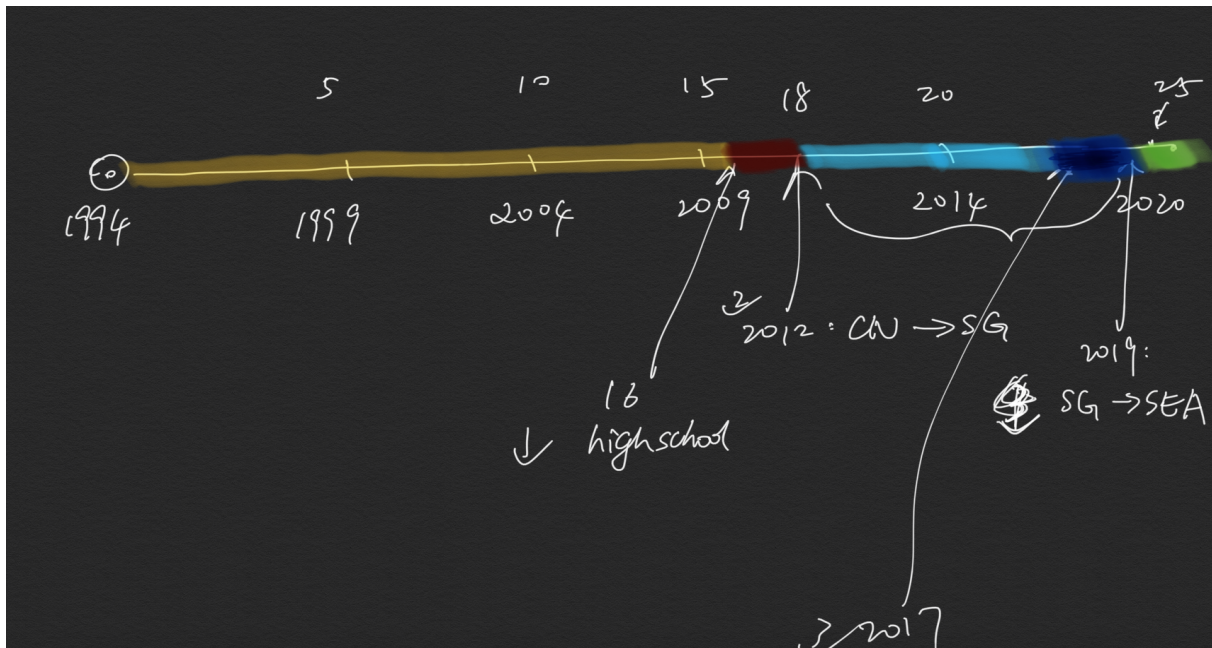
## Appendix

**Candice's** contribution was recruiting P5 and P6 and conducted an in-person interview with each of them. She was the co-author of the personal identity seeking entry and limitation, and the author of the self acceptance entry. She also creates the participant flow chart.

**Joey's** contribution was recruiting P1 & P2 and co-conducted the in-person and dyadic interview with Kevin. He worked on the initial draft of the final report, presentation and most of the previous assignments. He authored the abstract, introduction, and the discussion around the cultural encounter theme.

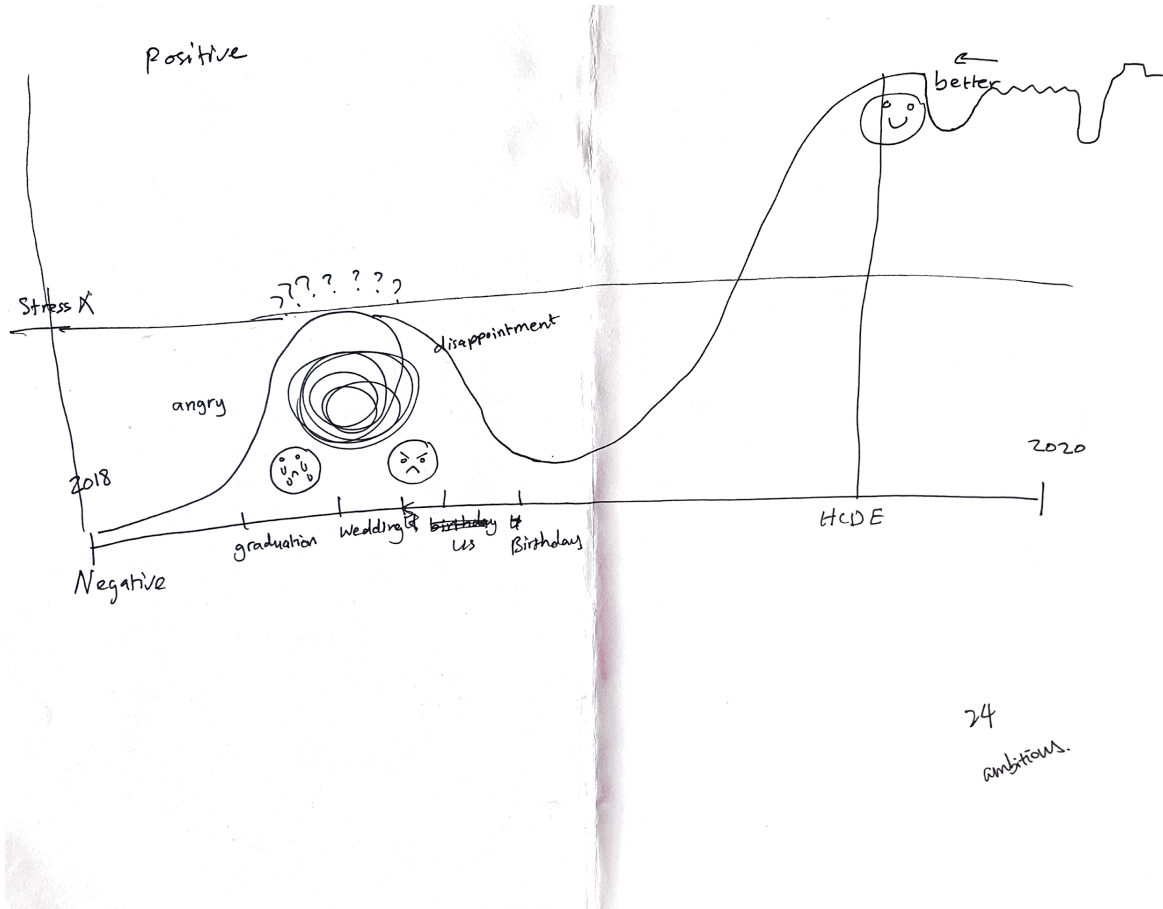
**Kevin's** contribution was recruiting and interviewing his neighbors as P3 and P4. Kevin also recorded and immersed in two dyadic interviews. He compiled an [dyadic interview highlight reel](#) and created [a video for the final presentation](#). He also was the author of the background final paper entries and co-author of the personal identity seeking entry.

**Yanyu's** contribution was recruiting P7 and conducted an in-person interview with this participant. She was the author of the finding about internalizing and acting upon changes, and the co-author of the discussion.



Appendix Figure 1. Drawing from P6





Appendix Figure 2. Drawing from P7

[Final Presentation Video](#)

[Dyadic Interview Highlight Reel](#)