The Experiences of Married International Graduate Students and Their Accompanying Non-Student Spouses in the US Culture: A Qualitative Study

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THE EXPERIENCES OF MARRIED INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
AND THEIR ACCOMPANYING NON-STUDENT SPOUSES
IN THE U.S. CULTURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Adriana Yellig

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Advisor: Gary Bischof, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 2010
THE EXPERIENCES OF MARRIED INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR ACCOMPANYING NON-STUDENT SPOUSES IN THE U.S. CULTURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Adriana Yellig, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2010

Many studies document the experiences of single international students in the U.S. culture. However, little is known about the experiences of married international students, their marital relationships, and the experiences of their accompanying non-student spouses in the U.S. culture.

This qualitative phenomenological study focused on the experiences of married international graduate students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture. Additionally, the study explored the impact of cultural influences on the participants’ marital relationships, as well as the impact of marriage on their adjustment to the culture.

The study included twenty participants (ten couples) from a range of countries, most from Asia and Africa. Interviews were conducted with each participant individually followed by a conjoint interview with each couple, for a total of thirty interviews.

The findings of the study suggest that married international graduate students and their accompanying spouses’ experiences are impacted by cultural factors in the following areas: (1) interpersonal relationships; (2) Americans’ attitudes toward
marriage; (3) academic environment; (4) parenting practices; (5) community organizational structures; and (6) physical environment. Balancing multiple roles appears to be the most salient challenge for married international graduate students. Developing a strong social support network and evaluating the host culture to identify characteristics that should be thwarted or potentially integrated were some of the coping mechanisms cited.

Homesickness, loneliness, and role shock were some of the most significant challenges experienced by the accompanying spouses (including two males) in the study, particularly for those who had an established professional identity beforehand. Key coping strategies for accompanying spouses include setting personal goals and engaging in a process of meaning-making.

Increased closeness in the marital relationship and a tendency to guard against negative cultural influences were some of the themes that emerged from the participants’ responses. Recommendations based on the findings are offered for counselor educators, college counselors, and student affairs professionals.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to acknowledge the people in my life who have helped me become the person that I am today. In the next few paragraphs I would like to mention some of the persons who have impacted my professional and personal development. I would also like to apologize to those who are important people in my life but whom I failed to include.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Elena and Ilie Dumitrascu, for their unconditional love and support throughout the years, for providing me with safety and
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Last but not least, I would like to express my appreciation for all the participants in this study. Not only have you welcomed me into your homes, you also shared with me joys and sorrows, and trusted me with the handling of these very private issues. I feel privileged for having had the opportunity to meet you, learn from you, and grow a little bit wiser as a result of this encounter.

Adriana Yellig
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

During the 2008-2009 academic year, international student enrollment represented 3.7% of the total United States (U.S.) higher education enrollment, for a total of 671,616 international students studying at various academic institutions in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2009). Over the past 30 years, total international student enrollment has steadily increased from 286,343 in 1979 to 671,616 in 2009. In 1977, approximately 75% of the international student population was male. Currently, more female international students join institutions of higher education in the U.S., reflected in an increased enrollment rate for this population (from 25% in 1977-1978 to 44.4% in 2004-2005 academic year) (Institute of International Education, 2005). During the 2003-2004 academic year, of the total number of international undergraduate students, 4.9% were married, and of the total number of international graduate students, 22.5% were married (Institute of International Education, 2005).

As indicated above, each year a large number of international students enter the United States for educational purposes. The contact with the new culture, however, often results in some form of difficulty, including language barriers, lack of a support system, homesickness, and lack of familiarity with the American instructional system (Lin & Ivey, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Although universities hosting international students take
steps to minimize these difficulties, the new culture poses real challenges to those who experience it for the first time. These difficulties are known in the cross-cultural literature as “cultural shock,” “a multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture” (Winkelman, 1994, p. 121).

The phenomenon of cultural shock appears to be a normal phase in the process of adjusting to a new culture (Winkelman, 1994). However, at least temporarily, it causes a series of symptoms and psychological distress for those who experience it. Language barriers appear to be the most challenging issues for the majority of international students (Mori, 2000). Along with language barriers, cross-cultural differences in social interaction appear to prevent international students from forming close relationships with American students, thus increasing their emotional and psychological distress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Two of the most critical factors which appear to be responsible for the distress experienced by international students are social connectedness and social support network satisfaction (Yeh & Inose, 2003). These two factors are thoroughly addressed in Chapter II, the literature review portion of this dissertation.

The cross-cultural literature documents primarily the experience of single international students with culture shock. However, a significant percentage of graduate international students (22.5%) are married (Institute for International Education, 2005). Given the increased need for social connectedness upon contact with the new culture, it has been proposed that marriage may provide for basic interpersonal and emotional needs that may lessen the effects of stressful events (Sweatman, 1999). Moreover, the quality of the marital relationship appears to be a mediating factor in the experience of culture shock. The higher the levels of marital satisfaction, the lower the symptoms of depression
and anxiety linked to cultural shock. A study conducted with missionary workers
documented that marriage acts as a stress moderator, magnifying or minimizing the stress
caused by the contact with the new culture (Sweatman, 1999). The experience of married
international students may be similar to that of missionary workers; however, an
extensive literature search provided little evidence in this regard. Little is known about
the mechanisms by which marriage impacts the experience of international students
transitioning to the host culture and the ways in which the transition to the host culture
impacts the marital relationship.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of married international
graduate students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture. The study revealed
how participants who are part of a marital relationship experience the host culture and the
types of adjustments they make while transitioning to the new culture.

The purpose of this research was twofold: to capture the individual experiences of
married international graduate students and their non-student accompanying spouses in
the U.S. culture, as well as to explore the ways in which the marital relationship is
influenced by the new culture and influences adjustment to the culture. Furthermore, the
study aided in the understanding of this cultural transition, helped inform future research
done with married international graduate students and their non-student accompanying
spouses, and identified some of the areas of need to assist in the development of suitable
programs for these populations.
Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What do married international graduate students studying in the U.S. and their accompanying spouses experience at the contact with the new culture?
2. How is the marital relationship influenced by the experience in the host culture?
3. How does the marital relationship influence the experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture?

Delineation of the Research

The literature review reported in the next chapter illustrates that the phenomenon of cultural shock has been widely researched. The experiences of immigrants and international students with foreign cultures have been described in the writings of many researchers. However, there seems to be limited information regarding the experiences of married international students in the U.S. culture. There are even fewer studies documenting the experiences of married international graduate students.

Further, the experiences of international students’ accompanying spouses, the often “invisible” participants in the new culture, appear to have been neglected in the professional literature. It appears this population experiences the greatest amount of cultural shock compared with international students, given the potential lack of personal fulfillment in the new culture. Thus, designing a study which included the voices of this invisible population seemed worthwhile.
Many of the researchers examining the experiences of sojourners (a term used for individuals coming from another culture who are in a host culture for a limited period of time) with host cultures have dealt with the topic quantitatively. Very few studies have approached the topic qualitatively. In addition, the majority of the studies exploring the effects of culture shock on sojourners’ marital relationships have been treated quantitatively. The researcher was able to locate one qualitative study which focused specifically on the international student spouses’ experiences (De Verthelyi, 1995).

**Importance of the Study**

This study attempted to enrich the area of marriage and family relations and serve to better inform those who work in the areas of multicultural counseling and student affairs in higher education. It also provided a new look at an old construct like cultural shock by considering the influences of the culture on the marital relationships of international students and their spouses. The findings may inform the development of specific program services designed to assist international students and their spouses in the process of adjusting to new cultures. By including couples comprised of a student spouse and an accompanying non-student spouse, findings from this study increased understanding of the challenges faced by the “invisible” population (i.e., accompanying spouses). Therefore, this study sought to address the needs of a population that has been largely neglected by the professional literature.

In contrast to other similar studies that have focused on the experiences of single international students, this study focused on both individual experiences of participants as well as their marital relationships. There are definite benefits to exploring the marital
relationship of international students and their spouses, as marital satisfaction appears to play an important role in the overall adjustment to new cultures (Sweatman, 1999). Additionally, only graduate students were included in this study.

The importance of this study also relates to the research methodology used. The literature about international students has raised some concerns regarding quantitative methodology which may lead to stereotypical assumptions about international students (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

In an attempt to provide an accurate image of common issues faced by international students and generalize the findings, the cross-cultural literature fails to understand the uniqueness of issues and circumstances experienced by international students (Arthur, 2004). Qualitative methodologies using instruments such as semi-structured interviews are useful tools for focusing on a specific issue, “while allowing the unique experiences of international students to be heard” (Arthur, 2004, p. 124). The present qualitative study attempted to capture the uniqueness of the phenomenon of transitioning to the U.S. culture for married couples by giving voice to the international graduate students and their spouses, and added to the existing body of cross-cultural literature by providing an in-depth look at an issue that has been primarily researched using quantitative methodologies.

**Definition of Terms**

*Culture shock* is a multifaceted experience caused by the numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture (Winkelman, 1994). The phenomenon is often experienced as a transitional crisis, characterized by feelings of inadequacy and
depression. To overcome this crisis, the newcomer identifies new adaptive behaviors, instrumental in the process of adjusting to the new culture.

*Cultural adaptation* refers to the repertoire of behaviors employed by the participant in the new culture to overcome cultural shock. It is a process of recovery and of learning, “a step-by-step psychological journey from the fringes to the center of a foreign culture, from a state of denial and ignorance to a state of understanding and empathy” (Anderson, 1994, p. 295). Behaviors such as mastering the language, developing a strong social support network, and actively participating in the new culture ultimately lead to cultural adaptation.

The term *international student* denotes the status of any individual who leaves his or her country of origin to pursue undergraduate or graduate studies in a foreign country. Other terms used are *newcomer, sojourner, and participant in the new culture*. The term *sojourner* has been used at times to refer to groups of international students and their spouses, military personnel, business managers, missionaries, and so forth. Sojourners are those individuals relocating to a host culture for a limited period of time, not less than a year (Navara & James, 2002).

For the purposes of this study, the term *accompanying spouses* designate those individuals married to international students and sharing the same nationality. This group of sojourners are joining their student spouses but are not allowed to work by the U.S. government and do not fulfill a specific role in the host culture.

Another term frequently used in this paper is *marital relationship*. For the purposes of this study, marital relationship refers to the relational dynamics of
international students and their spouses of the opposite sex who are bound by a marital contract.

Summary

Chapter I has introduced the background of the study regarding the phenomenon of cultural shock and its documented impact on marital relationship of international students and their spouses, as well as the role of marital relationship in the experience with cultural shock. The chapter also addresses the purpose of the study and its significance, identifies the research questions, and provides definitions of the key terms.

Chapter II presents a comprehensive literature review meant to provide a solid research context for the study. The literature review includes some specific issues experienced by international students at the contact with a new culture, as well as the importance of satisfactory social support networks in overcoming the difficulties associated with cultural shock, in which marriage plays a pivotal role. The interplay between cultural shock and the marital relationship is also captured in the literature review.

The topic of cultural shock and adaptation has been widely researched. However, little is known about international students in committed relationships and the way they and their spouses experience the transition to a new culture. Because of the limited amount of information on this topic, the literature review takes into consideration the findings of other studies capturing the experiences of missionaries working overseas, as well as those of immigrants in committed relationships.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Organization of the Chapter

The review of literature starts with an overview of cultural shock and adaptation. The specific effects of cultural shock on newcomers are illustrated and a cultural shock stage model is presented. The literature review continues with a discussion of some of the challenges that international students face and some of the adaptive behaviors that ensure adjustment to the new environment.

In the second part of the literature review, documented evidence of the effects of cultural shock on marital relationships is discussed, and findings from studies including immigrants and missionaries are included. The chapter also includes a discussion of the impact of social support and satisfactory relationships on cultural adaptation.

The review of literature includes findings from studies conducted on immigrants, missionaries, and refugees. There is very little information regarding the cultural shock and adaptation experiences of married international students and their spouses. This lack of literature suggests a need to provide a closer look at the ways that married international students and their spouses experience cultural transitions.
Cultural Shock and Adaptation in the Literature

The difficulties experienced by people who come in contact with a new culture are referred to as cultural shock. Cultural shock was described by Winkelman (1994) as “a multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture” (p. 121), which is accompanied by overwhelming feelings of stress and anxiety (Dodd, as cited in Ross & Krider, 1992). It emerges from the loss of a familiar context and the challenges associated with experiencing a new environment (Rhinesmith, 1985). Winkelman also qualifies this phenomenon as a normal occurrence in a foreign culture environment. People who come in contact with a new culture also experience a particular type of stress, acculturative stress, which is an inherent aspect of the immigrant experience and gives rise to experiences such as depressive symptoms, feelings of marginality, anxiety, and adjustment disorders (Thomas, 1995).

Several researchers (e.g., Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994) emphasized the presence of a stage model of cultural shock and adaptation in which four stages are emphasized: (1) honeymoon and tourist phase, (2) crises and disintegration phase, (3) reorientation and reintegration phase, and (4) adaptation and resolution phase. The first stage is characterized by interest, excitement, and euphoria. It resembles the typical experience of people entering a foreign culture for business, tourism, or vacations.

The crises phase emerges within a few weeks to a month, and may be characterized by feelings of depression, isolation, anger, hostility, cognitive fatigue, and paranoid features. All these symptoms are caused by role shock that involves changes in social roles and interpersonal relations, and personal shock, which includes loss of
personal intimacy and support systems, as well as interference of the new cultural values with personal beliefs and values. Other physical symptoms such as frequent headaches, minor pains, and a general sense of feeling ill are common.

The reorientation and reintegration phase is characterized by a decrease in stress-related symptoms and learning of new, more adaptive behaviors. The host culture appears to make more sense and an appreciation of the new culture emerges (Winkelman, 1994). Behaviors such as speaking one's own language, eating ethnic foods, reading books and newspapers from home, and talking and interacting with home nationals are used to maintain a personal sense of well-being. Developing friendships with people from other countries, in addition to fellow nationals, also helps ameliorate various stressors.

During the last stage, adaptation and resolution, the sojourner successfully manages the new culture and responds to the new environment in adaptive ways. A good understanding of the culture is the prerequisite to developing a third identity, a bicultural identity, which integrates aspects of the new culture into one's previous self-concept. Turning into an active participant in the new culture marks a superior form of adaptation to the new environment. People in this phase may experience several types of adjustments: *assimilation* in the new culture (when sojourners are either unable or unwilling to hold on to their cultural values); *separation* (when participants in the new culture aim to maintain their original cultural identity); *exclusion or marginalization* (when the newcomers' efforts to maintain original culture identity is blocked and so are their efforts to join groups in the new culture); and *integration* (which refers to an interest in maintaining aspects from one's original culture while participating as an active participant in the new culture) (Berry, 1997).
Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) have challenged this stage model of cultural adaptation, indicating that the initial state of euphoria proposed by Oberg (1960) is more a state of at least moderate distress. These authors indicate that psychological distress appears to be greatest in the early stages of transition (the first 4 to 6 months) and then varies over time. After 6 months, non-cultural issues appear to be responsible for sojourners’ psychological well-being. These might include issues such as examinations, relationship problems, or work stress.

Berry (1997) has defined adaptation as any change that takes place in individuals or groups as a response to environmental demands. A clear distinction has been made between two types of adaptations: psychological and sociocultural (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adaptation involves one’s psychological and physical well-being, while sociocultural adaptation refers to how well an individual is able to manage daily life in the new cultural context.

Anderson (1994) identified six principles that characterize cross-cultural adaptation which: (1) involves a series of adjustments; (2) implies learning; (3) implies a stranger-host relationship; (4) is cyclical, continuous, and interactive; (5) is relative; and (6) implies personal development. Huxur, Mansfield, Nnazor, Schuetze, and Segawa (1996) subscribe to the same idea that cultural adaptation involves personal development, by stating “becoming acculturated in the new environment, even with difficulties and problems, means gradually changing one’s outlook and experience” (p. 10). Therefore, adaptation is not a linear process, but rather a process involving a series of small adjustments followed by setbacks and temporary overlaps with the crisis stage.
The current study drew from the stage model of culture shock identified by Oberg (1960), as well as the more recent developments in the area of culture shock identified by Ward et al. (2001). The researcher took into account the honeymoon stage identified by Oberg as a stand-alone phase in the culture shock phenomenon, but also considered the time frame suggested by Ward et al. in determining the amount of time participants needed to have been in the U.S. to qualify for inclusion in this study. The study focused on the experience of married international students and their accompanying spouses who have already experienced the crisis stage. To ensure that participants have had first-hand experience with culture shock, only couples who have lived in the United States for at least 4 months or longer were included in the study.

Areas of Study in the Culture Shock Literature

The phenomenon of cultural shock has been the focus of many studies including international students (Ross & Krider, 1992; Yeh & Inose, 2003), immigrants (Polyzoï, 1985; Thomas, 1995), and even international students’ spouses (De Verthelyi, 1995). Pervasive feelings of isolation and inadequacy appear to transpire in all these studies. Immigrant families face language difficulties, limited financial resources and economic hardship, limited access to education, and disruption of family life and marital relationships. Illegal immigrants face additional stressors caused by the fear of being returned to the country of origin.

Polyzoï (1985) examined the immigrant experience from a phenomenological perspective with a focus on immigrants’ experiences upon arrival, during their stay in the host culture, and upon return to their home countries. The initial contact with the host
culture is described in terms of “strangeness,” “uncomfortableness,” and “feeling out of place” (p. 55). The study further captures the experience of immigrants as they transition towards an integration of both cultural perspectives and emphasizes the experience of reversed “strangeness” as immigrants return to their home countries.

In a study of international students, both graduate and undergraduate, Yeh and Inose (2003) identified a few predictors of acculturative stress. The results of their study indicated that high levels of self-reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness predict lower levels of acculturative stress, whereas poor English skills, low levels of social support satisfaction, and low levels of social connectedness are associated with high levels of acculturative stress.

In another study of international students, Ross and Krider (1992) examined the experiences of international teaching assistants in American classrooms. Participants in the study reported difficulties in areas such as instructional preparation (given that the interactive classroom activities were all new to these teaching assistants, as in their home countries the primary method of teaching was lecturing); classroom procedures (e.g., feeling constantly challenged and not taken seriously, concerns with drinking and eating in the classroom, etc.); English usage (lack of familiarity with slang and jargon, speaking with an accent, and using some different words than Americans); instructor’s expectations of students (who appeared to be less prepared than expected); cultural awareness, which was limited, given the lack of cultural understanding; and interpersonal communication (e.g., limited awareness of dating rituals and relationships in the American culture).
Social Support

The relational needs of international students have been mirrored in the writings of many researchers. A study conducted by Ryan and Twibell (2000) examined the primary concerns of college students studying abroad. The leading concern of these participants focused on developing interpersonal relationships and fitting into a new society. Other secondary concerns included academic achievement, communication and language skills, personal adjustment, health and safety, and bureaucratic procedures.

Many studies have documented the negative correlation between social support and psychiatric symptoms in international students, immigrants, refugees, and missionary groups (Ataca & Berry, 2002; Berry, 1997; De Verthelyi, 1995; Winkelman, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Lack of a satisfactory social support network appears to be correlated with symptoms of psychological distress such as depression and anxiety.

In a study investigating the impact of locus of control on the psychological adjustment process (Ward & Kennedy, 1992), relationship dissatisfaction was highly correlated with mood disturbance. However, the findings also indicate that mood disturbance is predicted by a high incidence of host national contact. This suggests that a high incidence of host national contact may diminish the sojourner’s opportunities to experience relationships with people from the host culture and consequently impedes adaptation.

Yeh and Inose (2003) researched the topic of social support satisfaction and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress in international students. Their findings support the idea that international students who feel socially connected and are
satisfied with the quality of their relationships are less likely to experience acculturative stress. However, it is suggested that the experience of acculturative stress is mediated by other variables also, such as cultural distance, and experiences with discrimination and racism. Ward and Kennedy (1992) indicate that as differences between the host and original cultures increase, so do the problems experienced by sojourners. In addition, the authors emphasize that sociocultural adaptation might be impeded by a strong identity with one's original culture. The results reported by Yeh and Inose in their study support this conclusion, indicating that European international students were less likely to experience acculturative stress compared with students from regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin/Central America.

Stone Fenstein and Ward (1990) took a step further by framing social support as “a buffer against psychological disturbances in reaction to stressful cross-cultural transitions” (p. 543). The authors suggest that psychological well-being in the host culture is related to the quality and evaluation of interpersonal relationships. Ward et al. (2001) emphasized a similar idea, stating that “good co-national relations may act as a stress buffer, diminishing symptoms of distress; however, psychological well-being may also contribute to enhanced interpersonal relations with the co-national group” (p. 87).

The most important source of social support appears to be the family unit, in which the marital relationship plays a critical role. In a study examining the psychological adjustment of American women sojourning in Singapore, Stone Fenstein and Ward (1990) found that the quality of the spousal relationship was the most significant predictor of psychological adjustment. The same idea was emphasized in a study
conducted by Naidoo (1985). The participants, immigrant Asian women in Canada, experienced less stress when they had supportive husbands.

**Marital Relationships of Missionaries and Immigrants**

Sweatman (1999) examined the relationship between overall marital satisfaction and psychological distress in missionary couples. Participants in the study were 34 married couples serving as missionaries outside the United States. The results of this study are congruent with Stone Fenstein and Ward’s (1990) findings, in that the quality of the marital relationship was found to act as a moderator of stress, with higher levels of marital relationship quality decreasing or minimizing symptoms of depression and anxiety. Sweatman concluded that “the marriage holds the potential to act as a predictable restoration center where the demands for adaptation are negligible and as a place where one feels competent and significant” (p.160).

Therefore, this literature suggests that a good marital relationship decreases symptoms of stress, while marital dissatisfaction acts as a stress magnifier. However, the way that one variable affects the other is still unknown, as it is unclear whether depression and anxiety are causing marital problems, or the source of the psychological distress is marital difficulty itself.

Other studies have documented the direct link between cultural shock and marital distress. The disruptive effects of cultural shock on family life have been documented in an article by Thomas (1995). The author indicates that the marital relationship goes through various changes, and these changes are often disturbing. For example, former
homemakers might become breadwinners, while the patriarchal family structure is often threatened by the more liberal values of the host society.

In a study conducted by Wassenaar, van der Veen, and Pillay (1998), the effects of cultural transition on South African Indian women were addressed. The effects of Westernization are very powerful and may lead in some instances to extreme psychological distress, such as suicidal behavior. These women reportedly experienced transitional tensions between the Indian culture and Westernization. As the authors indicate, these tensions in turn affected marital functioning and quality of life.

**International Students’ Spouses**

In the only study available in current literature that specifically addresses the impact of cultural shock on international students’ accompanying spouses (the “invisible” population noted above), De Verthelyi (1995) attends to the needs of a population that has been neglected in the cross-cultural literature via qualitative methodology. The author took a less traveled path in examining the sojourner’s experience with cultural shock, as she included 49 spouses of international students in her study. De Verthelyi emphasized in her research that international students’ spouses are not expected to fulfill any specific task or achieve any meaningful goal during their stay in the United States. All 49 participants were women accompanying their student husbands. Most of the sojourners revealed in their interviews their struggles related to language difficulties, feeling a loss of control, feeling powerless, having conflicts and misunderstandings with their spouses, losing a support network, lacking purposeful activity, losing professional identity, suffering financial hardships, experiencing homesickness and loneliness, and feeling
reticent to access programs and services designed to assist them in the transition to the American culture.

Although this is a pivotal article in the research done with international students’ spouses, the study only marginally mentions the marital relationship of international students and the impact of cultural shock as experienced by this “invisible” population on couples’ relationships. De Verthelyi (1995) interviewed only the spouses of international students and did not interview the couple together. However, the article marks a reference point in the cross-cultural literature, as it provides a closer look into couples’ relationships, even if only tangentially.

Summary

The review of literature illustrates the consensual view that social support networks, and in particular marital relationships, do influence and are influenced by the experience of cultural shock. Moreover, the existence of a supportive social network appears to diminish the effects of culture shock and improve the psychological well-being of sojourners. Marital relationships appear to act as a buffer against psychological distress. More specifically, a good marital relationship may diminish the effects of cultural shock, while a poor marital relationship may be easily permeated by the various influences of cultural shock.

The literature review consists primarily of studies done with specific groups of sojourners (i.e., missionaries and immigrants). The author of this dissertation was unable to locate studies focusing specifically on the marital relationship of international students and their accompanying spouses in the context of host cultures. The current proposed
study attempted to address this gap in the literature by conducting an exploratory investigation focusing on the individual and couple experiences of married international students and their spouses. The study utilized qualitative research methodology in an attempt to understand from a different perspective an issue that has been studied quantitatively in the cross-cultural literature with related populations such as immigrants and missionaries and their spouses.

The area of cross-cultural counseling is still a prolific one, in that many of the issues involving acculturative stress in international students have been studied from the perspective of the individual, underestimating the social networks in which the student is involved. As research indicates, the social support system is of crucial importance in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Given that there is a documented link between the psychological well-being of the sojourners and the quality of their relationships, more attention should be given to this issue. More studies involving the couple unit and marital relationship should be designed, as many of the cultural influences appear to be filtered through this medium, leading ultimately to effective cultural adaptation or further cultural crisis.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research methodology, specifically phenomenology, to explore the experiences of married international graduate students and their accompanying non-student spouses in the U.S. culture, the effects of transitioning to the U.S. culture on the marital relationship of international students, as well as the ways in which the marital relationship impacts the experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture. The first section of this chapter focuses on the research methodology and theoretical foundations for this study. Second, the process and the results of a pilot study are summarized. The third section illustrates the sampling procedures, selection of participants, and participant characteristics. The chapter concludes with research procedures involving data collection and analysis.

Research Methodology

This section consists of three parts. First, an overview of qualitative research and phenomenological research is presented. Aspects related to critical theory as a theoretical foundation that informs this study are briefly summarized. Second, the role of the researcher in qualitative research, along with the researcher’s personal biases and assumptions are discussed. In the conclusion of this section the primary research questions are restated.
Overview of Qualitative Research and Phenomenology

Qualitative Research

This study was approached qualitatively and examined the lived experiences of married international students and their spouses. Qualitative research has the following characteristics: it (a) takes place in the natural world, (b) uses multiple methods, (c) focuses on context, (d) is emergent rather than tightly prefigured, and (e) is fundamentally interpretive (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In addition, qualitative research directly investigates the subjective experience; incorporates meaningful stories in addition to measurable variables; allows for naturalistic observation and description, rather than testing general laws; is a tool for studying diversity; uses the research participants as expert informants; and involves reflexivity, the explicit use of the researcher’s subjectivity and values (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Qualitative methods are known to provide an in-depth and detailed picture of the topic discussed. The researcher approaches the field “without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis, which will contribute to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of information about a smaller number of people and cases, which increases the depth of understanding of the issue investigated, but reduces generalizability (Patton, 2002). Additionally, the credibility of qualitative research methods hinges on the skills, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork. Awareness of personal biases and assumptions, as well as first-hand experience with the issue investigated, help increase the validity of the data.
Phenomenology

Phenomenological research was chosen as a specific type of qualitative research for this study. A phenomenological study describes “the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 1997, p. 51). The specific focus of the phenomenological tradition is the essence of an experience, the central underlying meaning of the experience. The objective of a phenomenological study is providing “a description of the whole unified gestalt of participants’ experiences” (Thomas, 2003, p. 2). The phenomenologist attempts to understand the experience not objectively, but from the participants’ perspectives (McClelland, 1995). One aspect that differentiates phenomenology from other traditions is the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience (Patton, 2002). The experiences of different people are thus understood, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon.

Researchers using this tradition of inquiry attempt to set aside their own biases and personal experiences in order to learn from the participants and the meanings they associate with these experiences. This process of acknowledging and attempting to set aside one’s own prejudgments while conducting a phenomenological study is referred to as “bracketing” (Creswell, 1997, p. 52). The kinds of questions that guide phenomenological studies refer to the everyday lived experiences of participants and the meaning they associate with these experiences. Participants’ perception of the phenomenon is central in this process.
Data collection in a phenomenological study starts with locating the participants, who must be multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon to be studied and are able to articulate their experiences. As it is critical for all participants to have experienced the phenomenon studied, the preferred sampling strategy in phenomenological studies is "criterion" sampling, which involves selecting the cases that meet some specified criteria (Patton, 2002).

Typically, the preferred method of data collection in a phenomenological study is interviews with up to 10 individuals. Each interview might last up to 2 hours and could be preceded by the researcher's self-reflection, as a preparation for the interview (Polkinghorne, as cited in Creswell, 1997). Besides these, other materials illustrating the phenomenon examined could be used (e.g., art illustrations of the phenomenon). The most common data collection form is one-on-one interviews, especially useful when individuals are not hesitant to speak and have no difficulties articulating their experiences. The use of adequate recording procedures is necessary in this form of data collection. The place where the interview will be conducted must be free from distractions and must meet certain requirements for proper recording of the discussion. The use of an interview guide is recommended as a means of following a set structure and recording participants' responses in case the audio-recording equipment fails to function properly.

Colaizzi (1978) proposes the Phenomenological Descriptive Methodology as a useful tool for analyzing the data. The technique involves a thorough reading of all text-based data, followed by highlighting of the most significant phrases and statements in terms of the research questions. The following step involves formulating meanings for
each significant statement, followed by the identification of emergent themes/patterns across each statement. A theme, in its simplest form, is defined as "a simple sentence, a string of words with a subject and a predicate" (Berg, 1998, p. 231). These emergent themes are then organized in clusters and the results are integrated into a meaningful description of the phenomenon. The final step involves sharing the findings reached with participants in the study.

**Critical Theory**

As a theoretical foundation that informs this study, critical theory was used to give voice to the invisible spouses’ experiences who accompany international students. Critical theory is concerned with issues of power and justice, with particular emphasis on the interaction between matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, other social institutions, and cultural dynamics (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Critical research has found its groundwork in feminist studies and more recently in the multicultural domain, with a specific focus on women, Third World, and race. The studies done in these areas serve to reveal the workings of power in everyday life with the hope to bring about social change.

By shedding greater light on the experience of international students’ spouses, the current study attempted to capture and reveal the subjective experience of a marginalized group of sojourners, whose needs have been neglected by the cross-cultural literature (De Verthelyi, 1995). It was hoped that by capturing the views of accompanying spouses, the study may serve to further the knowledge about the specific struggles of this population,
suggest ways of empowering this underprivileged group of sojourners, as well as engage them in the rethinking of their role (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

**Researcher’s Role in Qualitative Research**

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2002), meaning that the credibility of the qualitative data depends on the skills, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork, but also on his or her previous experience with the phenomenon under investigation. A very important step in qualitative research is the researcher’s awareness of the assumptions and biases through which he or she filters the phenomenon studied.

I, as both researcher and international student, have had first-hand experience with cultural adjustment as a single female student and as a student partner in a committed relationship. However, I have never been an accompanying spouse in a marital relationship, therefore my experience and understanding of this role is limited. Conducting this study gave me an opportunity to reflect on commonalities as well as differences shared with participants in this study and formulate a meaning of the lived experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture through the lens of married international graduate students and their accompanying spouses. The following are some of my assumptions and personal biases that I identified before beginning the study.

**Personal Biases and Assumptions**

Since I was the primary researcher and the only interviewer in this study, my personal biases and assumptions along with my previous experience as an international
student may have possibly influenced my interviews and interpretation of the results. Some of the beliefs and preconceptions that required “bracketing” were my assumptions that a changing environment, new roles, and inevitable stressors influence the marital relationships of international students, by either strengthening or weakening the relationship. This assumption may not be true, as other variables may come into play, such as the couples’ experiences with cultural transitions and a preexistent set of realistic expectations. Additionally, the participants may be from cultures very similar to the American culture.

I also thought that cultural shock would be a common occurrence that each new participant in the host culture experiences. However, my view may be skewed as there may be some participants who have previously experienced foreign cultures, hold realistic opinions about the host culture, and are prepared for this kind of experience.

Likewise, I assumed that the quality of the marital relationship influences the individual experiences of participants in the new culture, by either amplifying the effects of culture shock or minimizing them. The validity of this assumption is questionable, as other factors such as one’s social support network may serve a similar function. Another assumption was that accompanying spouses may experience more difficulties compared with their student partners. My assumption may not be true, as student partners may be dealing with significant stressors in the U.S. culture, stemming from the multiple roles they play.
Research Questions

The research questions of this study were designed to gather information regarding participants’ experiences in the host culture, the influences of the host culture on the marital relationship of international students, as well as the impact of marriage on the participants’ adjustment to the host culture. The study explored the following research questions:

1. What do married graduate international students studying in the U.S. and their accompanying spouses experience at the contact with the new culture?

2. How is the marital relationship influenced by the experience in the host culture?

3. How does the marital relationship influence the experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture?

Pilot Study

A pilot study of two cases was conducted by this researcher as a qualitative research graduate class project in the fall of 2003. The study was designed to investigate how cultural shock impacts the marital relationship of international students, as well as the role that the marital relationship plays in the experience with cultural shock. This pilot study is described next.
Description of the Participants of the Pilot Study

Both couples interviewed were comprised of an accompanying spouse and a graduate student partner, and both had children. Additionally, they had lived in the United States for at least one semester (4 months) prior to the interview. Participants’ ages ranged from 30 to 48 years old. One couple was from Malaysia, and the other from Trinidad (Caribbean Islands). At the time of the interviews, the Caribbean couple had been married for 21 years, while the Malaysian couple had been married for 2 years.

Research Procedures

Phenomenological research methods were used in the research process of this pilot study. In studies employing phenomenological methods, the emphasis is on the participant’s experienced meaning (Polkinghorne, 1989). Phenomenological research involves a three-step process: (1) gathering a number of naïve descriptions from people who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation; (2) analyzing these descriptions to arrive at the common elements that make up the experience; and (3) developing a research report that describes the experience in an accurate, clear, and articulate manner.

One semi-structured interview with each couple unit was conducted in their homes. One interview lasted 45 minutes and the other was 1.5 hours long. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The interviews covered the following areas: obstacles related to living and studying in the U.S., coping mechanisms used in dealing with all the changes, overall effects of cultural issues on the marital relationship, areas of the
relationship that have benefited from experiencing a foreign culture, areas of the relationship that have suffered due to exposure to culture shock, and the development of a bicultural identity. The couple was the unit of analysis.

The data analysis started with transcribing the content of the audiotapes. Next, the researcher read the transcripts several times, to obtain a full description of participants’ experiences with cultural shock and their perception of their marital relationship prior to and after arrival to the U.S. Following this, significant statements about how these couples experienced cultural shock were laid out. These statements were then grouped into meaning units/themes which were listed and followed by a description of the couples’ experiences with cultural shock, including verbatim examples (Creswell, 1997). All transcripts were coded by hand. After having coded all the individual cases, a cross-case analysis followed, which revealed common themes across the two cases. The coding units were then reduced to general meanings followed by formulation of a general description of the issue. The researcher also checked the accuracy of the conclusions reached by sharing the findings with the couples in the study.

Summary of Pilot Study Findings

The within-case analyses revealed the experiences associated with cultural shock and adaptation for the Malaysian and Caribbean couples. In the Malaysian couple, cultural shock was experienced primarily by the student spouse, who attends school and comes in contact more often with the American culture. Also, the experience with cultural shock is drastically diminished by the accompanying spouse’s presence. The Caribbean couple experienced culture shock in terms of difficulties developing strong,
lasting relationships, preserving their own values, dealing with racism, and raising their children who are exposed to the values of the host culture.

The following themes emerged as a result of the cross-case analysis:

1. The marital relationship becomes a buffer in the experience with the new culture, such that the host culture cannot easily permeate the family system.

2. The host culture is viewed as very "different," culturally insensitive, and racist, and the couples refuse to allow the new cultural values to interfere with personal values.

3. Cultural shock contributes to increased closeness in the marital relationship; the isolation experienced outside the family system contributes to increased closeness in the marital dyad.

4. The support of the accompanying spouse is viewed as a necessity and reflects the strong commitment made to the family and the institution of marriage.

As indicated above, although the experience of cultural shock is labeled by the participants in this study as very isolative, the marital relationship plays a catalyst role in the transition to the new culture. The study revealed the tendency of participants to move closer together, as an effect of experiencing the new culture (e.g., communicating better and more, making mutual decisions, getting to know each other better).

As the marital relationship started to strengthen, so did couples’ tendency to defend personal and cultural values. Likewise, the couples seemed to be more invested in the process of preserving personal and cultural values and refusing the new, unfamiliar values of the host culture. Based on this tendency, the couples interviewed were not as eager to participate in the new culture and perceived it with a certain degree of
skepticism. The marital relationship appeared to serve as a buffer at the contact with the host culture, but also alter individuals’ opportunities to experience the culture at its fullest and minimize their chances to develop a bicultural identity. The couples become “inactive observers” in the host culture.

This pilot study revealed some of the ways in which cultural shock impacted the marital relationship of the couples interviewed, as well as the role of the marital relationship in the overall experience with cultural shock. The pilot study served to inform future changes to the interview guide, and signaled the need for separate individual interviews with each spouse to capture more accurately spouses’ individual experiences in the relationship and with cultural shock.

The emerging themes identified in this pilot study served as an informative reference for the analysis of data collected in the current study. Moreover, the pilot study provided the researcher with an opportunity to develop her qualitative research skills and become more versatile in handling and analyzing qualitative data. While conducting this current study, I was careful to remain open to experiences that varied from those of the two couples who participated in the pilot study. Now, we return to the research methods that were employed in the current study.

Sampling

Characteristics of Participants

The participants for this study were 10 married couples, each with one graduate student partner and one non-student spouse. The description of the participants is
captured in the table in Appendix G of this dissertation. A summary of each case is also provided in the beginning of Chapter IV. The criteria for inclusion in the study involved partners who lived together in their home countries prior to coming to the U.S., experienced the U.S. culture for at least four months, and had a good understanding of the English language and ability to articulate their experiences in English.

In order to obtain a diverse enough sample, an attempt was made to include individuals from various regions of the world. Also, the participants in the study had different levels of acculturation, reflected in their length of stay in the U.S. All of the student participants attended the same large, public, Midwestern university.

**Rationale for Selection Criteria**

The sample for this study targeted married international graduate students and their spouses for several reasons. First, the experience of cultural shock can be described using only participants who have had first-hand experience with this phenomenon. Students’ experiences with culture shock may be different from that of immigrants and refugees, given the nature of the challenges posed by the student status. Moreover, the student participants were graduate students. Thus, being married is a far more common experience for international graduate students, and understanding their experiences helps inform services for these students and their spouses. In addition, the academic pressure of graduate studies, as well as other identity development issues, may be different for the two categories of students. By including the voices of accompanying spouses, the study provided a closer look at the experiences of this invisible group of sojourners, with
implications for the area of multicultural counseling and future research with this population.

The participants were married heterosexual couples. Although the researcher favored a study that was more inclusive in terms of sexual orientation, such a study is not feasible at this point in time, as couples in committed relationships (regardless of sexual orientation) do not have the same privileges as married couples in terms of securing a visa for traveling to the U.S.

The original criteria for inclusion in the study consisted of couples who had experienced living together in their home countries, and had been married for at least one year prior to coming to the U.S. These criteria were included in order to provide control for the marital adjustment factor for newlyweds, and ensure that this factor did not interfere with the phenomenon being investigated. However, four couples eventually included in the study did not meet this criterion, as they joined the U.S. culture several months into their marriage. The researcher struggled with this decision, and ultimately decided to include them, so as not to exclude one of the types of international student couples that seems to be fairly prominent, at least for some cultures. The rationale for inclusion of these three couples is that it was very important to have a culturally diverse sample, with couples at various stages in their identity development. It appeared that many of the potential participants who qualified for inclusion in the study otherwise, did not meet this criterion. It was noted that many young couples coming to the U.S. get married shortly before their arrival in the host culture. The U.S. immigration laws do not allow unmarried couples to come together to the U.S. This, along with cultural expectations, could explain this trend with younger couples. Therefore, the researcher
decided to include them in an attempt to increase the diversity of the sample. It is this researcher’s belief that inclusion of participants of diverse backgrounds contributes to the diversity of the sample which creates opportunities for useful comparisons and richer understandings of the phenomenon studied.

The couples must have experienced the U.S. culture for at least 4 months. According to the literature, the crisis stage of the cultural shock and adaptation model emerges within 3 weeks to a month. Four months would allow participants ample time to experience the culture shock phase and even develop new adaptive behaviors.

**Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

Participants for this study were selected using purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling the researcher selects “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Criterion sampling was used to make sure all participants in the study met the criteria stated above. In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate information-rich cases, by sampling people “who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (p. 243).

For recruitment of participants, the researcher placed flyers advertising this research opportunity in locations where married international students reside (i.e., on-campus apartments). The flyer described this research opportunity and provided the e-mail and phone numbers of the researcher. Individuals who expressed an interest in this study were later contacted over the phone with more detailed information. An initial contact script (Appendix B) was used in this phase of the project. During this initial contact, the researcher explained that the study was conducted under the approval of the
Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) (Appendix A) of Western Michigan University, and how confidentiality would be maintained during and after termination of the study. The research procedure was also explained, and potential participants were invited to ask any questions they may have related to this research. During the initial contact the researcher made sure the potential participants fulfilled all the criteria for inclusion in this study. Couples received a $30 gift card for completing the study.

The English proficiency of participants was assessed in casual conversations with potential participants in the context of asking clarifying questions to assess fit with the study’s criteria for inclusion. I typically asked to speak with the partner as well, and made a subjective assessment of their language capabilities.

After the initial contact, the country of origin of potential participants was carefully reviewed, in an attempt to generate a diverse sample in terms of nationality and level of acculturation. The study included participants from Africa, China, South Korea, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, and Jordan. Of the 16 couples who expressed an interest in the study, 10 were selected for participation. Six couples were deemed ineligible, as they did not meet the criteria for inclusion (most ineligible couples consisted of partners who were both international students or shared different nationalities).

A second round of phone calls was made to set up meeting times and preferred locations for the interviews. The selected participants were notified that a consent document along with a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) were going to be mailed to them prior to the interviews. Participants were also informed that a code number would
be used instead of their personal names in the process of data analysis and during dissertation write-up and that only the researcher has access to their personal identities.

**Instrumentation**

**The Dyadic Adjustment Scale**

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) is a paper-and-pencil test which measures the quality of adjustment in marriage and provides an indication of the overall level of satisfaction with the marriage. The instrument is self-administered and takes only a few minutes to complete. The test includes four subscales measuring dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression. The scale has 32 items and a high reliability coefficient (.96) (Spanier, 1976). The first three subscales have high reliability coefficients; only the four item affectional expression subscale has a reliability that dictates some caution in interpretation (.73) (Spanier, 1976). The instrument’s correlation with other similar scales indicates high levels of validity (Graham, Liu, & Jeziorski, 2006). The scale includes questions on a 6-point Likert-type scale, as well as two Yes/No questions. A person can obtain a score from 0 to 151. The higher the score, the better is an individual’s adjustment to the marriage. Scores that are lower than 98 indicate couples in distress.

However, other test reviews (Kazak, Jarmas, & Snitzer, 1988; Sharpely & Cross, 1982) of the DAS indicate weak support for the presence of the four scales. The authors of these studies urge researchers to use this instrument for assessing one general
dimension of marital satisfaction, and not utilize the subscales as valid and reliable measures of components of marital satisfaction.

The DAS was previously used with different cultural groups and some conclusions were drawn about the utility of this instrument with diverse populations. A study done by Lim and Ivey (2000) illustrates that the DAS is a useful instrument for assessing one general dimension of marital satisfaction with Chinese-American couples, but that the utility of the identified subscales was questionable. This study also identified that the DAS is a potentially reliable tool in applications with Chinese-American people. In an exploratory study done with Mexican-American people, Casas and Ortiz (1985) identified the need for further studies looking at the normative value of DAS with Hispanic people. Results of a study conducted with Turkish couples indicated that the DAS provides a reliable and valid measure of marital adjustment for a Turkish sample (Fisiloglu & Demir, 2000).

For the purpose of the current study, only one general dimension (the total score) was assessed—that of marital satisfaction; no inferences and interpretations were made regarding the four subscales. The results obtained from this instrument were used to inform some of the questions in the couple interview and provide a more accurate picture of the role marital satisfaction plays in the process of adjusting to the host culture. The total DAS score provided an assessment of the overall marital adjustment and satisfaction for each couple. The results on this scale were not shared with the participants unless they expressed an interest in knowing their scores and meaning of the scores. The instrument was administered right after the first individual interview; the participants filled out the test in my presence, to eliminate the possibility of the two partners consulting.
Demographic Questionnaire

This instrument (Appendix C) helped gather basic information on participants in this study, such as contact information, age, nationality, number of years married, number of years/months in the U.S., program of study (for the student spouse), number of children and their ages, as well as information pertaining to their perceived level of fluency in English. The participants were asked to rate their perceived English fluency on a scale 1-5, with 1—very poor English abilities, and 5—very fluent. Participants’ responses to the demographic questionnaire were used to inform some of the interview questions, and provide the researcher with an opportunity to refine the interview process. The researcher also verified whether or not participants met all the criteria for inclusion in this study.

Procedures

Data Collection

Interview Process

For the purposes of this study, the data were collected via an audio-taped individual interview with each participant, and an audio-taped interview with each couple. The individual interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 100 minutes. Many of the individual interviews were conducted on the same day with each partner, and the longest period of time between the individual interviews for a couple was 2 weeks. The couple interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour. The average length of time between the
completion of individual interviews and the couple interviews was 2 months, with a range of 2 weeks to 8 months. In the case of C1, the length of time was 6 months. C1F was pregnant at the time of the first interview and expressed a desire to postpone the couple interview, until after the delivery of her baby. Other situations that delayed the couple interviews were related to the unavailability of participants, such as the case of C3F, who was studying for her comprehensive exams. In her case, the length between the individual interviews and couple interview was 8 months. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in English. The interviews were semi-structured and included questions asking participants to describe their experience in the host culture (see Appendix D for individual interview questions and Appendix E for the couple interview guide). The individual interviews were conducted first and analyzed preliminarily, so as to inform possible specific questions for the couple interview, to strengthen the data collection for the couple interview.

With the exception of three couples, all interviews were conducted in the participants’ home environment. An attempt was made to ensure confidentiality of responses and maintain a noise-free atmosphere. However, in several cases where there were small children involved, I had to interrupt the interview to accommodate the children’s needs. The interviews were resumed within minutes after an incident. Two of the couples in the study were interviewed on university premises, while one couple was interviewed in the researcher’s home.

The first round of interviews was an individual interview with each spouse (Appendix D). Before the start of the first interview, the researcher restated the purpose of this study and provided a detailed explanation of the interview procedure.
Confidentiality issues and other concerns related to the study that participants had, were also addressed. During this interview, the researcher inquired about individuals’ overall experience in the host culture, coping mechanisms used to overcome cultural obstacles, the impact of being in a committed relationship on their overall adjustment to the host culture, as well as their perception of the marital relationship prior to and after their arrival in the U.S. At the end of the individual interviews, participants were invited to fill out a Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). Following each individual interview, the researcher filled out a Contact Summary Sheet (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (see Appendix F) which included personal reflections, observations, and insights gathered from the interview conducted. This provided the researcher with an opportunity to identify the primary issues and themes discussed and determine which target questions to focus on during the interview with the couple. Other personal memos and insights were recorded via the contact summary sheet.

The second step in the data collection process included an interview with each couple as a unit (Appendix E). During this interview, the researcher clarified information collected during individual interviews and focused primarily on how the participants managed to deal with the challenges associated with this cultural transition as a couple. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were encouraged to initiate contact with the researcher should they like to add, clarify information, or ask questions related to the study. None of the participants contacted the researcher with such issues. The contact summary sheet (Appendix F) was used again as a tool to identify the main issues and emerging themes, personal insights, and observations that helped guide the analysis of data.
Data Analysis

The researcher used qualitative data analysis procedures to analyze the data collected from the interviews. By using phenomenology, the researcher hoped to arrive at an accurate description of participants' experiences in the host culture and capture the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. This section provides information related to data processing and primary procedures used in data analysis.

Processing Research Data

The data collected via face-to-face interviews, the demographic questionnaire, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, as well as the contact summary sheets constituted the primary research data in this study and were processed as follows. Each interview was transcribed as a Word document and saved on the researcher's computer. The individual interviews were transcribed shortly after the contact and the transcriptions were sent to the participants for review before the couple interviews. The preliminary findings from individual interviews served as a guide for the couple interview. Impressions from the preliminary analyses of the individual interviews were shared in the couple interview, which helped generate discussion. After completion of the couple interviews, the interviews were transcribed. Later, a preliminary draft of the findings resulting from analysis of the data was provided to the participants by e-mail, and they were invited to share their feedback via e-mail.

The data collected through the demographic questionnaire served as contextual information about the couple prior to the individual interviews and provided the
researcher with useful background information on participants in the study. The information included in the contact summary sheet provided the researcher with an opportunity to reflect on personal observations and field notes and corroborate interview findings with these data. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was useful in assessing spouses’ overall satisfaction with the quality of their marriage and provided a clearer understanding of the role the marital relationship plays in the process of personal adjustment to the new culture.

**Procedures for Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research involves a process of deep immersion in the data gathered, systematic organization of these materials into salient themes and patterns, bringing meaning to these themes so they tell a coherent story, and presenting it all in a way that communicates the essence of the phenomenon investigated (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). There are several ways of analyzing phenomenological data, but all focus on the development of themes. Four strategies are fundamental in analyzing phenomenological data: (1) *meaning condensation*, which entails a distilling of long interview passages into shorter statements; (2) *meaning categorization*, which entails coding long interview passages into categories, which can arise ad-hoc during the analysis or can be developed in advance; (3) *narrative structuring*, which follows the natural organization of the interview to reveal a story; and (4) *meaning interpretation*. Typically, the final step is validating the analysis by checking with the participants to see if they “agree, extend, or dispute your judgments” (p. 296).
The following steps were involved in the data analysis of this study and were used in analyzing the individual interviews, as well as couple interviews. These data analysis strategies were gleaned from several sources (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Bischof, 1999; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and for this study included:

1. Initially review all materials. All instruments used in this study, including the demographic questionnaire, contact summary sheet, Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and interview transcripts were organized and a first review of these materials occurred. Some preliminary analyses were conducted, particularly prior to the individual interviews, by reviewing the personal information contained in the demographic questionnaire, and then between the individual interviews and the interview with the couple, by reviewing DAS scores, contact summary sheets, and individual interview transcripts.

2. Read through entire interview transcripts. After transcribing the interviews and reviewing the aforementioned materials, I read through the entire interview transcripts and got a sense of the whole, while noting significant themes, general impressions, and self-reflections.

3. Re-read transcripts and condense data into units of meaning. This step entailed identifying the relevant text and key passages in the text. A passage was deemed relevant if it expressed a self-contained meaning related to my research concerns. Once relevant passages are identified, they were further condensed into units of meaning. After coding (i.e., identifying units of meaning) one transcript by hand, the codes were entered into a list using the qualitative software NUD*IST.
(Richard, 2002) to facilitate the coding of subsequent transcripts, while staying open to identifying additional units of meaning in later transcripts. After having coded all individual transcripts, I organized the relevant text into repeating ideas (i.e., frequently occurring codes), starting with a within-case analysis (i.e., repeating codes in each separate transcript and for each case), followed by a cross-case analysis (i.e., repeating codes across cases). Likewise, special circumstances or cases that stood out from the rest and unique occurrences were also noted.

4. Reduce units to general meanings/themes. During this step I went through the list of identified codes and assigned them to a theme, which is “an implicit idea or topic that a group of repeating ideas have in common” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 62).

5. Organize themes into a general description. The various themes and issues identified were organized in a description which comprises the essence of what it means to be a married international student and accompanying spouse in the U.S. host culture.

6. Share general description with participants. The general description, comprised of particular case summary and cross-case analyses, was shared with participants in the study for verification. The feedback received from participants was considered in formulating a final description of the experience of being a married international graduate student or an accompanying spouse in the U.S. culture. Fourteen participants provided feedback and four of them asked the researcher to remove certain potentially identifiable information included in the case summaries, such as academic department, specific academic major and job title in
the home country, and children's ages. One participant requested that one statement be altered as it was deemed too sensitive. Ten participants emailed with complimentary feedback and explained that the findings of the study seemed accurate. These changes impacted the information included in the case summaries (the within-case analyses) as the researcher decided to remove from all the case summaries potentially identifying information pertaining to department affiliation, specific academic major and job title in the home country, and the specific ages of children. The participants' feedback did not impact the findings from the cross-case analyses.

Confidentiality of Data

Confidentiality in qualitative research has two elements: protecting participants' privacy (i.e., identities, names, and specific roles) and holding in confidence what they share (i.e., not sharing with others using their names) (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In the current study, the researcher ensured both privacy and confidentiality of participants.

To protect participants' privacy, the researcher used codes (C1M through C10M for male partners and C1F through C10F for females, and C1 through C10 for the couples) when conducting the analyses and presenting the findings, instead of personal names and identities. Their first names were also removed from the interview transcripts; only codes were used. Only the researcher knows participants' real identities. The data for this study were handled by the researcher, who had sole access to the data. The researcher isolated the master list with participants' names and their corresponding numerical codes and destroyed the list once the study was completed. The information collected from
demographic questionnaires and interviews was kept confidential, which means that participants’ names did not appear on any documents or final write-ups of this study.

All audiotapes and instruments used in this study were placed in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home for a minimum of 3 years. Interview transcripts were stored in the researcher’s computer, but no information was stored containing the participants’ names or other identifiable information.

**Recursivity in the Research Design**

In qualitative research, analysis is ongoing (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). There is a continuous interplay between data gathering and analysis, as learning happens “as you go” (p. 271). Observations and interviews may lead to new insights which help guide future interview questions or shape the direction the study takes. Though data collection and analysis are presented as somewhat discrete entities above, the researcher recognizes the reciprocal interplay between data collection and analyses in a qualitative study.

In the current study, the participants’ responses from the individual interviews were used to guide and refine subsequent interview questions included in the couple interview. Such openness to modifying interview questions based upon information that emerged as the study progressed helped strengthen the research findings and stay true to this study as an exploratory one. Preliminary analyses of the individual interviews and review of the demographic questionnaire and DAS enhanced the data collection achieved in the conjoint interviews with the couples. Likewise, the data provided by the contact summary sheet, demographic questionnaire, and Dyadic Adjustment Scale helped guide subsequent interview questions and helped the researcher modify the data gathering as the
study unfolded. As stated earlier in this chapter, the pilot study also helped inform the interview questions for the current study and signaled the need for individual interviews in addition to interviews with couples.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used in this study. The chapter described a previous pilot study and the findings resulting from this study. A brief overview of qualitative research and critical theory was provided. The researcher included a description of phenomenology, the qualitative research tradition of choice for this study that seemed to be best suited for the research questions herein.

Specific methods of sampling, data collection, and data analysis employed were also covered. Participants were selected using a criterion and snowball sampling procedures. Specific methods of data collection pertaining to phenomenology were employed, such as in-depth semi-structured interviews, demographic questionnaires, and contact summary sheet. In addition, the researcher used the Dyadic Adjustment Scale to determine couples' levels of satisfaction with the marriage. Methods of phenomenological research data analysis were also addressed. A step-by-step process of data analysis was provided. The findings resulting from the data collection and analyses will be presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

CASE SUMMARIES AND FINDINGS

The chapter documents the findings from the within-case analyses, followed by findings from the cross-case analyses. The first part of the chapter comprises summaries of the cases that were included in the study. Specific codes were developed for the participants to protect their anonymity. The names capture the participants’ gender and nationality. Demographic information and details about each participant and couple appear in Appendix G.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was used to establish participants’ overall adjustment to marriage. The scores on this scale can range from 0 to 151. The higher the score, the better is a person’s adjustment to the marriage. Scores lower than 98 indicate a distressed couple. Only one participant, student spouse C10M, with a score of 92, had a score below the cutoff for distressed couples. Overall, the mean DAS score for accompanying spouses was 123.2 (range of 104-143), and the mean score for student spouses was 121.2 (range of 92-141). Females overall scored an average of 124.4, and males 120. Male accompanying spouses (n = 2) averaged 111.5, while female accompanying spouses (n = 8) averaged 126.1. Female student spouses (n = 2) had a mean score of 117.5, and male student spouses (n = 8) averaged a score of 122.1. These results will be discussed in Chapter V.
Case Summaries

Couple 1 Female Partner Yugoslavian-Jordanian (C1F)

C1F (DAS = 138), 29, was born in ex-Yugoslavia, and spent several years in Jordan, where she also met her husband. As the accompanying spouse in the relationship, she joined her husband 1.5 months after his arrival in the United States. The participant speaks four languages (Yugoslavian, Arabic, Russian, and English) and “chose the career to raise kids.” Thus she is acquainted with the homemaker role, which she finds very fulfilling. She reports enjoying a very prosperous lifestyle back in Jordan, and emphasizes the drastic change in economic status in the United States. She expresses openness to combining traditional values with the host culture values, integrating aspects of the three cultures she has experienced thus far into her identity. The benefits experienced in the U.S. culture amount to opportunities to improve her use of the English language and expose the children to a different worldview. Some of the salient information that emerged from this interview refers to personal adjustment to the culture, which was facilitated by having a purpose and a commitment to this purpose (i.e., coming to the U.S. for a limited amount of time, in a supportive role). Having clear expectations and being mentally prepared for this challenge is what helped the participant deal with cultural difficulties.

Couple 1 Male Partner Jordanian (C1M)

C1M (DAS = 127), 35, was born and raised in Jordan, and spent 4 years in the United States between the ages of 6 and 10, while his father pursued his Ph.D. He holds a
master's degree from his home country, where he used to work 25 hours a week in higher education. He is currently working on his Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences and emphasizes the importance of age and maturity in his adjustment to this culture as a student, husband, and father. He identifies change in economic status and balancing his student status with family responsibilities as primary stressors, however manageable. He talks about being committed to his family, his "heaven," and labels himself a "family guy."

**Couple 1 Yugoslavian-Jordanian (C1)**

At the time of the interview, the couple had been in the U.S. for approximately 2 years. They have been married for 6.5 years and have four children under the age of 6 who live with them. They share friendships with both Arabic and American people. The spouses emphasize the importance of family values such as commitment, shared values, similarity in character, and communication as essential ingredients in a successful marriage, regardless of the cultural context. They also report increased closeness in the relationship since living in the U.S. The couple appears to disagree on their length of stay in the U.S., with C1F desiring a longer stay in the U.S., and C1M contemplating an earlier return. Some of the illuminating information in this interview includes couple’s tendency to defend and implement personal values, in an attempt to guard against specific cultural influences such as people’s attitudes towards marriage.
Couple 2 Female Partner Indian (C2F)

C2F (DAS = 129), originally from India, came to the United States in January, 2006 (1.5 years at the time of the interview). She is the accompanying spouse in the relationship. The participant has a master's degree from her home country and used to be a homemaker in India. She talks about enjoying her experience as an accompanying and stay-at-home spouse, and cites a tradition where women in her family share and prefer this role. Her adjustment to the U.S. culture was mediated by the presence of C2M, who was already established in the U.S., where he spent approximately 6 years prior to her arrival. She enjoys her newfound freedom in the United States, where parents' interference is minimal. The participant cites Indian parents' tendency to influence their children's decisions in areas of life such as education and marriage. In contrast, C2F describes parent-child relationships in the American culture as being friendly and conducive to open communication. Since coming to the United States, C2F has made several friends within the American community, most of whom are married, and was introduced to fun activities such as bowling, golfing, fishing, and even sex toy parties. She speaks in admiring terms about the American culture and she finds American people to be very friendly and helpful. The participant talks about the lack of privacy in India, where she can spend time alone with her husband only at night, due to limited space and the presence of other extended family members. C2F enjoys the emphasis on responsibility sharing in the U.S. culture and the mutual support in marital relationships. She also talks about being very good friends with her husband and sharing a good
relationship with him. One of the main themes identified during this contact refers to the participant’s receptivity to and immersion in the U.S. culture.

**Couple 2 Male Partner Indian (C2M)**

C2M (DAS = 120), originally from India, came to the United States in January 2000 (7+ years at the time of the interview). He is nearing the completion of his Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences. C2M is in the process of applying for employment in the United States. He has a master’s degree from his home country, where he used to work half-time in the research field. The participant comes from a big family or “joint family,” with grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins living in the same household. C2M stresses how he used to have other members of the extended family attend to his needs in his home country, and how he struggled to learn personal responsibility in the host culture, doing things like cooking, cleaning, and managing his finances. The participant describes a supportive network of friends in the U.S., socializing with both people from India and United States. He also talks about struggling with loneliness and cultural differences in the first couple of months of his stay in the U.S., and wanting to return home; after the first semester of his stay in the U.S., he made friends and adjusted successfully to the host culture (e.g., acquired the skills for cooking, cleaning, and money management). He also pursued interests like fishing, bowling, golfing, and drinking, activities inaccessible to middle-class people in India. C2M addresses the high divorce rate in the U.S. and stresses background compatibility and the ability to compromise for a successful marital relationship. The advice he offers newcomers in the U.S. culture is “mix up with the U.S. people, like American people."
That’s the best way to do it. If you mix up with just Indian people, you can’t really make it work.” Some of the main themes identified during this contact refer to the issue of personal responsibility in the host culture and expressing openness and receptivity to cultural elements.

**Couple 2 Indian (C2)**

The couple met in May 2005, when C2M went back to India to meet C2F for the first time, after spending 6 months chatting online and talking on the phone. C2M reports having spent approximately $5,000 on calling cards during their courtship. The couple used to spend 2 to 3 hours at a time on the phone, getting to know each other and their personal values. Their arranged marriage took place in November 2005, and the couple came together to the U.S. in January, 2006. C2M played a supportive role in his spouse’s adjustment to the culture, showing understanding and patience, spending time with her, and introducing her to his American friends. While C2F admits that being married was helpful in her adjustment to the U.S. culture, C2M indicates that his adjustment to the culture had nothing to do with his marital status, as he came here alone. The participants describe a close relationship, based on solid friendship. Some of C2M’s behaviors created tension in the relationship initially. Behaviors such as eating beef and drinking alcohol are reprimanded by Indian culture, especially in the Hindu tradition. As C2F advanced in her process of adjusting to the U.S. culture, she came to accept her husband’s choices and tolerate the differences between them. Some of the main themes identified during this contact refer to couple’s openness and willingness to experience the U.S. culture, and the mediating role of C2M in C2F’s adjustment to the culture.
Couple 3 Female Partner South Korean (C3F)

C3F (DAS = 125), 35, originally from South Korea, came to the United States in June, 2005 (2 years at the time of the interview). She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences and already has a Ph.D. from her home country, where she worked full-time in higher education. During the interview she talked about the help she received from her American “parents,” emotionally as well as academically. The participant reminisces about one of her first contacts with the U.S. culture, and describes humorously her first contact with her Ph.D. advisor. She talks about what she gained from the U.S. culture in terms of maintaining a positive attitude, despite inner emotional issues, as a way of dealing with difficulties (e.g., saying that she is doing okay when asked, despite her having negative feelings and a desire to be heard and consoled). The participant cites difficulties making friends with people from the host culture and interacting with others in the workplace. She also stresses how people in the U.S. culture seem to mind their business and do not offer to help unless they are asked. C3F comments on her language difficulties and lack of cultural awareness, which has impacted her ability to make friends and establish meaningful social contacts. The participant describes the numerous ways in which her marital relationship benefited from being in this culture. For example, her husband is more involved in housework, raises their daughter, and engages in explicit displays of affection. While she expresses feeling content that the family is now reunited, she also talks about the challenges associated with caring for more family members and balancing multiple roles. Some of the main themes identified during this contact refer to the impact of language difficulties and lack of
cultural awareness on C3F’s ability to form social contacts, and support received from her host family, her “American parents.”

**Couple 3 Male Partner South Korean (C3M)**

C3M (DAS = 104), 35, originally from South Korea, came to the United States in January, 2007 (4 months at the time of the interview). He is the accompanying spouse in the relationship, has a master’s degree from South Korea, and back home used to work approximately 60 hours a week. He cites good experiences in the U.S., but expresses fear regarding people’s access to guns and the acts of violence committed here (e.g., the shooting incident at Virginia Tech). He reports fearing for his and his family’s safety and security. Being a “stranger” in the host culture also seems to add to his fears and anxiety associated with living in the United States. When talking about his first impressions of the U.S. culture, he cites an airport incident where he and his daughter were waiting in line to clear customs, and he realized that he forgot his backpack with all of his identification documents in the airplane, thus receiving “unkind” treatment from the U.S. inspector. He talks about feeling embarrassed, confused, and scared during his first contact with the U.S. culture: “I am a foreigner, so they are unkind.” He talks about how challenging it is to learn English on his own, and identifies his status as a stay-at-home dad as equally difficult: “Actually, this is very difficult for me, you know, especially because I am a man, you know. I am a man and to adapt to baby is not usual.” Despite of all the difficulties, he does embrace his role as accompanying spouse and stay-at-home dad: “So this is my mission … so from now on, I want to stay here.” He also describes
how being a stay-at-home father helped him change his mind about traditional Korean male roles.

Other challenges experienced in the U.S. culture are loneliness and difficulty making friends. The main themes identified during this contact emphasize commitment to his family and being with his family, and assuming a non-traditional role and going against Korean norms. Additionally, the participant discusses the need for improved university programs that include accompanying spouses as well. He also stresses the need for day care programs that are free of charge.

**Couple 3 South Korean (C3)**

The participants met in South Korea 10.5 years ago, at a university they were both attending. At the time of the interview, the participants had been married for approximately 8.5 years. They spent 4 of the 8.5 years separated, working jobs in different cities. Together they have a 3-year-old daughter. C3F came to the U.S. in June 2005, and was followed by her husband approximately 1.8 years later. During the interview, they talked about the challenges posed by background differences, demanding jobs, and being away from each other for long periods of time. Being in the United States provided the couple with not just an opportunity to be together, but to improve their relationship and redefine the traditional roles they embraced in South Korea (i.e., C3M started to take on household responsibilities, clean and do laundry, and raise their daughter). C3M in particular has experienced significant changes since coming to the U.S., in that he enjoys being with his family (he already rejected three job offers from home to be with his family), and cites a departure from traditional Korean male roles.
The couple indicates that the factors that contributed to increased closeness in the relationship are not entirely cultural (i.e., coming in contact with other American couples who serve as role-models); personal choices and a decision to improve their relationship were equally important. Some of the main themes identified during this contact refer to an improved relationship in the U.S. culture, and significant role changes experienced by C3M since coming to the U.S.

**Couple 4 Female Partner Thai (C4F)**

C4F (DAS = 113), 35, originally from Thailand, came to the United States in August 2001 (5.5 years at the time of the interview). She is the accompanying spouse in the relationship, currently also the mother of two young children under the age of 3. She has a bachelor's degree from her home country where she used to work full-time. She expresses contentment with her role as an accompanying spouse in the U.S. culture and does not cite any particular challenges in her transition to the U.S. culture. Her adjustment to the U.S. culture was mediated by the presence of her cousin ("Thai with American style") who has been in the U.S. for three years prior to C4F's arrival. The participant appears to be highly separated/individuated from her family of origin; she also shows appreciation for U.S. values such as personal privacy and lack of interference of family members in her family life and decisions. She indicates difficulties getting to know people in the U.S. culture, and talks about the lack of depth in relationships and friendships. C4F also hints at some potential relationship difficulties caused by different levels of acculturation and individuation between her and her husband. She believes that her marriage benefited from experiencing this culture and expresses doubt that the
relationship would have worked out in Thailand living with C4M's parents. Some of the main themes identified during this contact refer to feeling in control of personal choices and decisions regarding family life and child rearing practices, openness to values in the American culture/willingness to learn from the U.S. culture, such as the ways in which senior care is handled, personal privacy, and freedom in decisions and choices.

**Couple 4 Male Partner Thai (C4M)**

C4M (DAS = 128), 36, originally from Thailand, came to the United States in January 2002, following his wife's arrival in the U.S. by approximately 4 months. He came to the United States at his parents' suggestion, to further his education. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences and has a master's degree from another American university. C4M stresses the responsibilities that adult children have towards their parents in the Thai culture, such as caring for aging parents, who have provided the children with continued support (financial and emotional) until late in their adulthood. The participant identifies language difficulties and differences in academic instruction, for example, students being allowed to ask many questions in the U.S. culture and assuming body postures during lectures that might be considered offensive in Thailand. He talks about how being married with kids interferes with study time and vice-versa. C4M goes on to list difficulties encountered in the U.S. culture, primarily with one of the offices servicing international students. He cites situations where he felt that international students were unfairly treated (i.e., asking international students to open checking accounts that have monthly fees, without presenting them with other free of charge options; requiring international students to take
a TB test every 5 years, even if they did not leave the U.S. during that 5-year period).

Some of the main themes identified during this contact refer to participant’s expanded
definition of “family,” which includes his wife, children, and also parents. He indicates
maintaining very close ties with parents from home, and calling them several times a
week, sometimes daily, to seek their advice and guidance with some of his decisions.
Other themes include identifying his wife as best friend and confidante, with their
relationship growing stronger as a result of being in this culture and having to work
through difficulties as a team without other people’s assistance.

**Couple 4 Thai (C4)**

The Thai couple dated for approximately 6 years prior to getting married. At the
time of the interview they had been married for 6.5 years. Together they have two
children under the age of 3. They talk about acceptance and receptivity to the other
person’s opinion in a marital relationship, and share their impression that the high divorce
rate in the U.S. is caused by people’s difficulty to “accept” their partner and compromise
personal dreams and goals. The participants also talked about how their presence in the
host culture helped strengthen their connection; likewise, the birth of their children
helped them become more accepting and forgiving of one another. C4M identifies his
wife as his best friend, the person with whom he shares everything. The couple
acknowledges the potential difficulties that moving back to Thailand and into C4M’s
parents’ home might cause. C4F enjoys her privacy and others’ non-interference in her
family life; however, C4M wants to care for his parents in their old age, sharing the same
expectation for his children as he ages. Additionally, C4F recognizes the value of marital
counseling; C4M is unsure about how talking with a stranger could help their relationship; he stresses the value of communication ("talking") and direct expression of thoughts and feelings, without outside help. From the contact with this couple, it is apparent that C4M embraces traditional family values, while C4F expresses openness to more modern ideas. The contact captures two seemingly opposing views of family life, one that stresses a belief in traditional family values and one that shows receptivity to modern family values, such as clear boundaries and a right to privacy. Another theme identified during this contact reflects C4M's tendency to seek guidance and direction from his wife and parents, thus recreating the "comfort" zone from home that his family provides for him.

Couple 5 Female Partner Chinese (C5F)

C5F (DAS = 143), 28, originally from China is the accompanying spouse in the relationship. She has a master’s degree from her home country and used to work full-time in her home country. She describes the Chinese culture as conservative, stressing qualities such as humility and indirect expression of feelings. In contrast, she describes the U.S. culture as fostering qualities such as confidence and independence, where “people are very proud of themselves, and maybe sometime arrogant.” As an effect of living in the American culture, C5F learned how to express herself more directly and confidently. C5F has happily embraced her supportive role in the host culture; however, she experienced feelings of loneliness, which she overcame by coming in contact with other people in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and at church. She is also preparing for admission to a graduate program. The participant comments on the lack of “interruptions”
(i.e., work schedule in China, other family members’ interference) in the U.S. culture, which led to increased closeness in the relationship. Some of the themes identified during this contact were: increased opportunities for self-expression and personal privacy in the U.S. culture; tendency to reach out and meet new people; and increased closeness in the relationship as an effect of spending more time together and supporting each other through difficulties.

**Couple 5 Male Partner Chinese (C5M)**

C5M (DAS = 113), 30, originally from China is working on his Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences. He has a master’s degree from his home country and worked full-time in China. C5M values American people’s friendliness, their patience and helpfulness, along with the cleanliness in the environment. He also values the exchange of ideas and viewpoints that takes place in his interactions with other international students. The participant comments on his difficulties engaging in the same kind of exchange with Americans, stating that

American people do not have a strong wish to know the outside world, because United States is the most powerful country in the world, so in their mind, U.S. equals to the world, so they don’t have the strong wish to know the outside world. I mean, some of the American people.

C5M indicates that what he found most helpful in his adjustment to the U.S. culture were the initial Teaching Assistant orientation, and the support from the Chinese Church. The relationship also benefited from this experience, which led to increased communication and better understanding of his partner’s feelings and ways of thinking. Some of the themes identified during this contact were: tendency to move closer together and deepen
relationship intimacy, and feeling responsible for one’s spouse’s life and well-being, while acknowledging her supportive role in the U.S. culture.

**Couple 5 Chinese (C5)**

The couple came to the United States in August 2006 (1 year at the time of the interview). They had been married for 6 months prior to coming to the United States and dated for 6 months prior to getting married. The participants cite relationship conflict about 1 to 2 months into their stay in the United States, which they were able to resolve successfully. They go to church weekly and come in contact primarily with married people, whom they met at the Chinese and American church. The spouses describe their perception of low divorce rates in the United States and emphasis on the notion of family. Their view of relationships in the U.S. is that in general, people prefer multiple dating partners, but once married, they tend to take commitment to one partner very seriously. In contrast, in China, they indicate a pattern of dating one partner, translated in increased closeness initially, with a decrease in nurturing behaviors after getting married; hence, a high divorce rate. The couple learned from the American culture the “responsibility to maintain and improve the marriage.” Some of the major themes identified during this contact were the focus on marriage, marital improvement, and family in the American culture, and C5F’s desire to further her education, so she can be an equal partner, and make equal contributions to the relationship.
Couple 6 Female Partner Indian (C6F)

C6F (DAS = 134), 31, is originally from India and came to the U.S. in 2003. She is the accompanying spouse in the American culture. She used to work an average of 48 hours per week in India and acknowledges the role shock experienced as an effect of losing her status as a working woman. She enjoys the freedom in the American culture and the sense of privacy and lack of interference of other people in her and her husband’s life. She talks about getting pregnant shortly after joining her husband in the U.S., and her lack of readiness and skills for the experience of pregnancy. She describes feelings of loneliness and isolation, especially in the first year of her stay in the U.S. The participant describes how her culture has prepared her for this experience, and comments on Indian women’s ability to accept suffering and tolerate whatever life has to offer, which proves to be an effective coping skill in the host culture. She talks about feeling disconnected in the American culture, missing her friends from home, and notices a tendency to shift the focus to herself and work on developing personal goals. C6F comments on the experience of going back to school in an attempt to cope with the isolation and loneliness experienced, thus undergoing a process of individuation in the relationship and culture.

Couple 6 Male Partner Indian (C6M)

C6M (DAS = 141), 31, originally from India, came to the U.S. in 2001, and is currently working on his Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Engineering. He talks about the experience of being impractical (i.e., respecting people’s feelings and not being direct in his communications with others) in the initial stages of his stay in the
United States. He learned from the American culture how to be individualistic and appreciates the freedom and privacy that the culture offers, along with the ability to engage in public displays of affection towards his wife (e.g., kissing, hugging, and holding hands). He mentions his struggles as an international student stemming from financial issues and negative encounters with an on-campus office serving international students, which left him feeling unsupported and unfairly treated. The participant appreciates the emphasis of the American government on promoting healthy families and relationships, but acknowledges how the clear boundaries in social relationships have led to his inability to trust other people, especially in the issue of child supervision. He describes himself and his wife as inseparable, to the point of fusion.

**Couple 6 Indian (C6)**

C6M came to the U.S. 2 years before C6F. It was towards the end of his master’s degree that he decided to return to India to get married. After getting married, the couple lived together for approximately 2 months prior to coming to the U.S. Together they have two children under the age of 3. The spouses talk about how issues encountered in the new culture have helped them grow as a couple, as they had to rely on each other often. A sense of pride stemming from the experience of navigating difficulties together, especially the experience of being first time parents, was apparent. The couple describes the evaluative process they used in order to arrive to a good understanding of the culture and identify the highly adjustable behaviors. They learned about the clear boundaries in social relationships, as opposed to the fluid, boundless relationships characteristic of their home country. The spouses described a tendency to progressively set boundaries in their
relationships with others, become more private, and focus on the family unit. The participants also described a tendency to deliberately filter cultural influences, allow particular cultural influences into their marriage, and reject the ones that are deemed detrimental to the growth of their relationship.

**Couple 7 Male Partner Sri Lankan (C7M)**

Originally from Sri Lanka, C7M (DAS = 120) came to the United States to pursue a Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences. He talks about the mediating role of the Sri Lankan community, already in place, that helped in his adjustment to the host culture. The participant cites few challenges experienced in the host culture, mostly related to language usage and finances. C7M also identifies opportunities experienced in the U.S. culture, such as organized, structured communities and social interactions, politeness and friendliness of people, along with the presence of an organized legal system. The participant finds the experience of being married very beneficial, suggesting that coming alone to the U.S. could cause people to “go in the wrong direction, mix with the local people too much.”

**Couple 7 Female Partner Sri Lankan (C7F)**

C7F (DAS = 127) from Sri Lanka is the accompanying spouse in the relationship. She holds a college degree from Sri Lanka where she used to work full-time in the medical field. She also talks about the presence of Sri Lankan people in the U.S. as the mediating factor in the transition to the new culture. The participant identifies the delivery of her first baby as the first real contact with the host culture, and she reminisces
about the helpfulness and friendliness of the medical staff. She expresses contentment with her status as an accompanying spouse and stay-at-home mother, and would like to do some volunteer work after the kids start school. C7F talks about missing certain foods from home and the lack of a nearby temple to practice her religion.

Couple 7 Sri Lankan (C7)

The couple came to the U.S. together, in Fall 2004 (3.5 years prior to the interview). Coming to the U.S. was a mutual decision; the couple dated for approximately 3 years prior to getting married and came to the U.S. 5 months after getting married. They have two children together under the age of 2. The spouses emphasize their preference to socialize with people from Sri Lanka, and very few Americans. Reasons for this preference include differences in financial means, socializing practices, and attitudes towards marriage. The participants express their wish to preserve their own cultural values and minimize their contact with people from the host culture (e.g., going to a kids' party, just so that the kids do not feel isolated). They cite increased closeness in their marital relationship since coming to this culture, and further state “Seeing people who think marriage is a simple thing makes our bond stronger. So people doing silly things in their marriages; that makes our bond stronger.”

Couple 8 Female Partner African (C8F)

C8F (DAS = 107), 36, originally from Africa, came to the United States in 2006 (1.5 years at the time of the interview). She is the accompanying spouse in the relationship, has previously studied at an Australian university, and worked full-time in
Africa. She talks about her high expectations prior to coming to the United States and the disillusionment experienced when becoming aware of the limitations placed on her as an accompanying spouse in the host culture: “Who is America to me? My America, it’s just this house. This is the only place that identifies me.” Furthermore, she stresses the role shock experienced in the U.S. culture: “Oh, I jumped from being well-known in the community to doing housework. [laughter]” Her DAS score (107) is possibly a reflection of her expressed ambivalence towards her role as accompanying spouse. However, she reports increased closeness in the relationship with her husband in the U.S. culture, as an effect of getting to know each other better and relying on each other more. The participant lists some of the advantages of living in this culture, such as reuniting the family, learning new skills (e.g., swimming, bike riding, and operating a manual transmission car), and having the freedom to define herself and her identity, without outside constraints. She reports dealing with challenges such as a child’s illness, limited financial funds, or her feeling torn between the two roles, through prayer, relying on God’s will, and applying for jobs nationally and internationally. Attending weekly church gatherings where couples get together to talk about their challenges is another way of coping with difficulties. She talks about feeling inspired by some of the American women from church who stress the advantages of being stay-at-home moms and fostering a special relationship with their children. Additionally, the participant mentions very limited contact with neighbors and lack of depth in personal relationships while in the U.S. culture. Some of the major themes identified during this contact refer to participant’s ambivalence toward her role as an accompanying spouse, and the use of prayer and trust in God as methods of dealing with challenges in the U.S. culture.
Couple 8 Male Partner African (C8M)

C8M (DAS = 136), 40, originally from Africa, came to the United States in 2005 (2.5 years at the time of the interview). He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences. In the interview he talked about gender expectations and the respect shown to the elderly in African culture. For example, the man fulfills the role of leader, making all of the decisions in the household; younger people and women kneel in front of the elderly, and men usually eat at the table, while women and children eat on a mat on the floor. Additionally, eye contact between mother-in-laws and son-in-laws is to be avoided at any cost (same with father-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships), to avoid temptation; such indiscretions could result in severe fines. In encounters such as these, women are to keep their bodies well covered, and there needs to be a respectable distance (at least 3 meters) between the two in-laws. C8M comments on social relationships in the U.S., from family relationships, to friendships, and public relationships. He goes on to stress how relationships lack depth and genuineness. The participant discusses the need to protect his family from various cultural influences, such as the notion of divorce and ideas promoted by specific American holidays, and preserve a spiritual approach to daily living, typical of African culture. He also addresses the deep spiritual connection that he shares with his wife, and comments on the lack of depth in marital relationships in the American culture, which are also time-bound (i.e., they dissolve quickly), based primarily on mutual benefit and material comfort, and lacking a spiritual foundation. While he feels that the benefit of living in the U.S. culture is mostly academic, he also acknowledges his cultural learning,
such as acquiring skills on how to deal with the White culture. The main issues and
themes identified during this contact stress the individualistic and materialistic approach
to living in the U.S. culture, versus the spiritual approach in African culture, cultural
adjustment conceptualized as making sense of the host culture (i.e., understanding the
culture), and people in the host culture acting in culturally sensitivity ways (i.e., feeling
understood).

Couple 8 African (C8)

C8M came to the U.S. 1 year before C8F and their children joined him. The
couple met in college. They dated for approximately 2 years before they got married.
They have been married for 12 years and together have three children under the age of 12.
This is not their first experience abroad; they spent approximately 2 years in Australia,
where C8F pursued an advanced degree, and C8M served as accompanying spouse. They
talk about missing the support of their extended family from back home, who were
involved in child rearing and other household tasks (e.g., cooking and cleaning for the
working couple). Throughout the interview, the couple stressed the importance of making
marriage work and honoring their commitment to each other through a series of decisions
congruent with this commitment:

Life is a series of decisions. So, anyways, I go back to my decision and I say I
decided that I am going to marry this girl. And I am going to stay with her and try
my best to make the life meaningful for both of us. That was my decision in the
beginning, that was my goal in the beginning, and I am going to pursue that. It’s
probable that many things are going to come in and distract us, but that is my
primary goal.

Particular emphasis is placed on how they deal with cultural influences in their marriage:
We’ve come to agree that we should not follow what everyone else is doing. But we should have a culture that is ours, that is ours, that we can run with, that we can maintain. We are building cushions within our marriage. Not to allow what is happening all over the place because then what is happening in the United States begins to be a big deal.

The participants express a desire to preserve their spiritual approach to marriage and reject the cultural influences that introduce a materialistic approach (e.g., showing their love for each other and during various holidays by purchasing expensive gifts, eating out on a regular basis, and celebrating Valentine’s Day) that could threaten the foundation of their marriage. The main themes identified during this contact refer to preserving personal values and preparing the marriage for this cross-cultural experience by adopting shock absorbers and having set expectations about behavior as a couple in the new cultural context. Additionally, the partners talked about making daily decisions that are congruent with their original commitment to each other, such as shutting down the opportunities/influences that arise each day that conflict with their original commitment.

**Couple 9 Female Partner African (C9F)**

C9F (DAS = 119), 42, originally from Africa, came to the United States in September, 2004 to pursue a Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences. She has a master’s degree from her home country and worked full-time for the African government. Throughout the interview, C9F emphasizes the individualistic aspect of the American culture. She describes social relationships, including friendships, business, and family relationships, as superficial and lacking depth; a sense of hopelessness emanates from her description of social interactions in the American culture. Difficulties in the host culture are handled through prayer and faith in God.
Re-enacting parts of the African culture in the context of the host culture (i.e., living in close knit with another African couple, who lives just down the road) is another way of dealing with cultural issues.

**Couple 9 Male Partner African (C9M)**

C9M (DAS = 110), 48, from Africa, came to the United States in January 2007 as an accompanying spouse. At the time of the interview, he had spent approximately 1 year in the U.S. In Africa, C9M used to work full-time in a spiritual leadership role. He talked about the role change experienced and how he came to embrace and accept his new role. He emphasized the differences between the two cultures, especially in the way people handle their marriages, and the parenting of children. The participant evokes the use of prayer and trust in God as central in dealing with cultural issues. Additionally, he credits his American friends from church, who provide support in the form of prayer, material help, and fellowship.

**Couple 9 African (C9)**

At the time of the interview, C9M and C9F had been married for 18 years. Together they have four children. The spouses describe how their stay in the United States helped increase the bond between them and between them and the kids. Whereas in Africa there was little time to spend with the kids due to busy schedules and the presence of numerous other family members, in the host culture they are able to provide the children with individualized attention and shift the focus to members of the immediate family. The couple comments on the high divorce rate in the American culture. While
acknowledging the role of Christianity in the preservation of marriage in African culture, the participants agree that it is a reality that could affect anyone, anywhere, and that people need to safeguard their marriages in order to be successful. One critical aspect is communication, along with sharing common goals.

**Couple 10 Female Partner Chinese (C10F)**

C10F (DAS = 118), originally from China, came to the United States in 2007, approximately 4 months prior to the time of the interview. She is the accompanying spouse in the relationship. She has a bachelor’s degree and while in China she used to work full-time in the education field. She talks about having more privacy in the U.S., versus China where she used to live in a crowded, overpopulated city, in the same place where she worked, sharing living arrangements with her coworkers. She reports feeling more disconnected and isolated in the U.S., due to lack of proximity to grocery stores and the absence of pedestrians walking to places. While in the U.S., the participant started to attend church and learn more about Christianity. She attends both American and Chinese churches. Even though she proclaims her belief in God, she expresses ambivalence towards the idea of organized religion, and feels uncomfortable when people try to impose on her their religious beliefs. The major gain made since coming to the U.S. is her increased confidence in her abilities; she appreciates the emphasis on individuality in the U.S., which goes beyond age, race, and other background experiences. She cites financial difficulties which put a strain on her relationship with her husband, though manageable. Even though she enjoys her role as accompanying spouse, the participant reports that she has not fully embraced her current status, as she has been studying for admission to a
Ph.D. program ever since coming to the U.S. The major themes identified during this contact emphasize personal opportunities and confidence in personal abilities since coming to the U.S.

**Couple 10 Male Partner Chinese (C10M)**

C10M (DAS = 92), originally from China, came to the United States in 2007 (8 months at the time of the interview). He is currently working on his Ph.D. in a department affiliated with the College of Education. In China he worked full-time in the field of education for approximately 7 years. The participant talked about the emphasis on privacy in relationships in the U.S. culture, as opposed to relationships in China, where people display affection very publicly. He also comments on the lack of accessibility to places like grocery stores and restaurants in the U.S., which are usually not located within walking distance. C10M appreciates how Americans take care of their environment and wild life and make efforts to maintain clean, healthy surroundings. The participant also contrasts and compares the two legal systems and identifies the presence of a structured legal system in place in the host culture, with laws that people obey. He describes the various opportunities that are available to people in the U.S. culture, and the emphasis on human individuality that is not bound by age or education background. He comments on how people in China experience various limitations, especially in terms of career choices. For example, while in the U.S. people can have a student status at any age if they choose to, in China that is almost unheard of. Similarly, in the U.S. being a student and working is a common occurrence, but in China people cannot go to school and hold a job at the same time; they usually sacrifice one aspect or the other. C10M also addresses the
differences between the two educational systems. In China the student is the recipient of information; students do not ask questions and critical thinking is not usually encouraged. In the U.S., on the other hand, students are asked to interact, contribute to classroom discussions, and think critically. Along with language difficulties, this was a challenging task for C10M, which he overcame with perseverance by auditing classes he already took and putting himself in situations that require him to interact with others. The main issues identified during this contact refer to the participant’s emphasis on personal opportunities in the U.S. culture, along with personal growth experienced as an effect of challenging himself and communicating/interacting with other people.

**Couple 10 Chinese (C10)**

The couple had been married for 9 years prior to coming to the United States. During the last 3 years of their stay in China they lived separately, as C10M was getting his master’s degree in a different city. They indicated that the first month spent together in the U.S. was the most difficult, as they had to work through conflict caused by personal differences. The relationship issues were complicated by uneven education levels and differing goals. C10M describes how the communication gap between them got wider as he went on to pursue a graduate degree while C10F maintained homeostasis: “She still stayed in the place. She didn’t change, but I changed, the opinion changed about something. So I feel difficulty to communicate sometimes.” The couple seems to be confronted with the same issue currently, as C10M continues to further his education, while C10F is staying at home and enjoying her status as an accompanying spouse. While C10F reports increased closeness in the relationship since coming to the U.S., C10M
expresses ambivalence and indicates a desire for C10F to return to school and pursue a graduate degree. C10F reports feeling pressured by C10M to return to school. The disconnect in the marriage is reflected in the participants’ DAS score, with C10M’s score (DAS = 92) suggesting a distressed couple. The drift in the relationship is captured in the following statement:

If we didn’t learn, we have not something to share. She was a teacher for such a long time, she didn’t study something new, so she cannot share something with me, I think that’s the problem. And still she doesn’t like to talk about something she was thinking. So I don’t know, I don’t know her. It’s really a stranger, you know? So I don’t know how to communicate.

Additionally, he emphasizes the need to work on common goals, such as discussing books together, or talking about sports. The main themes identified during this contact are a relationship disconnect caused by differing goals and communication issues; and differences about whether C10F should return to school.

**Findings from Cross-Case Analyses**

Next, I will report on the findings for each of the research questions of the study, and on other findings that emerged as the study progressed. When reporting the findings, I will document the more frequently occurring findings first, followed by the less prevalent findings.

*Research Question 1*: What do married graduate international students studying in the U.S. and their accompanying spouses experience at the contact with the new culture?

The participants’ responses were organized in three major categories; several subcategories were identified within each category. The three major categories are:
cultural differences, student spouses’ experiences in the U.S. culture, and accompanying spouses’ experiences in the U.S. culture.

**Cultural Differences**

Several themes emerged from analysis of the participants’ responses in regards to their experience in the new culture and cultural differences noted. Differences in interpersonal relationships comprised one of the most prominent themes. The participants also noted differences in people’s attitudes toward marriage. For some, parenting practices were evident. For others, the differences in the academic environment were more salient. A few participants cited differences in the community organizational structures and physical environment. This section on cultural differences concludes with a summary of favorable and unfavorable views of Americans provided by the participants.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

A large number of participants shared their perceptions of interpersonal relationships in the U.S. culture, and in general identified this as a major area of difference. Many participants recognized the presence of boundaries in relationships and the emphasis on privacy. Although many participants described Americans as friendly, in general they cited limited contact with American people. Participants identified a tendency to either keep to themselves (C6), re-create the home culture environment by establishing relationships with people from their original culture (C4; C7; C8; C9), come in contact with limited number of Americans through church (C3; C5; C10), or entertain occasional contact with people from the host culture (C1). C2M and C2F appear to be an
exception; they seem to be fully engaged in the American culture, socializing mostly with American people (e.g., they go bowling, golfing, fishing; party on a regular basis, and consume foods that are prohibited in the Hindu culture).

The following views of interpersonal relationships in the U.S. were shared by the participants and are presented in descending order: privacy of people and presence of boundaries in relationships (13); superficial relationships (12); focus on the nuclear family (9); absence of community and family norms to regulate individual behavior (6); individualistic society (6); gender and class issues (6); and public behavior (5).

Privacy and presence of boundaries in relationships. Many participants identified the presence of boundaries in relationships and an emphasis on privacy in the U.S. culture. According to the participants in the study, the emphasis on privacy often manifests in an inability to get to know people and build meaningful relationships. It also is evident in a perceived lack of hospitality of people in the U.S. culture. C4F’s response captures a view shared by many participants in the study:

I think in the Thai culture it’s very easy to get to know people, like your neighbor, but here you live in like apartments. It’s not easy to knock in somebody’s door and then ‘hi, my name is blah blah blah’ and have a good relationship with them. I think that that is different ... for American people they’re not like, actually they’re friendly. Some of them are friendly, but they don’t like want to get along with you for a real friend ... I think since we’ve been here we have American friends and it’s hard to go to their house. They never invite us to their house. They can talk to you in the class or hang out with you sometimes seldom or something, you know. But if in my culture, for example, if you were my friend in Thailand, I would like you to meet my parents. I don’t know why; maybe their culture, like private person or something like that.

The difficulty getting to know Americans is shared by other participants as well. C8M vehemently expressed his inability to understand people’s feelings and thoughts and establish satisfactory relationships:
It was a tough time finding out and I had to be upfront with some and say ‘I don’t understand you.’ When everybody talks about America, is talking about people that are exuberant and thinking of good will, but they’re very dry people. I tell them, ‘You are very dry people. In you, people cannot feel you. You hide emotions, you hide feelings, everything is personal, personal, personal, personal. Relationships are very important in Africa in my culture. Relationships are more important than achievements. Achieve little, but they have the relationships that maintain us and heal. That’s why mothers sue brothers and sisters, and daughters, everybody is suing one another. This kind of things. So it was tough for me.

For one participant in the study the emphasis on privacy is conceptualized as straightforwardness. The following quote is suggestive of such an attitude:

Actually, I am not in contact with any Americans, like closely, so I don’t know, but few things I like in Americans. I like ... they don’t interfere in your life ... I don’t know, but sometimes people are good, they are straight. They are not really interested in you and your life. If they find they are not comfortable, they will stay away from us. That thing I like, I really appreciate that. (C6F)

For some participants, however, the same unobtrusiveness is viewed as lack of a caring attitude:

Yeah, no friends. It was so hard. The problem is, if I have international students in my country, probably is personal, or not, but probably we are trying to help them, even when I am very busy, for example, probably I ask first to international students ‘do you have anything that I can help you?’ But, I don’t know, probably because my surrounding person set, like attitude or characteristics, they never ask me if I want to go out to eat once together ... it was so hard to be in my cubicle without any like chatting. I think they look very busy every time. I don’t know why they are so busy, still I don’t know, but they look very busy every time. It’s kind of different in my country. In my country is absolutely different, so probably if I have any internationals, probably I am going to say ‘what can I help you’ first, before they are going to ask me. Yeah, it’s very hard to make a good relationship in this country. (C3F)

Several participants addressed the tendency of American people to be unwelcoming of family and friends. C5M stated:

Actually, it’s totally different in our country than in the United States. Because in our country we have a tradition for hosting the friend, and your friend, and your relatives rather warmly. So compared with our country, I think the hosting culture in this country is more conservative.
C6M referred to the host culture as “not as welcoming as the Indian culture.” C8M addressed a similar idea:

I found that in America everybody has built their own slot. And everybody is shouting ‘Please don’t come, don’t touch my space.’ Everybody is fighting for their space. And that makes social life hard. In that for you to get into that space, you always need permission. Unlike us, when you know one another, your friends, or you’re attending class together, or you’re sharing the same cubicle, you say ‘Come in anytime.’

Several couples in the study cited a tendency to recreate culture-of-origin communities, as a way of coping with the marked emphasis on privacy in the host culture. C9F stated:

I think most of my support is between the two families, because we have known one another for over 15 years. So although we live in 2 separate houses, we live as one, and the kids are either here, or there, and we share. We share the cars, the food, so live in our small Africa, right here.

It appears that the presence of boundaries in relationships and an emphasis on privacy in the U.S. culture causes mixed attitudes in the participants in this study. Although some appreciate the focus on privacy, the majority see it as a barrier to getting to know Americans, socialize with them, and build meaningful relationships.

**Superficial relationships.** Several participants in the study used qualifiers like “superficial,” “surface,” and “insincere” when discussing their perceptions of social relationships in the U.S. culture. The participants illustrated how this quality permeates all kinds of relationships, from friendships, public relations, to parent-child relationships.

A large number of participants addressed the issue of friendship in the American culture. Although many participants in the study described American people as friendly, several participants (6) in the study cited difficulty building friendships with Americans; others (3) talked about building fellowship with Americans through church and prayer. Two of the participants (C2F and C2M) indicated having many American friends. Four
participants (C6F, C6M, C7M, and C7F) decided to keep to themselves and avoid contact with people from the host culture. One couple has occasional contact with Americans.

C9F stated:

We have friends, but there is a limit, it’s kind of a surface relationship. Maybe we meet … the American friends that we have, we only meet them for prayer. So beyond that, we don’t share so much. If we share anything, we share things like prayer items, and pray together about some situation, but we do not go out to seek for help from them. Because we know what the answer would be.

The definition of friendship in certain cultures tends to have a profound meaning, based on mutual sharing and lack of boundaries, which emphasizes the contrast between the American and African cultures for C8:

I would say that I rely more on e-mails from home and friends away from here, because Americans … their friendship is a little bit different from the friendship we have. If I am a friend of somebody, then somebody’s just like a brother, just like a sister. It means that we share almost everything in common, and I think because of factors that we grew up with, we learn to share everything. You know … And here you’ll share so many other things, but you won’t share economic problems. ‘You should have known that, you should have planned that, you should have budgeted better … Go look for more jobs, get a credit card, those kind of things.’ And so my social support is mostly from home and from friends that I knew that are here before I came. I’ve got a few white friends that I came to know through church. And even then it is within the ‘Christian kind of limits,’ they are not in my cultural limits, they cannot transcend that Christian [inaudible] to come into my culture limits. So our social support basically is within our cultural limits. The Africans that are here and that stuff. (C8M)

Throughout the interview, C8M expressed a personal dilemma stemming from the inability to get to know people and form meaningful and satisfactory relationships:

So I had to adjust a lot. Not to come full blast in people’s lives, and not to allow them come full blast in my life. So I had to go through the pain of selecting who should I open to, and who should not. You know, who is genuinely interested in me, and will allow me in. That was a big deal, and in Africa, if you don’t have somebody like that, life is miserable. You consider yourself worthless if you don’t have two-three people that you can throw your problems in and they feel like you. And they can throw their problems on you and you feel together. We have that psychological support that doesn’t exist here.
A few participants discussed their perception of superficial parent-child relationships in the U.S. culture. This category will be presented in greater detail in one of the following sections describing parenting practices.

Other participants identified a lack of trust in social relationships. C6M described difficulties trusting other people, such as his neighbor, to look after the kids. C8M and C9F discussed their perception of lack of genuineness in social relationships, as evidenced by "fake smiles," lack of true interest in one as a person, and tendency to hide feelings. C8M explained:

People were not that friendly, and people don't smile genuinely, it is like everybody here has been trained how to work the public. Public relationships are not genuine: 'I need you as long as I have to use you to get to point B, but I don't want you to think that there is anymore between ...' I mean, it's surface, everything here is surface.

Absence of community and family norms to regulate individual behavior.

Several participants identified the lack of family and community norms in the U.S. to help regulate an individual's behavior. The participants discussed how an individual's behavior in the U.S. is inner driven, as opposed to an individual's behavior in other cultures, where there are family and community expectations to be followed.

C1M, C2M, C4M, C6M, and C8M, all male participants, discussed how in their cultures the hierarchical lines between generations are clearly defined, and there are expectations that dictate how an individual should act. Most of these participants acknowledged the expectation to treat the elderly with respect and care for their parents in their old age. C6M stated: "In India, you knew to respect your parents and elderly. So respect comes in the distance. You knew to keep your distance from them. So I cannot kiss my wife in front of my parents, not even I can touch her."
Most of these participants also suggested that there are specific gender role expectations that need to be fulfilled. C8M described in great detail how gender role expectations guide an individual’s behavior:

In our culture, the husband, being the head of the household, he has to lead everything. The husband has to lead everything. If he has to go out bring money, he has to lead. If it’s discipline in the home, the husband has to lead. If it’s money matters, he has to lead. The woman is a helper. And here [the U.S.] there’s a lot of exposure of the body. It’s very hard to find women in my culture who are exposed. Skirts are not shorter than knee level. And it’s very hard to see a lady’s bra. Those kinds of things stand out. We have things like ... women here stand to greet their husbands. Women in my culture kneel down to greet their husbands. They kneel down to greet eldest, kneel down to talking. But here it’s not. And then men hug their mothers-in-law, and wives hug their fathers-in-law, which is totally, totally unacceptable in my culture. I stand miles away from my mother-in-law. If she came in here she would not leave past that door. The young one has to kneel before the old one. So I kneel before my mother in law and greet, and my wife kneels before my dad. And I cannot make eye contact with my mother-in-law. If I make eye contact with her, I have to pay her, pay a fine. So if she accidentally looks at me, I am supposed to look away.

C5F described some of the socialization practices in China. She stated that people are to follow community rules and obey “the whole people’s benefits.”

Our culture is concerned about obeying the whole people’s benefits and sometimes it’s about sacrificing yourself, but nowadays people are more and more aware of the individualism’s importance. But in the past we were taught to obey our teachers, obey our parents, and obey our government or something ... I think people here have more freedom to do what they want to do, and say what they think.

The absence of community norms to regulate an individual’s behavior appears to also affect the way people handle their relationships, particularly marriages. This issue will be reviewed later in the section discussing marriage attitudes.

It appears many participants shared the view that in the American culture an individual’s actions are inner driven, and the emphasis is often on developing an internal
locus of control versus external locus of control typical of other cultures. Thus, many participants in the study identified the individualistic aspect of the American culture.

**Individualistic society.** Several participants identified the increased focus on individualism in the U.S. culture. C8M explained in great detail how the emphasis on individualism and personal responsibility in the U.S. culture fosters beliefs of self-sufficiency, which lead to feelings of alienation and disconnect. He also implies that mental illness in the U.S. could be related to the suppression of natural tendencies for connectedness as a means of coping:

American culture is too individualistic. Even among the African Americans is still individualistic, it is me, it is you can do it. But you come here and in the winter you don’t have a car, people know you don’t have a car, you finish up a lecture, 9 in the night, and nobody will say ‘What direction do you go so I can give you a lift?’ No, because everybody should have a car. You should have known that there will be a winter, it is your responsibility. Individualism does not work. I cannot even teach my children that maybe being a bit individualistic is good sometime, simply because in the long run they always end into negatives. Americans are stressed out, so stressed out. They consume 90% of the world’s anti-depressants. And sincerely, consuming 90% of the world’s antidepressants is not because their lives are too packed up, no, they don’t have outlets. A child will suffer and will not be able to call home and say ‘Mommy or daddy or auntie, or my sister, or this friend of mine, I am going through this.’ No, this friend of mine who’s calling, his wife is in the hospital but he knows that every step he’s taking I am there with him, I will stay awake the whole night and be with them, I will tell him ‘go home and sleep, I’ll stay awake,’ this kind of things. You cannot do it here, that’s your problem. I can write you a card and say ‘Sorry for this’ but I will not give up my time, American time is so precious, you know ...

C9F described a similar situation, stressing how the focus on individualism in the U.S. culture fosters a materialistic approach to living, which permeates relationships and leads to superficial encounters:

I think it’s very individualistic and everybody is inward looking, very materialistic, and friendship stops where money starts, and that is very different from our culture. Our culture is such that everybody is part of the family and you don’t have anything that is yours; you know, whatever is available, it is shared
among the people. I think it’s hard to tell whether the people are sincere, because I see a lot of fake smiles and that surprised me, because you think that someone is genuinely smiling, but before you even respond to it, it is gone, so that is different. When we smile to somebody, the smile comes from inside, and you take time and acknowledge somebody, or even greet them.

Other couples, however, as it is the case of C6, appear to be receptive to the focus on individualism in the U.S. culture. C6M discussed his tendency to be “impractical” in the first stages of his stay in the U.S., by not being able to assert himself in certain situations or expressing his feelings directly. He went on to describe how he was socialized in India to show respect for authority figures and elders. He indicated a desire to adopt a more individualistic attitude, express his feelings directly and assert himself, and be less mindful of other people’s feelings.

Likewise, C5F expressed an attitude of admiration for American people’s ability to “speak their mind” and communicate “directly.” She also appreciated their ability to come across as confident and be self-reliant.

Focus on the nuclear family. Several participants identified the emphasis on the nuclear family in the U.S. culture. A few participants (C2M, C6M, C8M) come from cultures where people live in multigenerational households comprised of children, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Others (C1F, C4M, C10F) come from cultures with clear hierarchical structures, with households comprised of at least two generations:

Most of the families in China, the parents and the children, they may live together, and the young children most of the time they graduate from the university and they find a job and they will live with their parents for a long time. And maybe even after they are married they will live together with their parents (C10F).

C4M contrasted the traditions and living arrangements of the Thai culture with the living arrangements in the U.S. culture, emphasizing the disadvantages of the latter:
We come from a big family. We have grandpa, grandma, and but here it’s like single family, individual family. And I think the majority of people when they finish high school, they just go wherever they want to go. I don’t feel comfortable with that because, I think if you do it like that, the relationship between parents and kids is not strong.

However, most female accompanying spouses expressed contentment with the emphasis on the nuclear family in the U.S. culture. They discussed how non-interference of extended family members and in-laws provides them with the opportunity to focus exclusively on themselves, their partner, and children. C4F stated: “I think I’m happy that I don’t have to take somebody’s opinion. I mean, I can do what is best for my children. Because grandparents always think that they know better.” C6F illustrated a similar opinion:

Personally, here I am free, I can go wherever I want, don’t have to worry about anything, like at 11 o’clock, if I want to go out, I can go out. It is really good for me, because in my home country women can’t go out after like 10 or 9 o’clock. In my home country also my parents didn’t allow me to, you know, ‘you can’t go out, this is not safe, what will people think if you go outside?’ but here I’m free; you know, if you are not pressurized, you will feel comfortable. When I was in my home country ‘no, you can’t go’ so I always was so excited to go out, if I had one chance. And here I have all kinds of liberty.

It is possible that accompanying spouses are more receptive to this type of living arrangement, as they often serve the role of primary caretakers in multigenerational families.

**Gender and class issues.** A few participants addressed issues related to gender and class issues in the U.S. culture. The main areas identified are the presence of division of labor in relationships, good senior citizen care, and the lack of social class issues. Three participants identified the focus on responsibility sharing in marital relationships, where husbands and wives divide the housework and help one another. Their responses
suggested that in their home cultures there may be an uneven distribution of responsibilities, with the woman performing all of the household-related activities, including child rearing. C3F described how the experience in the host culture has helped with some of the unevenness of responsibility-sharing in her own marriage:

So I don’t know, I have to see what he is going to do in my country when we go back to my country. But so far he changed a lot, because back home he never tried to help me. He just said ‘I want a drink, I want a drink. Go get water.’ I had to bring, but now he can do …

C2F expressed an attitude of appreciation for the division of labor in marital relationships. She stated:

I really appreciate that they divide their working … the man is working and cooking also. The men always cook burgers and other things like that. And the woman is baking cakes and desserts, and when the husbands go to the office then the wife takes care of the child. I like that, take care of the child. But then also, when the wife goes to office, the husband takes care of their child.

One participant identified the good senior citizen care in the U.S., with senior citizens living fulfilling and independent lives, well into their old age. C4F described how in her culture older people rely on others, typically their children, to fulfill their emotional needs:

We always talk about the senior people who live here. We wonder why they are so happy and I think they are healthy because they live happy. They go to places, they travel. They go travel. They go meet their friend of the same age. They don’t need to wait for their children, but in my country they have no friends as they get older, they have no friends. They just have their children. And I feel they’re not happy, they’re not happy, but here I saw old people that can drive when they are more than 60 years old, but in my country no, they just wait for their children to take them someplace.

Two study participants expressed their perception of lack of major differences between social classes in the U.S. culture. Both C2M and C2F explained how activities that are accessible only to the privileged, rich people in India, such as bowling and golf,
are affordable and can be accessed by anyone in the U.S. culture. C2F illustrated: "In America it’s really, really good. There are no differences between rich people and middle class people, but in India it’s a very big difference."

**Public behavior.** Several participants commented on the ways in which American people conduct themselves publicly. The participants noted in particular the tendency of American people to engage in public displays of affection, adopt a rather revealing dress code, particularly women, and act rude/impolite.

A few participants commented on the American people’s tendency to show affection for their partner publicly. C3F and C6M expressed an admiration for people’s ability and freedom to express their innermost feelings towards their partner. C6M stated:

I think it’s pretty good, the culture is friendly with the couples. Because [in India] if I want to hang out with my wife, I cannot embrace her, walking on the road, people will stare at us, ‘what are they doing,’ you know? They take that as a negative sign…So I cannot kiss my wife in front of my parents, not even I can touch her … It’s ok if I put a hand on her shoulder or something, but I cannot embrace her or hug her or anything. So here I am very comfortable because I can express myself properly, because nobody’s around, and even in the car or something I can kiss her if I want. People don’t mind, that is very nice, that is a timely expression, expressing yourself, so I can do it here, but not in India.

C3F discussed how her husband has slowly been engaging in expression of feelings since his stay in the U.S. She stated: “In this country you’re kind of free to kiss the woman on the street, or he is free to say ‘I love you’ in front of a lot of people … So I think the circumstances are helping him.”

C8M commented on the revealing dress code adopted by the women in the host culture. He stated: “That’s a lot of exposure of the body. It’s very hard to find women in my culture who are exposed. Skirts are not shorter than knee level. And it’s very hard to see a lady’s bra. Those kinds of things stand out.”
A few participants identified impolite/rude behaviors that American people display, particularly in the American classroom. These behaviors are described in greater detail in the section describing academic environment issues.

This section provided a detailed description of participants' perceptions of interpersonal relationships in the U.S. The section highlighted mostly the emphasis on privacy and individualism in relationships, the superficial character of social relationships, the focus on the nuclear family and absence of community and family norms to regulate individual behavior, the perceived lack of significant gender and class issues, and aspects related to public behaviors. The next section will provide a closer look at American people’s marriage attitudes, another area of difference identified by the participants in the study.

**Marriage Attitudes**

The individualistic approach to marital relationships in the U.S. culture as perceived by the participants is reflected in observations such as inability to sacrifice personal goals or understand and accept the partner for who s/he is, or the lack of support from family and the community. The participants’ responses are captured in the following categories: high rate of divorce and the ease to get a divorce in the U.S. culture (10); individualistic approach to relationships (5); lack of support from family/community (4); and perceived positive attitudes of American people toward marriage (3).

**High rate of divorce and the ease to get a divorce in the U.S. culture.** Some participants stated that Americans allow small reasons to come between the partners, as evidenced by C7M’s statement: “I heard one story where the woman got a divorce
because her salary was higher than the man’s.” Others (C2M) described how lack of compatibility between partners contributes to the high divorce rate:

It’s almost 50 percent, so why is it? Because they don’t think when they got married. If a guy is really compatible with her. So I think that’s a main reason there is so much divorce in the U.S., because they don’t think ‘Am I really getting the right guy,’ because how can that be possible: the guy who is working as a mechanic, a worker like that, who works with auto parts, in an auto shop; how can he really understand that girl about her Ph.D., that’s way, way off to me.

C9M’s perception of Americans’ attitudes toward marriage provides a synopsis of the views shared by many participants in the study:

There are so many differences in the U.S. culture compared to mine back home. I found that their understanding of marriage is that marriage is taken as a temporary kind of contract, which can be terminated anytime, when the parties wish to do so. And yet, back home, my culture, both the Christian culture and the traditional culture of my tribal clan is that marriage is supposed to be a kind of permanent relationship between the couples. That if things go wrong, which actually do, there should be a way of seeking re-dress, so that the two parties can be helped, they can be counseled, they can be encouraged, they can be made to understand that once they had entered that relationship they needed to endure, persevere, the difficult things. But here I found that divorce rate is very high, whereby when a couple does not agree, and the man or the woman they are thinking “enough is enough” in this state, Michigan, I am told, even for the flimsiest reason, divorce is granted. Of course that doesn’t mean that back home there are no divorces. The rate is not as high as it is here. And the church, of course, my church teaches that when you get married, there is no divorce, because you take a vow at the time of your wedding, you extend the vows of commitment, and in that you say ‘for better or for worse, for rich or for poor, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.’

So as long as you are living, you are alive, you just need to keep together. When things go wrong, try to see how you can seek counsel, how you can try to resolve it, and also ok, sometimes you can separate for a while, but not really being divorced. During that moment of separation, God can intervene, speak to you, about your situation, maybe which is causing you to have thoughts otherwise about your marriage, then that way you get a conviction that ‘I really need to forgive my friend, or I need to change my attitude and get back to the business of our marriage.’ So during the separation, that is expected. And so when I saw this difference, I really got troublesome, in the sense that this culture is different indeed, and of course there are other things...
Individualistic approach to relationships. Several participants (C1F, C1M, C7M, C8M) noted the lack of marital commitment in the U.S. culture. Others (C2M, C4M, C7M) discussed the inability of people to compromise personal goals and accept individual differences. C7M stated: “Basically, every person is different from the other, right? So you need to cope with the others’ preferences, their attitudes, and make an effort to understand them.” C8M discussed the emphasis on material possessions in the U.S. culture, at the detriment of the spiritual connection in the marriage:

America is top of the world ... Wife’s car, husband’s car, their first’s born car, three cars in the compound. They are fighting. All the time. You know, you see them smile in the public, they get into their house. Everybody is in their cocoon. The man goes hunting, the woman goes doing what, and when do they ever sit down and analyze their lives and know one another, get filled in? Marriage is a very strong spiritual thing. It has nothing to do with how much money you have, or the size of your house. You and your spouse can live in a cave and feed on hunted meat and gather your foods, yet you can raise up a family that is so happy and knitted together, than that of somebody who is having zillions of dollars in their account, but in their heart it’s about the things.

Lack of support from family/community. Several participants suggested that the general cultural context does not support marital commitment. C8F stated “the community eyes that dictate this is how a married couple behaves is missing.” One participant (C1F) illustrated a similar idea:

That’s what I regret in this culture, that it’s lost its strong family values. And it’s very widely supported in the media. People just say, ‘Oh, just forget it, why do it? Oh, I don’t like it, just leave it, just stop it!’ No one has that commitment to work it out. And relationships are really hard and people should keep repeating that and should work hard.

C1M added: “The American culture does not support commitment from what we understand. So if you’re not pleased with your spouse or your partner, you just leave and go. And the children would be taken care of.”
Perceived positive attitudes toward marriage. Conversely, the opinions of C5F and C5M were interesting in that their perceptions of Americans’ attitudes toward marriage seem to contradict the opinions of the majority of the participants. They stated that Americans take marriage and commitment to their partners very seriously. The couple indicated that in Shanghai, one of the largest cities in China, the rate of divorce is rapidly increasing. They explained that couples spend a lot of time together prior to getting married, but then fail to attend to their relationship once married. Additionally, C5 has been attending church regularly since coming to the U.S., and frequently comes in contact with married Christian couples (they did not attend church in China). It may be possible that their perception of marital attitudes is “colored” by exposure to these two environments. Here is an illustrative comment:

I think a difference between our cultures in China we spend a lot of time together before you get married and try to dating frequently, talking frequently and when we get married I think most people will just think that ‘oh, since we got married we don’t have to take care or our marriage.’ But for here I think it is reversed, before you’re married I think you can chose your own activity just like you can go for your own party without your girlfriend or boyfriend, but when you are married you have to be think seriously for your relation with your wife. So there is a saying in China to advise young people to open your eyes before marriage but close your eyes when you get married.

C3F noted the presence of division of labor in marital relationships, where husbands and wives share responsibilities. She stated: “So I don’t know if that’s common stuff in this country, but based on my experiences through my [host] family it’s kind of easier to handle, to manage their house as a married couple.”


**Academic Environment**

For the most part, the participants in this study acknowledged the quality education received in the United States. They noted primarily the flexibility in the academic environment, such as the presence of informal professor-student relationships; ability to switch majors and select coursework; ability to return to school or pursue an education later in life, etc. The following categories reflect the participants’ responses: impolite classroom behavior (4); interactive relationships between professors and students and less obvious power differentials in these relationships (3); and classroom curriculum (1).

**Impolite classroom behavior.** For some international students, the lack of rigid hierarchical relationships in professor-student interactions appears to pose challenges. It may be conducive to behaviors deemed as impolite, and it also requires participation and classroom contributions. The behaviors that were viewed as impolite are eating and drinking in the classroom, talking with each other, walking out of the classroom without asking for permission, putting feet up on chairs, and dress code. Additional behaviors deemed as rude were blowing one’s nose publicly and walking into someone’s home with shoes on.

**Interactive relationships between professors and students.** In the American classroom, the power differential between students and professors is significantly diminished. One participant noted: “The students here look at the professor as their employee, ‘I pay the money you teach me’ (C4M). Professors expect the students to engage in an interactive dialogue, ask questions, and make contributions to class
discussions. In many cultures, students are the recipients of knowledge and unsolicited contributions or questions are reprimanded. Often times international students experience discomfort with this type of academic environment, especially in their initial stages of stay in the U.S.

Classroom curriculum. C2M addressed issues related to the American classroom curriculum. He identified more exams in the U.S. as opposed to India, and also emphasized the increased flexibility of the coursework, as well as the practice-oriented/applicable knowledge in the U.S. He indicated:

In India is very, very classical, like they teach you what’s the norm, what’s the principle, but they didn’t teach you how to apply this stuff in nature. And I think in India the majors and minors are also very limited what you can choose from, not like here where you have plenty of majors and plenty of minors that you can choose, you can drop classes or you can add.

Parenting Practices

Several participants, especially those with children, touched on the topic of parenting practices when talking about cultural differences. The following differences were noted in regards to parenting practices in the U.S.: superficial parent-child relationships (3); permissive parent-child relationships (3); difficulty parenting children in the U.S. (3); and children and senior citizens socialized to be independent (2).

Superficial parent-child relationships. Similar to other social relationships illustrated above, parent-child relationships are viewed as superficial and equal/permissive. Several participants talked about the American people’s difficulty to develop strong bonds with their children, as kids leave home early (sometimes before the age of 18) and they lack parental guidance. Parents may help their children up to a point
(i.e., pay for school tuition) after which they expect them to take care of themselves; helping children later on in life is uncommon and viewed as enabling. Guiding children appears to be one way of laying a strong foundation in the relationship parents-children:

Because I think every parent should guide, ‘okay, you should study this, you should learn this, it’s better than that.’ Sometimes when I was in high school I don’t know what kind of career was good and what I wanted to learn, something like that. I think we should guide our kids (C4M).

**Permissive/Friendly parent-child relationships.** A few participants discussed the permissive, laissez-faire approach to parenting in the U.S. culture. C7F explained how too much friendliness in the relationship parent-child can be conducive to behavioral problems: “Yeah, they’re friendly. But...in our country, the children respect their parents. I saw sometimes some kids are very noisy ... I saw that. I haven’t seen that in our country.” C2F conceptualized this friendliness as beneficial for the parent-child relationship, conducive to honest, open dialogues:

American parents they are actually friendly with their kids, but our Indian culture is not like that. For example, sex. It’s a very big thing in their life you know, but our parents, we can’t discuss openly with our parents. I like it here, this culture, they’re open and parents talk to his or her kids very friendly. Actually parents’ behavior with their child is friendly, is very friendly here, is very helpful to me because when I’m becoming a mother I also want to raise my child like that. It’s very helpful to me because I can understand my child’s situation and I like friendly behavior.

C9M stressed how the presence of laws that regulate what parents can and cannot do are getting in the way of properly disciplining the children. Practices which seemed perfectly appropriate in the context of the original culture are no longer appropriate in the host culture:

In the American society there is a lot of freedom, and this freedom causes troubles with the law. So I found that inside a free society, when children are not disciplined, when there is need to correct them, and sometimes to scold them, and
even to spank them when it is necessary, but here it can’t be done, because the law protects them so much, that if you spank your child, they can call the police, they will come for you, and you are put in jail, and that kind of thing. So children know it and so they can take advantage of that, so you find that sometimes they do things which call for such punishment, but they know that the law protects them and within that context therefore nobody can touch them. And back home you find that their parents have got the responsibility to correct their children, to discipline them.

**Difficulty parenting children in the U.S.** A few participants addressed the difficulties involved with raising their own children in this culture. They cited the unsafe environment, such as not really knowing your neighbor, and cases of sexual abuse among children. The laws also seem to prohibit parents from using certain types of punishment, and the influences from the media can portray unrealistic images for children:

Kids here they have boyfriends and girlfriends ... Actually, we don’t have the words girlfriend-boyfriend, it is fiancé, husband, and then they have girlfriends-boyfriends, at 12 or 13, having boyfriends and girlfriends, and they’re even on TV and media, on whatever. And you ask yourself ... am I doing the right thing to my children? Should I lock them off the TV and Internet? So it’s a big challenge. How do you maintain the sanity of those children? And the good culture that we know they grew up and they came up with here. And everywhere Valentine in the schools is official. Children are taught how to get a Valentine, children are taught how to ... my daughter is 11 years, never knew anything about Valentine, and we knew that Valentine is for people that are married, it’s a European thing, and they knew the meaning of it, but here she’s being told how to prepare for dates, for all numbers of the classes, she’s free to call them, she’s free to pick her Valentine date, and go for Valentine dances at school, and ... then as a father, you start struggling with that. And somehow you sail through that, you fight, you explain, you raise your voice, let them know, after some time, they just say ‘Ok, I won’t do it, because you’re daddy, not because we understood you.’ (C8M)

**Children and senior citizens socialized to be independent.** Two participants made remarks in regards to parenting/socialization practices that foster independence in children and senior citizens. C4F described how she admires the fact that the elderly do not rely heavily on their children and are able to lead independent, fulfilling lives past a certain age:
Here the senior people do not depend on their children. They can take care of themselves. I think that is very different and I think seniors here are happy because they don’t need to worry when their children are going to come to see them, but in my country the old people just stay at the house and wait for children to come to see them and they will be sad if nobody wants to come.

Similarly, C2F explained how the host culture’s parenting methods appeal to her, as they foster independence in the kids. She explained how “In India the parents are trying to over-take care of the child, in regards to education and marriage, especially. They always thought that you are small, you are not big, which I like, but I also like the American way.”

Community Organizational Structures

The participants in the study addressed differences in the societal organizational structures and the way the socio-economic system runs. While some acknowledged the value of having an organized body of rules and regulations that people obey for the most part, they also cited the inability to navigate a system that is rigid, inflexible, and unable to take into consideration an individual’s experiences and circumstances. The differences noted by the participants in the study in regards to organizational structure are: unfriendly laws toward accompanying spouses (4); bureaucratic system/highly organized relationships/presence of rigid rules (4); presence of laws that people respect (4); good health care for pregnant women (2); and lack of social class issues (2).

Unfriendly laws toward accompanying spouses. The main concerns that the participants expressed regarding the laws that govern the accompanying spouse’s behavior in the U.S. refer to the inability to access medical insurance (unless pregnant) and the inability to secure work:
I think ... the conditions set by the host country are kind of ... I don't think they 
are family friendly, because as I told you, I studied my master's in Australia, and he [husband] accompanied me as my spouse, and we had only our first born then, 
but you know, his visa didn't have that restriction. It's like ... 'Ok, what's the 
spouse supposed to be doing, anyway? Just stay home.' So he had his visa and he 
was able to work, if he wanted to go to school he could have tried, but he just 
prefere, to work...But you know, it's once you get here it really dawns on you 
and you're like 'This is not exactly a good deal ... Why are you stamping my visa 
that I can't work? Even when I'm a professional ...' Maybe that's not really 
culture, but ... something that I found that's not very positive. It's like ... to stay 
home and cook for him, clean for him, and that's all ... Or else, stay back home. 

(C8F)

Bureaucratic system/highly organized relationships. One participant described 
her struggles with the bureaucratic system and what she found to be rigid rules:

I found out that they don't care about anything! For everything, they have 
something ... Because, if you have some problems, in India, we used to talk with 
everyone. We can talk with friends. Here, if you have some problems, they are one 
group, you have to go there. Not like this! Because if you have health insurance, 
you are a woman and you have some problem, you have to go to this department, 
and they will take care of it. You can't go to this department, you can't say 
anything, if you have this kind of problem. If you are looking for job, if you are 
looking for some kind of you know ... 'ok, you are going to this department.' 
Like, there wasn't anything generalized. You can't go and just talk. No, we have 
everything like programmed: 'If you have this, you go here; if you have this, you 
go here.' (C6F)

A similar frustration was expressed by C9F:

And I realize in this country, humans are very detached from the system. The 
system runs by itself, and so that's why you call a phone and there's an answering 
machine, and you cannot explain anything to it. So the humans are being trained 
to be like those machines. Which have no feelings, so you can't explain, or even 
ask a question. Or it will tell you 'I didn't hear you.' So that's what they've 
reduced the humans to.

Presence of laws that people obey. Several participants expressed an 
appreciation for the organized system in place, where people obey the law. C7M stated:

I think that the law works better here, people obey the laws more, it is more 
structured. The ways ... the more structured communities, so we think it's better, 
sometimes it's kind of really hectic back in Sri Lanka. Sometimes the society is
not all that well organized, so sometimes people are rude, so we also react the same way. So, for example, driving. People when they are driving, people obey the rules here, they are more decent. But in Sri Lanka people do not obey the rules as they do here. So we have … if you don’t do the same thing, you won’t be able to get to the place.

**Good health care for pregnant women.** Two participants identified the helpfulness of the medical staff in the U.S. during the delivery of her babies and the good medical care. C7F stated: “I think they have good health service here. I don’t know, but I like these people here very much. I think they were very helpful during my delivery when I was pregnant, they helped a lot.” A similar idea was expressed by C6F:

First contact was when I was in the hospital, then only I could see the people, I could find how they treat you as a patient but also as a person, I could tell how well they were treating me, because I was in the hospital for 20 days, 10 days before, and 10 days after my delivery. So I used to spend all day in the hospital.

**Lack of social class issues.** This category was described and can be reviewed in an earlier part of this section, under interpersonal relationships.

**Physical Environment**

The participants also noted differences in the physical environment. A few participants were impressed with the cleanliness of the environment and people’s willingness to preserve the wildlife. Others were taken aback by the episodes of violence in this country and people’s access to guns. The main differences cited by the participants in regards to physical environment are: clean environment (4); culture perceived as unsafe (3); good infrastructure (2); fewer people (2); convenient life (2); lack of proximity to stores and workplace (2); protected wildlife (2); unfamiliar foods (1); and weather (1).
Clean environment. Several participants (mostly Chinese) noted the cleanliness of the environment and the presence of protected wildlife. C5F indicated:

First, I think the air here is very fresh. This is the earliest thing I know after I arrived in America ... I think the living environment is very good. Because we are from Shanghai, we live in a crowded space. So I feel the environment is very good, and there are many trees, fewer people, many cars ...

Culture perceived as unsafe. Some participants described feeling unsafe in the culture, either because of the expectations formed prior to coming here via violent movies watched, or the actual events portrayed in the media. C3M stated:

Sometimes I am scared, because you know the personal attack, massacre, so there are a lot of people to carry a gun, so when I was watching the T.V. massacre, so I was very shocked. What happened in this country? So, yeah, if a gun man shot people, this is the everyday occurrence, daily occurrence in the United States, so I think sometimes I'm not secure.

Views of Americans

The participants in the study often described their perception of American people when prompted to identify cultural differences. Two categories emerged from the participants' responses: favorable and unfavorable views of Americans.

Favorable views of Americans. The following descriptors were most commonly used: friendly (6); law-abiding (4); polite (3); assertive and confident (3); professional/hard-working (3); kind/nice (3); confident/proud/arrogant (3); helpful/generous (3); diverse and humanitarian (2); and independent senior citizens (1). C7F's statement captures the perception of several participants in the study. She was particularly impressed with the helpfulness of the medical stuff during the delivery of her babies:
I think these people are working really hard, most of them are very polite, and helpful. I think they are very efficient. I think in the government, and everywhere, they are very efficient. Especially the medical personnel. And I met some good persons, nice persons, in the child birth education classes, I met some very nice people.

C5M stressed the friendliness and helpfulness of American people:

Actually, when we first arrived here people were very friendly, because we did not have cars at the time. We were walking on the street and people would ask us if we need a ride. So I think people are friendly, they are very friendly. And the department store and grocery store are very clean and the service people are very helpful.

**Unfavorable views of Americans.** The following qualifiers were used to describe some of the negative perceptions of participants in the study of American people:

- insincere (2)
- people have loose morals in terms of sexual practices (2)
- rude/impolite (2)
- ignorant (1)
- poor financial planners (1)
- use the English language improperly (1)
- have access to guns (1)

Two of the participants in the study discussed some of their perceptions of the sexual practices that American people engage in. C2F, who used to be invited to sex toy parties by some of her husband’s American friends, went on to say: “Actually when I went to a naughty party they are open, sex is very, very open. To some extent being open is okay, but they’re going very, very open.” A similar disapproving attitude regarding the use of pornography and Cybersex was expressed by C8M:

I never ventured into pornography or try to find online dating or chat rooms, just to keep myself as a man to go around. And it’s not because there was anybody policing me. And you find these guys out spending millions of dollars in counseling. Counseling all the time. How can you get addicted to seeing other naked women when you have a woman? Why don’t you go home and strip all those clothes and you see ... and then, that’s your wife. What’s the problem here? And to them, it’s material. They look at their wives maybe and it’s material. The substance they touch. So if they touch something material better, they desire that better ...
C9M was particularly taken aback by the improper use of the English language by American people. He expressed concerns regarding his children’s ability to benefit from the English language taught in the U.S. classrooms:

Then of course, the other cultural aspect is the language. I’ve seen that the main language here has been very diluted and we find that for us who learned English back home, because it’s the British English, you find that the rule of the language, the grammar, and the way you pronounce the word, the phonetics, have been altered. Especially African Americans, the way they have brought in their own words, slangs, and things like that. People of our age, we care about the rule of the language, so that when you speak it, speak it well. But that’s something which has also shocked me and I saw that when I speak my accent, I found that sometimes those who are used to the American accent here, they may not get me. And also when they speak, with their American accent here, sometimes I also don’t get them. And they also have no care to master the language according to the rule, like we do back home. So sometimes I’ve been worried about our children, I said ‘They are here, in the schools, are they going to be okay with the English language?’ They should make a point, they should speak it well, they should write it well also, and that kind of thing.

This section highlighted the cultural differences identified by the participants in the study. The main cultural differences noted lie in the areas of interpersonal relationships, marriage attitudes, parenting practices, academic environment, organizational structures, and physical environment. The participants also expressed their views of American people when discussing the differences between host and original cultures. This section provided the foundation for possible areas of difficulty experienced by the participants in the study. The next section focuses on the student spouses’ experiences and they ways in which they approached these differences.

**Student Spouses’ Experiences**

Whereas the section above focused primarily on the differences noted at the contact with the new culture, this section focuses mostly on the individual experiences of
the student spouses in the U.S. culture. The participants’ responses were organized in four
categories: challenges, benefits, coping, and personal changes. The participants in the
study cited mostly difficulties balancing multiple roles and finances. The benefits
identified encompass personal, marital and family gains. The presence of a supportive
network of people and identifying the most adaptive behaviors are among some of the
coping mechanisms reported. Improved attitude (e.g., more confident, more positive) and
learning from the role-models in the host culture are some of the personal changes noted
by the student participants in this study.

Challenges

One of the themes that emerged from the participants’ responses was their
perceived inability to fulfill multiple roles in the new culture at a level that is pleasing to
them and meets their expectations. Many participants also cited inability to provide
financially as they would like to. In three of the cases the accompanying spouse’s desire
to engage in school appeared to be also motivated by the financial situation, as a solution
to these stressors. Several participants cited language difficulties and challenging
academic environments; a few participants talked about their encounters with
discriminative practices and challenges with an on-campus office serving international
students. The following challenges were identified by the student participants in the
study: balancing multiple roles (6); finances (6); language (4); academic environment (4);
difficulty socializing with Americans (3); homesickness and loneliness (3); racism and
discrimination (2); and issues with the office serving international students (2).
Balancing multiple roles. Many participants addressed their inability to fulfill their roles at a satisfactory level. C3F stated:

Being a graduate student is very hard. I should be a graduate assistant. I should be a mom. I should be a wife. Even my husband helps me a lot as a woman, and that’s not usual in my culture.

A similar role conflict was expressed by C4M, who believes that being married does not interfere with his student status. The parent role, however, does seem to hinder his ability to perform academically:

I don’t think marriage is a problem. I never get a problem when I was in Pennsylvania; we go together, we travel together everywhere. When I want to go to play some sport she says ‘okay just go.’ We have stopped to do that after we had kids, a problem is when you have a kid. Marriage is a good thing when you have someone to talk to and maybe is like a friend. But after you have a kid you have to think about many things. Something that you can spend as you are only a couple or only single you cannot do it. You have to think about your kid. Like this semester I am assigned to teach Physics class for my education major, but I have to refuse my director because I cannot do it; first of all I have to speak English, and I find that this kind of system and have a kid, it’s too hard to do.

The difficulty balancing multiple roles is experienced in a slightly different way by C8M. It appears that the major threat lies in the cultural influences that operate at all levels, influencing both his children and the relationship with his wife. The emphasis on material possessions and financial prowess in the host culture conflicts strongly with his spiritual orientation. The conflict is even more exacerbated by the gap between societal expectations (e.g., men should provide for their spouses and “shower” them with attention during various occasions, such as birthdays, Christmas, and Valentine’s Day) and the modest stipend that he earns every two weeks. The role conflict is experienced mostly through attempts to counteract the influences from the host culture, so that the
homeostasis in his family is preserved. It is not a direct conflict between the student role and that of husband and father:

Having children and family in a differently new culture is tough. So like every day you have something to basically uproot out of them. And say ‘You know what, we don’t do that.’ ‘But why, people do it!’ And I say ‘Yeah, people do it, but we’re not. That is not our culture.’

**Finances.** Several participants identified financial struggles. C9F described her difficulties trying to keep up with the bills and their due dates, to avoid shut-down of major utility services. She explained how she often has to solicit the help of people from home:

Like I said, I have to ask for money, from home. And people at home can’t understand it, you know. ‘You’re in America, and you don’t have enough money to pay your bills? And you get money from a poorer country to support yourself in America.’ I mean, it’s ridiculous, but that’s what I have to do. And then I ignore all these notices. I have learned to ignore them, I have told myself I am not going to kill myself over it, I will pay when I can.

C1M described the challenges associated with the change in financial status, triggered by the move to the U.S.:

It’s not easy because we have a good life there; personally, my family, my parents are educated, all my brothers are educated. They are either engineers or physicians, doctors, money wasn’t a problem for us there, it started to be here, because you know there is not a drastic change, but there is a change here, just for a while.

The majority of the participants who identified financial problems expressed the difficulty providing for two or more people from a modest stipend that is really meant to support one person. C8M described feelings of inadequacy stemming from an inability to provide more in terms of material goods, in a culture where the perceived measure of a person’s value are the material possessions and amount of money that one has:
I would say ... stumbling. I mean, people evaluate you how you love your wife, by the many gifts and kisses you give to her when they are seeing ... and the number of flowers, flower bouquets you bought for her, and they do not know that the love between a man and a woman transcends the gifts that you give, it's more genuine in the way that the other woman understands. Then the love-culture of giving ... things, gifts. You know ... it is a tough time. It is a challenge and you don’t know what to tell them.

Language. A few participants described their language-related struggles, especially in the initial stages of their stay in the U.S. C3F described turning in her final reports at the end of her first semester in the U.S. as “the worst problem, the worst thing in my life.” She went on to say “that was kind of scary.” C4M identified similar difficulties:

When I came here, I don’t know, I could not speak English. Even when I traveled, I asked for information at the airport, but they don’t understand what I am saying. So I think language is difficult in this culture.

C7M described a related issue, stemming from his lack of familiarity with the American accent and prior exposure to the British accent:

So sometimes because when we first came here I was not as fluent as now, I was not this good, it was a bit challenging; plus Americans have a different accent. We are used to the British accent. So even understanding people sometimes can be a challenge.

Similarly, C10M identified the language issue as one of the most difficult challenges in the host culture. He went on to say:

My challenge here? I think the language. This is my first year, so I need to improve my understanding, I need to learn how to communicate with people, especially in class. Last semester I could not understand very well in classes, so it’s very difficult for me, because the most important thing is to study here, we are students, right? So that’s the most difficult thing.

According to the student spouse participants interviewed, the language appears to be one of the most challenging issues, especially in the initial stages of their stay in the
These difficulties seem to be complicated by the perceived challenging academic environment, which emphasizes student participation and the pressure to write research-oriented, graduate-level papers.

**Academic environment.** Several participants described the academic challenges they have faced in the U.S. culture. C3F expressed her difficulties associated with writing papers and turning in reports that she got graded on. C1M identified a similar challenge: “I needed to get used to the educational system here. Especially writing papers, because we wrote papers, but the criteria were different and the expectations were different.” C2M described functioning on overload during his first semester in the U.S., with taking three graduate level classes and being a teaching assistant for two undergraduate courses. C4M identified much discomfort associated with the participation requirement: “Yeah, a lot of participation. The first semester, last Fall, I just keep quiet and I sit in there.”

**Difficulties socializing with Americans.** The difficulties socializing with Americans appear to stem from the way interpersonal relationships are conceptualized in the U.S. culture. This area of difference was described in detail in one of the previous sections of this paper. Three international students in the study described these difficulties. C3F talked about feeling isolated and strange, and went as far as doubting her personality characteristics and ability to make friends. C8M also described his difficulties in the host culture stemming from a marked awareness of presence of superficial relationships among people. C5M explained how the difficulties socializing with American people are rooted in international students’ specific circumstances (e.g., lack of time, too much pressure to study), but also the larger social context which is not supportive or conducive to intercultural exchanges. He explained:
First, it’s from international students themselves. Because, they don’t have enough time. And don’t have enough opportunities, there aren’t enough institutions or agencies to provide the international students with the opportunities ... And I also think it comes from the society, because although it’s a very open and free society, some of the people in this country would keep their way of life, they would not interrupt their life as people ... I think American people do not have a strong wish to know the outside world.

It appears that the inability to develop meaningful relationships and a support network of people in the U.S. culture contributes to an increase in issues like homesickness and isolation. It is interesting to note that some of the same participants that expressed difficulties connecting with people in the host culture have also identified feelings of homesickness and loneliness.

**Homesickness and loneliness.** A few participants described the difficulties associated with being away from their families and feeling isolated in the host culture. It appears that the participants’ feelings of homesickness were emphasized by the inability to make friends and connect with others in the host culture. C3F ultimately resigned herself to the belief that her inability to make friendships with American people was caused by her improper use of the language:

So I’ve been here for two years probably and still I don’t have any friends, I don’t know. Probably the reason is my characteristics, but I don’t think I have poor characteristics to make friends based on my experiences in my country. So I just put my problem into poor English.

Both C2M and C8M expressed a desire to return to their countries of origin during their first semester in the U.S. C2M described:

The first couple of months I wanted to go back to be honest. I called my family that I’m coming back. I have some money for the flight and I’m coming back. And I flew back to London actually. I had a stop in London and I called my family that I’m coming back, I’m not going to go to the U.S. Yeah, very attached to them, so that’s the problem, two things, loneliness and my family, other than that I don’t mind to stay in the U.S.
C8M described a similar experience:

And then quite frankly, I started thinking my first semester I wanted to go home. Because to me school is not important if people working with me are not ... I don’t feel them. So it was tough for me. And I wanted to go home, but I was encouraged to hold on and I went home that December. I told my wife if she doesn’t think of coming quickly, everything is blowing away, I don’t think I can sustain it, everything is so dry. I don’t have anybody to say they are my friend, you know.

It is also worth noting that all of these participants came to the U.S. alone; C2M was not married, while C8M’s and C3F’s spouses were still in their home countries.

**Issues with an office serving international students.** Two of the participants addressed difficulties with an on-campus office serving international students. They expressed their frustrations regarding the bureaucratic and unfair procedures employed by this office and the overall inefficiency of it, despite it being designated to help international students with the admission process and the application process for a work visa. C6M described in great detail how the employees of this offices lost his application for employment which made him unable and ineligible to start the job he has previously secured. C4M expressed a similar frustration:

I don’t like [office] here. I came here because the director of my department helped me. The application process with [office] is very slow, and they don’t have the right forms, I have a hard time, because after I finish my master’s and I had to manage the visa, my professor helped me push the [office], and my professor got me to study, but [office] don’t know how to handle things right.

Both C6M and C4M found some of the practices used by this office to be unjust, unfriendly, and discriminative.

**Racism and discrimination.** A few participants mentioned encounters with racism and discriminative practices. C4M described his frustrations with certain requirements placed on international students. He commented on how during orientation
international students were prompted to open an account with a particular bank that had fees, and no alternative free options were provided. He also explained how international students have to take a TB test every five years, even if they did not leave the country during this five-year period. He indicated: "That’s why I think this kind of things isn’t fair for international students.” C6M’s described a few overt racism encounters. He stated:

Sometimes, initially, when I came, within the first 6 months, while crossing the road, I had hatred from the people, you know, like while they’re crossing, you know, they’ll abuse using the language, or they’ll throw the cans or something, you know, maybe, I don’t know … Being a foreigner probably they didn’t like me. So there were 4 or 5 times. The one time in a store, somebody came to me and he just started saying that I was looking at his girlfriend, and I said ‘I don’t know what is your problem.’ They were just trying to make a joke, you know, but it was very hard. Then when I came out they were laughing in the Jeep, because I was so furious at the time and I couldn’t express myself properly, because usually I don’t do anything like that.

C8M described some of his personal encounters with racism and discrimination. He cited difficulties securing a credit card and, on several occasions, dealing with overt racism displays:

Racism, yeah, it is there. It’s not overt, though. It becomes more apparent especially when on the phone, the other party realizes that there is an accent or something and they go ‘I can’t get you … which part of Africa do you come from? Da, da, da, da …’ and then after that they start … the responses are not highly weighted. You know, it took me a long time to get a credit card that I needed to buy my scholastic materials, like books. All other people, people from China, people from Thailand, they were getting them like that (snapping fingers) … but it took me a long, a very long time. And then the other element of racism that was common was … nobody would direct you to a store, where you could get something new, they always directed you to a store that is a thrifty … So that was kind of debasing, debasing me that I cannot afford what you afford, so you show me this path … But other times you realize that you just have to prove yourself too, like ‘No, I am better than that, I can afford that, I can also stand out in that direction.’ That is a common thing. And sometimes people can ask some very nasty questions: ‘So how did you used to live in Africa? Did you have a house in Africa? Where do you live?’ You realize that they are referring to you like you are semi-illiterate or less than, so I used to tell them, very first thing ‘I am a PhD
student' and that helped. And the head of my department would introduce us as 'our international PhD students.'

**Benefits**

The participants identified opportunities for themselves, their marital relationships, and their families. In general, the personal benefits encompass mostly academic and cultural gains. The marital benefits emphasize a shift in marital dynamics, with increased support from the spouse, as an effect of exposure to role models that engage in mutual support and role interchanges. The family benefits include exposure of the entire family to a cultural experience with entertainment, educational, and language gains. The following benefits were identified by the student participants in this study: academic benefits (5); cultural benefits (5); increased support from spouse (3); learning to value and respect the law (2); benefits for the entire family (2); learning self-responsibility (1); learning to be more individualistic and assertive (1); practicing a positive attitude (1); and increased privacy (1).

**Cultural benefits.** C1M commented about the opportunity to engage in intercultural exchanges which helped him “correct stereotypes about American culture, Americans, and the way of life here,” through interactions with professors, students, and colleagues. Likewise, C8M emphasized the cultural benefit, stating that living here has helped him “learn how to deal with cultural issues, with the White culture, understand where they’re coming from.” He added that although the cultural exposure did not benefit him or his family directly, he was able to deepen his understanding of the culture and grow stronger in his spiritual and collectivistic approach to living.
Academic benefits. The primary academic benefits identified were: ability to further one's education, regardless of age; increased flexibility in terms of coursework and one's career path; the dynamic interchanges between professors and students; the applicability of the concepts studied; and the opportunities to network with other professionals at conferences, seminars, and via professional associations. C10M expressed his appreciation for the numerous learning opportunities fostered in the U.S. culture:

Here they provide so much chance. Many of my classmates, they are still working, and also maybe they have been more than 40 years old and also maybe more than 50 years old, but they can come back to study the master or PhD, but it's very difficult in China, if you missed the right time when you were young, you know... Yes, some people can go to work first. Then, someday, they want to continue their study, they can come back. But in China they can't. It's very difficult. That's different.

Other personal benefits. Other personal benefits identified were: learning self-responsibility; engaging in hobbies and interests (e.g., fishing, golfing, bowling) that are not easily accessible in the original culture; practicing a positive attitude; learning to be more assertive and individualistic; and learning to value and respect the law. C2M describes his journey of learning self-responsibility:

First of all, I told you I never had to do anything by myself. I was taken care of, so once I came here I found that, well if you want to live you have to do something by yourself like clean up the carpet, clean the kitchen table, plus do your cooking, management, like financial management. So I think that's really important, being responsible, it made me a more responsible person than I used to be back in India.

Marital benefits. The marital benefits experienced include exposure to American couples that model supportive attitudes between spouses, and decreased feelings of homesickness and loneliness. C3F's statement is illustrative of the ways in which her relationship benefited from exposure to this culture and other American couples:
I don’t know, I have to see what he is going to do in my country when we go back to my country. But so far he changed a lot, because even for every day he never tried to help me. He just say ‘I want a drink, I want a drink. Go get water.’ I had to bring, but now he can do … Probably before he came here, probably he was thinking he had to help me because I am a student and he doesn’t do anything in this country. So he probably had some idea, but I never expected he could change, but now, yes.

Family benefits. The benefits for the family include seeing new places, learning English, and exposing the children to a different type of thinking and a good educational system. C1M explained how his family is benefiting from exposure to this culture:

I’m glad I have my children here because they get to learn American accent, English language, they got to know this culture. They benefit a lot from schools and some activities in schools. My family will get to see some places here that we heard of or saw on maps, or read about.

Coping

The majority of the student spouse participants emphasized the relational aspect involved in their adjustment to the U.S. culture. In some way or another, most participants involved in the study mentioned the positive influence of relationships on their adjustment to the host culture. A few participants addressed a pattern of evaluating the host culture and identifying the most adaptable behaviors. Others emphasized the presence of realistic expectations that they formulated prior to joining the U.S. culture. Other coping mechanisms, less frequently identified, were: personal maturity (2); help from the government (1); and applying to the Ph.D. program (1).

Social/Spousal support. The presence of a supportive network of people was the most frequently cited coping mechanism. The majority of the participants cited the supportive presence of their spouse. Others talked about the help received from their host
family while navigating these cultural issues. C3F spoke about the valuable presence of her "American mom" and her ability to "cure" her "emotional problem." Some participants mentioned the support received from their academic advisor. C3F shared a rather unusual (and comical) first encounter with her academic adviser, who offered to share his lunch with her, after she admitted that she had not eaten in two days. On a similar note, C10M cited the friendly gatherings held at his adviser's home during traditional American holidays (like Thanksgiving). Other participants (like C8M) found support in online chatting with people from home or with peers from their culture of origin who studying at other universities within the U.S. C7M explained how contact with Sri Lankan people studying at the university was the most helpful coping mechanism. C4M talked about the close ties with his parents whose advice he seeks on a regular basis (he calls them 2-3 times a week and consults with them on various decisions). He also acknowledged the positive presence of other Thai students at the university and openness with which they receive one another:

It's not difficult for the Thai culture to get along to each other, but I don't know Americans, because I don't know the culture, I don't know how much you can open, I mean how close it is, but for Thai students although we just met here, we just help each other a lot. We get along with each other a lot.

Evaluate the culture to identify the most adaptable behaviors. Several participants addressed the tendency to engage in an evaluative process of the culture in an attempt to identify the highly adaptable behaviors. C2M talked about "mixing up with American people" and joining them in their various activities. C3F identified adaptive behaviors such as learning the language in the cultural context, adopting a positive
attitude, and learning specific social rules (e.g., learning that “How are you?” is a greeting formula, not an actual question that solicits a detailed answer):

Based on my experiences I had to say ‘Good, I’m good,’ but inside of my mind I didn’t feel very good, but I had to say, but I think that’s kind of very … both positive and negative. But then I just told them ‘yep, I’m fine’ and I could feel a little bit fine.

Other participants, like C5M, found the various student gatherings (e.g., TA orientation; meetings at the Chinese church) to be good opportunities for deconstructing professor-student relationships and culture-specific behaviors. A similar attitude is expressed by C9F: “You learn how things are done in that country, and then you decide ‘Okay, this is how I am going to live my life.’

Realistic expectations. The presence of realistic expectations is another theme identified by the participants in the study. C1M referred to “pre-knowledge” of the culture as helpful in his adjustment. Similarly, C9F talked about her previous visits to the U.S. and how they were helpful in shaping a realistic view of the host culture.

Personal Changes

This category addresses the changes that the participants experienced as an effect of living in the U.S. culture. Most of the participants cited positive personal changes. Some did not report the presence of significant changes. The positive changes identified as an effect of living in this culture are: increased confidence (2); learning to obey the law (2); adopting a positive attitude (1); being hard working (1); more respectful (1); more responsible (1); and increased personal reflection (1).
**Positive changes.** C6M described how the focus on individualism and privacy in the U.S. culture helped with his confidence level and ability to assert his needs and wants:

Let me think ... I think the major benefit I am getting from this culture is I learned how to be individualistic. I was same way in India also, but there I always found it a struggle to be a little more individualistic. Because you are always surrounded by your family and friends. But here I got the opportunity, because people respect others’ privacy and personal independence, freedom, I learned quite a lot, that if I go back to my original culture in India, then I will keep this thing easy, that I can say ‘No, I don’t like that, or I don’t want to.’

C10M explained how the experience in the U.S. culture engaged him in a reflective process, both culturally and personally. He stated:

This country made me think many things ... They respect our privacy, right? And then they govern the country by laws, not people, it’s a little different from China. Then, I began to reflect about myself. I think I was not a good teacher, because I just wanted to change somebody else. And it’s difficult, maybe because we can only affect somebody, not change. Yeah, I told myself ... I need to be more patient, I think.

C2M described how he learned responsibility for self and ability to attend to his needs:

Ah, first of all I told you I never had to do anything by myself. I was taken care of, so once I came here I found that if you want to live, you have to do something by yourself like clean up the carpet, clean the kitchen table, plus do your cooking, management, like financial management, your money, and what you have to spend for some stuff. So I think it made me a more responsible person.

**No significant changes noted.** Two participants stated they had not experienced any significant personal changes as an effect of living in the U.S. culture. C4M described how he continues to rely on his wife’s and parents’ feedback with everyday decisions. He explained that while he is able to make decisions by himself, he is extremely uncomfortable; he stressed how his family focus continues to impact his attitude in regards to personal decisions:

I don’t know, I seldom decide to do something by myself; and sometimes they [friends] told me to go to have lunch at some place like Stir Max, something like
that, alone or with my friend, but I do not want to go because my family will not go with me. I know I can make a decision, but as I told you, I don’t feel comfortable.

This section focused on the student spouses’ experiences in the U.S. culture. The section highlighted the primary challenges, benefits, coping mechanisms, and personal changes associated with living in the U.S. The next section consists of a thorough description of the accompanying spouses’ experiences in the host culture.

Accompanying Spouses’ Experiences

This section focuses on the accompanying spouse’s experience. The participants’ responses were organized in four categories, just like in the previous section: challenges, benefits, coping, and personal changes. The most cited challenges identified by the accompanying spouses in the study are loneliness/homesickness, language difficulties, and role shock. The benefits associated with living in the U.S. culture include personal (e.g., new learning), marital, and family gains. Setting personal goals and seeking meaning and purpose are among some of the most cited coping mechanisms. Some of the personal changes noted refer to increased independence and self-reliance, and increased awareness of spousal responsibilities.

Challenges

Loneliness/isolation and homesickness. The participants’ responses in this category emphasize the isolative nature of this experience, especially during their early stay in the U.S. They also stress the emotional difficulties stemming from losing one’s
support system from home, and, for some, the working status that used to define them and provide a source of self-esteem.

Many accompanying spouses (5) cited loneliness and homesickness as one the primary challenges experienced. C7F described her experience in the initial stages of her stay in the U.S.:

I think I miss my family, and everything is different, peoples are different, roads, vehicles are different ... I think I was alone at that time. I feel ... I was so sorry ... I had no one, only my husband. Sometimes I cried a little bit because I wanted to go home, I missed home, but most all of the time, he was with me. He tried to stop me from crying...

C2F shared a similar experience: “So sometimes I feel loneliness. Yeah, I missed my family. So I always try to do something. I found that loneliness is very bad for man or woman.” C3M talked about the unusual experience of being a stay-at-home dad (a very uncommon experience for a Korean man) and how often he would have liked to speak with an adult, but there was no one available; he stated—“my heart is empty.”

Language barriers. Language differences appear to be another source of difficulty for the accompanying spouses interviewed. Five of the participants addressed this challenge, which also appears to further highlight the isolation and alienation stemming from losing the support system from home. C3M talked about feeling “scared” about conversing in English; he went on to explain how his lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness is impacting his ability to speak the language: “You know, to speak the language is to understand, to understand a nation’s culture, but I don’t speak English that well, so sometimes I am a little bit scared to talk about someone, especially American culture.” A similar idea was expressed by C5F:
Because sometimes I think American people are more aware of themselves and they do not really care about the outside, so sometimes if you want to talk to them you should find some issue that concerns this country. I think this is a challenge for me to communicate with them. Because in China we talk about everything we know in the outside world, we know the international news, and our country news or something. So here I should change my views and my mind to know more about this country’s issues to be suited for the American.

C10F described how she used to “hesitate” in the beginning and how it took her a while to get comfortable with the language. C4F acknowledged the supportive attitude of the people in the host culture: “They try to understand you; try to be nice to you. Even sometimes they don’t understand exactly what you want to say.”

Role shock. Another theme that emerged from the participants’ responses is role shock. Most (4) of the accompanying spouses who used to work in their countries of origin addressed this subject. C8F’s reflection is illustrative and acutely captures her inner struggle:

Otherwise, I though ‘Hmmm, this is like being brought down, you were up there, and all of a sudden you are down here.’ Because I was still a mother at home, but my career put me in a certain position in society, and here I was…all that identified me was the house, and all that I could put my hands to do was the housework. So it was like, ‘hmmm, I am becoming less than who I am. Oh, I jumped from being well-known in the community to doing housework.’ Sometimes I want to say ‘You should have known this’ because I left home with a visa that said you are not allowed to work. But that reality didn’t dawn on me when I was there, it was much more the excitement. So the reality comes when I’m already here. So it’s walking around that reality and then saying ‘no, but this is what I have to settle for …’. That’s still challenging for me.

A related challenge is described by C9M. There appears to be a constant internal debate between the feeling stemming from doing the right thing by joining his spouse and grieving the loss of a once rewarding identity: “It’s very humbling, because sometimes you feel that … ‘is this the thing?’ Then another thought would say ‘Yes, why not? It’s just for a while, it will not always be like this.’
The role shock experienced by C3M is slightly different. He described how in the Korean culture men are not the primary caretakers of children, and how being a "househusband" and taking care of his daughter is a major challenge. He went on to say "it is difficult for a man to take care of kids, this is a big thing, and to adapt to baby is not usual."

Other themes that emerged from participants’ responses in regards to challenges experienced in the U.S. were: lack of medical insurance (3); unfriendly laws toward accompanying spouses employment-wise (3); the presence of a highly organized, bureaucratic system in place (2); lack of finances (2); religion issues (2); issues concerning safety (2); and lack of transportation (1). Some of these themes have already been addressed in previous sections.

**Lack of medical insurance.** Three participants addressed their difficulties accessing medical insurance in the U.S. culture. C7F explained how she only got medical insurance during her pregnancies. C1F described a similar frustration: "You know what, I don’t like the way the medical system is organized here, I think it costs too much and I haven’t got medical insurance at all until I got pregnant, which is just too bad, really."

**Unfriendly laws toward accompanying spouses.** A few participants described their difficulties trying to secure work in the U.S. C6F described her disappointment associated with the experience of applying for jobs:

I was always thinking that it would be good if I had something to do, so I used to go to the library and find some books; then I missed my work, what I was doing in India ... sometimes I used to do job search, but I was emailing people and nobody was replying, so I was thinking that it’s really difficult to get a job here.
C8F described feelings of disillusionment associated with the realization that securing work in the U.S. is not an option for accompanying spouses on a dependent visa. C9F stated a similar idea: “The concern here is that laws are very unfriendly to the spouses. You come, and you are dependant on somebody, and it doesn’t matter whether you are highly educated or not ... You are just useless.”

Religion issues. Two participants described religion-related issues. C7F talked about the absence of a nearby temple to practice her religion, Buddhism, while C10F described the pressure she experienced to go to church or think about God a certain way. She stated:

I think religion helps people to overcome difficulties. So it’s a good thing. Sometimes I think I don’t like the organization, the church. I went to the Chinese church in the first month I’ve come here, and I think people made me nervous there. They are very eager to let me know that God is very good, and I must believe in God, but I think sometimes I feel pushed by them. Maybe I have not made up my mind whether to believe in God or become like Christ, so I am still thinking about that. I think it’s a big decision.

Finances. Two participants described the struggles associated with lack of adequate finances. C8F indicated:

The other issue challenging is the financial status, we are basically living off a student stipend, that is difficult. But again, because we are Christians we have decided that God is the provision for our home, so we pray and he provides. But it’s difficult in knowing that I am not working. If I was working we would have more income, so ... Usually the important thing is the kids have food to eat, the bills paid, there have been some constraints because of this winter, we’ve moved to a bigger place, I’ve told you, and so the bills there were much, much less, and the salary didn’t increase, so it’s been very strenuous.

Likewise, C10F stated: “I think the finances. Because I have no income now, so I have to support my husband and if he does well he will get a scholarship, to support our life here,
and so I think it’s a pressure for us.” She expressed a desire to gain admission into a graduate program to be able to make financial contributions by securing a job on campus.

**Safety issues.** This aspect was captured in an earlier section, under physical environment.

**Lack of reliable transportation.** C7F identified difficulties securing rides to get to places in the initial stages of her stay in the U.S. She described: “I think transportation was a big issue. We had no car at that time, we traveled by bus, everywhere we traveled by bus, so I think that was very hard.”

**Benefits**

Three categories of benefits emerged from the participants’ responses: personal, marital, and for the whole family. The personal benefits include new learning, enjoying the accompanying spouse role, ability to make more independent choices, and the convenience of life. The marital benefits include increased feelings of responsibility toward the spouse, improved marital relationship, and privacy. The family benefits identified are family reunification, benefits for the kids, integration of elements from the host culture in the parenting of children, and non-interference of other family members from home.

**Personal benefits.** New learning (e.g., skills, activities, and attitudes) was one of the most frequently cited benefits (7). C2F identified access to activities that in India are unavailable to middle class people, such as bowling, fishing, and golfing. C8F shared the excitement of learning skills, like riding a bike and swimming for the first time. C5F talked about how she learned to be a better cook. CIF mentioned language acquisition,
meeting new people, and seeing new places. C9M acknowledged the hard-working nature of the American people that provide for him a source of learning and inspiration. Other participants (C5F, C10F) cited improved confidence as an effect of living in this culture and being exposed to American role models. C10F stated “I think I’ve become more confident here. So if I am here, and I will begin a new life here, I don’t need to hesitate. Because you just do your best.” C5F expressed a similar idea:

I think the most important thing is I know how to express myself directly and not be afraid to talk to people, now I know in American culture you can freely express yourself, and people are very nice, they won’t blame you or something.

Many participants (5) described having an enjoyable experience as an accompanying spouse. C1F discussed how staying at home to raise the kids is a decision that she has made and is very happy with. C2F indicated that being a stay-at-home mother is a family tradition, and that she is comfortable with this role. C4F emphasized the advantages of staying at home to raise the kids and “doing what is best for the children” without having to take into consideration other people’s opinions (e.g., grandparents). C7F also expressed contentment with her role as an accompanying spouse and stay-at-home mother. C10F talked about enjoying the accompanying spouse role and the opportunity to get away from her high pressure job.

Several participants (4) described the benefit of being able to make more independent choices as an effect of living in this culture. C4F cited increased independence, especially in regards to parenting decisions. C5F talked about feeling more confident as an effect of living in the U.S., materialized in an increased ability to interact with people, feeling less self-conscious, and being able to ask for help as needed. C6F stressed the freedom she experiences in the host culture, without having to worry about
other people's judgment of her. C10F described feeling more in control of her career choices in the host culture, where she has more opportunities to pursue her dreams, irrespective of age or physical appearance:

So I think in America I feel more free to choose my favorite job, or my favorite subject to study a degree ... So I like the life here, because the people here ... American people don't care how you look or how old you are to tell what kind of person you are.

A few participants (3) talked about having a comfortable life in the U.S. C4F labeled life in the U.S. as "convenient." C7F stressed people's access to accommodations such as a dishwasher, washer, dryer, and the Internet. She also talked about availability and affordability of certain foods (e.g., milk products), which can be very expensive in Sri Lanka. The good hospital care and cleanliness of medical facilities were among other benefits cited. Similarly, C9M addressed the access to advanced technologies and facilities in the home, characteristic of developed countries.

Marital benefits. Two participants addressed the responsibility they feel toward their spouses as an effect of living in the U.S. culture. C3M discussed how the experience of living in the U.S. as an accompanying spouse helped improve his understanding of the challenges that come with being a homemaker:

Actually, I've changed much. I am more concerned about her than previously in S. Korea, because right now I am doing the role of a househusband so I understand what was like ... The housewife's job is very hard, and I understand that, so I understand my wife more than previously.

On a similar note, C5F talked about the increased responsibility she feels toward her husband as an effect of living in this culture:

I think the most important job for me is to take care of my husband because he likes Chinese food and I like to cook. So I'm very willing to prepare his meal for him, because he is very busy and I want to take care of the house keeping, and go
shopping, buy food or something. Yeah ... I like to take care of him because in
China ... also, he also cares about me, so I think because he is very busy and
engaged in his study, it's more my responsibility to support him, to do
housekeeping, cooking, or something ...

Another marital benefit shared by one of the accompanying spouses in the study is
an improved marital relationship. C10F stated “our relationship is making progress” as an
effect of spending more time together with her husband and engaging in supportive
behaviors (e.g., cooking for him). Another added benefit is the non-interference of people
and the respect for privacy (C6F).

Family benefits. Three participants (C3M; C8F; and C9M) cited the benefit of
family reunification after a prolonged period of separation. C8F described the advantages
of having her family reunited:

I mean, the biggest thing for me, is to have my family together. That’s really big.
Because we have myself and the kids away from him and if he traveled, he was
going to be traveling only once a year, to come and see us, there was a lot we were
going to miss as a family, so the advantage overruns the inconveniences. It’s still a
big deal that we are together.

Additionally, despite the difficulties experienced as a “househusband,” C3M emphasized
the benefits of spending time with his daughter, which he labeled “a special experience.”
He added “In the U.S. looking after my baby make me change my mind. Family is
important. To be with my family is very important to me.”

Similar to the student spouses above, a few accompanying spouses (3) identified
benefits for the children, such as seeing new places, meeting new people, learning the
English language (C1F), and being exposed to an educational system that is “free,
developed, has advanced facilities, and where children are given a very good quality of
education” (C9M). Furthermore, C6F explained how her children are experiencing added
benefits from being born in this country; they qualify for government assistance, such as food stamps and free medical care.

Two participants stressed the opportunity to integrate elements of the new culture in the parenting of their children. C1F identified the benefit of “taking the best of both worlds” to raise her children. Similarly, C6F addressed her desire to engage in a process of bicultural development, to benefit the entire family:

I am trying to take a few good things from my culture and a few really good things from this culture, I want to combine these things, and I want to make a new culture for my family, you know? So in that way we can enjoy everything. The things which people can’t enjoy in my culture, and the few things that these people don’t enjoy because of their culture. I want to combine these things from both cultures and I want to make a new culture for my kids, for my family. So they can live happily.

Another benefit identified is the non-interference of family members from home in the parenting of children. C4F talked about the opportunity to raise her children according to her own values and beliefs, without the interference of grandparents. She stated “I think I’m happy that I don’t have to take somebody’s opinion. I mean, I can do what is the best for my children. Because grandparents always think that they know better.”

Coping

The majority of the participants emphasized the relational support that they accessed in the process of transitioning to the host culture which helped them cope with the aforementioned challenges. The coping mechanisms identified lie in connections with people, setting personal goals, seeking meaning, and having clear expectations.
Supportive network of people. A large number of accompanying spouses (8) identified the presence of a supportive network of people. Most of the participants cited the supportive presence of their spouse. Others talked about keeping in touch with friends and family from home, developing relationships with people from culture of origin present in the U.S., meeting people at church and ESL classes, and connecting with an American host family.

Setting personal goals. Setting personal goals was another coping mechanism that several participants (6) addressed. C6F and C5F described how they decided to take all the necessary language tests and seek admission to a program of study. C8F and C6F talked about applying for jobs as a coping mechanism. C2F developed an interest in home decorating; she also found that keeping busy during the day was helpful. Going to ESL classes and watching movies were among other coping mechanisms cited. Having kids and focusing on raising the kids helped counteract the feelings of loneliness experienced by some participants (i.e., C6F and C7F).

Seeking meaning. Seeking meaning was another theme that emerged from participants’ responses (4). C6F conceptualized the challenges experienced in the host culture as “suffering,” a notion much familiar to her:

I did everything just because of my culture, what I had from my culture. That culture only helped me, because in my culture, a woman is to suffer. You can say accommodation is good in women in India. Because in India, my parents used to raise their kids, especially their girls, their daughters, in that way, so they are more adaptable, more good things in girls, not in boys. That culture and everything helped me a lot.
One participant (C8F) described how conversations with other mothers from church helped her gain a new perspective on her role as a mother and the benefits of staying at home with the kids:

White friends, have shared with me that the advantages are far higher than you know, going both of you to work and putting kids in day care and after school care, and so that brought the positive side of it. And also realizing that it’s not like at home, where you are going to have a lot of other relatives in the house to help … So my friends also inspired me.

Despite the role shock experienced, C3M discovered the joys of being a dad and building “a special experience” with his daughter; he referred to the experience of being an accompanying spouse and stay-at-home dad as his “mission.” He stated:

I think to take care of my daughter is more important than to make money. To be with my family is very important to me, so if I go back to my country I have an opportunity to get a job, but right now to take care of my baby and support my wife is my first mission.

Two participants (C8F and C9M) identified prayer as the primary coping mechanism. The relationship with God seemed to be provide the meaning and perspective on the challenges experienced:

God … I think that’s the central thing here, because our God is big, is almighty, so through prayer, handing things to him, we believe that he can help us. It’s very humbling, but we believe God is faithful and is being good. Much of the struggle continues, but we are also to remain faithful and trust him for everyday need.

**Clear expectations.** Having clear expectations about the purpose of the stay in the U.S. and the time-limited stay in the U.S. was another coping mechanism shared by two participants. C9M stated: “What really encourages me is that it’s for a while.” A related idea was described by C1F: “Because we know the purpose we are here for, that made it easy for us. We know that we are here because my husband is getting his PhD and that makes it easy to adjust.”
Personal Changes

The majority of the participants interviewed identified having experienced personal changes as an effect of living in this culture. The participants mentioned feeling more independent and self-reliant; having an increased awareness of spousal responsibilities; and discovering meaning in being a stay-at-home parent.

**Increased independence and self-reliance.** Several participants (4) described feeling more independent and self-reliant as an effect of living in the U.S. culture. C4F expressed appreciation for the focus on the nuclear family in the U.S. versus extended family; she described feeling more in control of her decisions, especially those regarding the parenting of her kids. Similarly, C6F identified feeling “free” in the host culture, and being able to make choices without having to ask for others’ approval or being concerned with people's judgments of her. C5F talked about feeling more confident as an effect of living in the U.S., as evidenced by an increased ability to interact with people, feeling less self-conscious, and being able to ask for help as needed. On a similar note, C10F described increased confidence and ability to self-actualize as an effect of living in this culture.

**Increased awareness of spousal responsibilities.** Two participants expressed increased awareness of spousal responsibilities and the supportive role they play in the U.S. culture. C5F indicated: “Yeah, I think I am more aware of a wife’s responsibilities than I was because in China I had to work.” C3M described the process of change that he has undergone, from identifying as a “workaholic” to embracing a supportive role as an
accompanying spouse, based on an empathic understanding of the challenges attached to this role:

Well, actually in my country, I worked so much, I was a workaholic. Yeah, maybe 10 hours or more per day, so I was always so tired, but since I've arrived in June, in the United States, I was relaxed. So I've changed much. I am more concerned about her than previously in S. Korea, because right now I am doing the role of a househusband so I understand what was like ... The housewife's job is very hard, and I understand that, so I understand my wife more than previously. My wife, she has to achieve her goal, she is studying her major, so this is my mission.

Discovering meaning in the stay-at-home parent role. Other participants (2) explained how they discovered meaning in their role of stay-at-home parent. C8F described the resolution that she reached to the inner conflict experienced as an effect of role-shock: "So that’s how I got that ‘You know what, don’t regret it, because kids are only home for a certain number of years, after that they will be gone, so invest in them now.’ Likewise, C3M described how taking care of his daughter helped him reconsider his approach to fatherhood, and even go against Korean cultural norms which suggest that men do not take care of children.

This section documented the findings to the first research question. The section illustrated some of the most salient cultural differences identified by the participants in the study, and also focused on the individual experiences of the student spouses and accompanying spouses. The next section aims to capture the couples’ experiences in the host culture, and the impact of cultural context on their marital relationships.

Impact of Living in U.S. Culture on Marital Relationships

Research Question 2: How is the marital relationship influenced by the experience in the host culture?
Marital Relationship Over Time

The researcher inquired about the quality of the relationship prior to coming to the U.S., 2 months into the participants’ stay in the U.S., and quality of the relationship at the time of the interview. The participants’ responses were indicative of a noticeable movement towards increased closeness in the relationship, marked by reports of difficulty spending time together in the original home culture to significantly improved relationships in the host culture.

Relationship prior to coming to the U.S. The following categories emerged from the participants’ responses: limited time spent together (7); good and mutually supportive relationship (7); excitement associated with getting to know each other (4); and relationship disconnect (3). These categories are detailed below.

Limited time spent together. Several participants identified the difficulties associated with spending time together in the original culture, due to the presence of other family members or work responsibilities. C5M illustrated:

You know, I think after we came here we became more close to each other. You know, in China we have to work, so everyday when we get up we have to work, so we can’t see each other during the day. When we’re back, we may cook the dinner, have dinner, and then go out for shopping, and then I think … We have more time to spend together here.

C9F indicated how “at home the attention was divided to all these other people out there, but now we are … we focus on the family and ourselves.”

Good and mutually supportive relationships. A few participants used qualifiers like “good” and “mutually supportive” when addressing the quality of their relationship in the country of origin. C1F stated: “We used to be a team and support each other’s causes,
you know, and I cheered him to come here, and he did it. And he supported me through my pregnancies and births.”

Excitement associated with getting to know each other. Four participants were in the courtship phase of their relationship shortly before coming to the U.S. This was the case of C2 and C6 from India. C6F explained:

It was good, it was so good. We were chatting like 10 hours a day, so it was like always dreaming. It was really great. Where I was working I used to mail him like, everything, in the morning, 3 mails, afternoon 3 mails, at night go home and go for chatting. And Saturday... I was working on Saturday, too. So on Sunday we used to do chatting also for 10 hours. So from like January to June every Sunday we would chat for 10 hours. That was great.

Similarly, C2F described:

Every week he was talking with me. One hour, two hours. He also regularly called me in India. He tried to understand my problem and he also supported me, he saw my picture and I saw his picture first time before our arranged marriage.

Relationship disconnect. Two participants discussed the tendency to grow apart as an effect of living in two separate cities, sharing different friends, and limited communication. This was the case of C10 who lived apart for 3 years while in China. C10F described:

Sometimes we quarreled. Because we couldn’t talk as much, so sometimes there was misunderstanding. And he did not know about me, what happened, or what I did, not everything. And the same for me, I didn’t know what he did, or what kind of people he was dealing with. So the environment I think was different, so sometimes we had misunderstandings.

C5F discussed how frequent fights with C5M in China used to interfere with the quality of her marriage:

The experience to go outside is very important for us and I just, like the experience and maybe if in China we fight every day or quarrel every day because of the interference from the outside ... but here we build our marriage in a more
solid way, we care more about each other and love each other more. I think this is very good for us.

**Relationship two months after arrival in the U.S.** The participants identified relationship difficulties associated with transitioning to the U.S. culture. Most of the participants acknowledged the presence of relationship conflict and stress 2 months into their stay in the U.S. The following categories emerged from the participants’ responses: relationship conflict (8); good relationship (5); and tension and stress (3).

*Relationship conflict.* A large number of participants identified the presence of frequent arguments and disagreements in the first few months of their stay in the U.S. C5F indicated: “Actually, we had some quarrel at first, maybe within one month or two months, because we did not know the future and we were not suited for the living here. So after the first two months I think we did much better.” C10F expressed a similar idea:

We had a hard time in the beginning months here, because we have been separate for a long time, and first month we came here we had a different culture here, and we met a lot of different people here, and we would talk about that. So at the first month, every time we talked about this topic we really began to fight. But now I think we are communicating better, much better.

C2M stated: “We used to have fights like once a week; right now it’s once a month so ... it’s much, much improved.”

*Good relationship.* Several participants used qualifiers like “good,” “great,” and “supportive” to characterize their marital relationship approximately two months into their stay in the U.S. C7F illustrated: “Great, I think great. He was the only person with me at the time.” C7M shared a similar idea:

We were both new, so we were hanging on to each other, kind of. We were both discovering new things. We were the only two people together, so we had to rely on each other ... because we had our families back home, but after we came here we had only the two of us, so she was the only person I knew so closely.
Tension and stress. A few participants identified tension and stress experienced a few months after their arrival in the U.S. C6F described:

When I came here, after 15 days we paid for our apartment. Why do you have to pay for 15 days? They charge. So, here the system is really strange. For everything you do, you have to be so precise, otherwise they will charge you. Like if you call people and they come and you are not at home, they will charge you. Not like ‘ok, I will do it tomorrow.’ No, you have to follow everything. So I found that he was so much tense for those things, because we were newlyweds. So in a few months I became like this, you know?

C8F identified a similar experience:

I didn’t feel like I was blaming him, I wasn’t blaming him, and he was very supportive when I started feeling down, and ‘how can I just be in the house, is that all for me to do?’ And he was like ‘Ok, go ahead and apply for jobs … As for me, you can leave me here a few months and come back,’ that kind of thing. So I never thought like he was being selfish, and he let me all to myself.

Relationship at the time of the interview. Nearly all of the participants (19) identified an improved marital relationship at the time of the interview. They also described working through conflict and an increased ability to compromise (3); as well as an increased focus on each other and the children (2).

Improved relationship. The participants used qualifiers like “closer,” “stronger,” “better than ever,” “more intimate,” “just perfect,” “more than just best friends,” and “supportive,” to describe the quality of their marital relationships at the time of the interview. C6M indicated: “[Right now] you cannot differentiate between me and her. So if you talk about me, you are talking about her; if you talk about her, you are talking about me.” C4M identified a similar trend: “Yeah, the relationship is stronger.” C10F described:

I think we are closer than before, because he is the only person I can depend on, or I can believe in here. And when we encounter some problem or difficulties, he is
the only person I can talk with, so I think we made some improvement in our relationship.

C5M described mutually-supportive interactions between him and his wife:

In this country, because we don't have too many friends here, and we are living in a totally different culture, we have to encourage and support each other and rely more on each other. Generally, I think our relationship in this country became more close and more intimate.

C10M expressed increased understanding for his wife's situation:

Before we came here, we had some difficulty to communicate; that's because the distance, and also maybe I always lost some patience maybe. But now I can understand, it's really difficult for her to face some problem in her life, now I can understand it, because I was studying some theory about education, but she was not. She still stayed in place ... she didn't change, but I changed, the opinion changed about something. So I feel difficulty to communicate sometimes. But now I think she is still working on something, she is still learning, and she works very hard. So I think it will be better and better.

Working through relationship conflict and increased ability to compromise. Two participants identified how they are currently benefiting from working through relationship conflict without other people's interference. C5M added:

I think if we have some fight it's not possible for any other people to help us compromise with each other, so we have to handle that problem by ourselves. Usually I think we work together to see who is responsible for the problem and usually the person who is responsible actually takes steps. When some fight breaks, we handle it very quickly.

C7M cited an increased ability to compromise during disagreements. He stated: "Coming to an agreement is easy now. Just after getting married, we were adjusting, so at that time it was a bit harder to compromise."

Increased focus on each other and the children. Two participants identified a tendency to focus more on the nuclear family. C9F stated: "Now we focus on the family
and ourselves.” C9M added: “Now we have more time to pray together, through challenges, we always pray together, we believe that a solution will be there.”

**Impact of Culture on Marital Relationship**

The majority of the participants agreed that the experience in the host culture has helped make the relationship “stronger.” The participants often used descriptors like “closer,” “better,” “understanding,” “trust more,” “more intimate,” and “stronger.” The experience of closeness in the host culture is facilitated by spending more time together, communicating more with each other, reaching a deeper understanding of one another, lacking the family interference from home, going through challenges together, working through conflict, engaging in mutually supportive behaviors, and engaging in more displays of affection. The participants also identified a tendency to focus more on their identity as a couple, as a result of increased privacy, lack of family interference, and ability to develop common goals.

Another theme identified was the couples’ tendency to consciously guard against cultural influences as an effect of evaluating the host culture and its fit with the culture of origin values. Other participants consciously thwarted the impact of cultural influences on the marital relationship, and indicated that the quality of the relationship is affected by personal values and beliefs and how they decide to handle themselves in the relationship. A few participants reported increased responsibility to maintain and improve the relationship as an effect of living in the U.S. culture.

**Increased closeness.** A large number of participants (8) cited increased closeness as an effect of living in the U.S. culture. Several factors seem to be responsible for the
increased closeness in the relationship. The participants identified how spending more
time together, communicating more with each other, and understanding each other more,
have contributed to this closeness. C3F described how the isolation experienced in the
host culture has translated in increased closeness in the relationship:

We feel isolated like an island, so we just say we can talk to each other in Korean. So it’s kind of like we’re going to say something, understand each other, because we have more time to talk with each other. Instead of just chatting with other friends or something. So, I don’t know, probably based on my perception as couples are talking more, they can understand more of each other and the relationship is getting better …

A similar idea was expressed by C10F:

I don’t know … I think this experience made us more close … We talk a lot about the new experience here, and it’s the way we get to know each other and it seems to me that my husband is the only person I can depend on, so I don’t know how to describe that.

C5M also described how the experience in the host culture has helped improve the quality of the relationship, making it “more intimate” and “more close.” He attributed the changes in the relationship to lack of friends in the host culture, spending more time together, encouraging and supporting each other more, understanding each other’s ways of thinking, indicative of interactions based on transparency and deep empathic understanding:

It provides us more time to spend together, I think we can…talk more to each other, and I can really understand what she is thinking, and if she has some concerns I can understand it more clearly … So, actually, we can understand more about each other and then know there are no hurt feelings. And then think more for her, or, for me, I can think more about her.

Other participants identified increased closeness in the relationship as an effect of sharing and navigating challenges together. C1M explained how relying on each other more and “believing in each other” has helped increase the trust in the relationship. C6M
talked about dealing with the challenge of raising children by themselves, without any help from family members. He went on to say “It was useful, and it really strengthened our relationship, I don’t know what more to say. It’s good, but we really put our health on this challenge.” C6F described how tackling challenges together was beneficial for her relationship. There is a sense of pride that emerges from being able to deal with challenges together as a couple:

> We learned a lot from the troubles that we’ve had, and now we are thinking ‘okay, what we had, it was sometimes ok, we did a great job, you know?’ We passed through all these troubles but now we are ok.

A similar attitude was described by C4M. He explained how taking on the challenge of raising the children with his wife has helped strengthen his marital relationship: “I think it’s a benefit that we live here because in our country we have too many helpers, but now ... So life in America made the relationship stronger.”

Other participants (C3F, C6M) discussed how their marriage benefited from increased expression of affection. C3F shared the ways in which her relationship has benefited from husband’s increased comfort with expression of affection:

> Because usually Korean men, they never say, ‘I love you’ explicitly. Especially if you are a married person, married man. Before they were married, of course you could say, but usually after getting married they never want to say ‘I love you’ like that. They never express their emotional, how much they love, how much the men love their wives. But he is changing a lot I think. He never says ‘I love you’ explicitly, but he is just getting better to explain his feelings.

C6M described how the cultural context in the U.S. is supportive of public displays of affection, and how his marriage benefited from this influence. He went on to say:

> Well, it definitely enhanced our relationship...first, in India, you knew to respect your parents and elderly. So respect comes in the distance. You knew to keep your distance from them and from the elderly. So I cannot kiss my wife in front of my parents, not even I can touch her. It’s okay if I put a hand on her shoulder or
something, but I cannot embrace her or hug her or anything. So here I am very comfortable because I can express myself properly, because nobody’s around, and even in the car or something I can kiss if I want. People don’t mind, that is very nice, that is a timely expression, expressing yourself, so I can do it here, but not in India.

Several participants acknowledged the tendency to move closer together as an effect of rejecting particular host culture influences and embracing culture of origin values that resonate with their beliefs and the initial commitment to each other. This theme will be described in greater detail in the following section, as a standalone theme, as it appears that many of the participants in the study have embraced this attitude.

**Guarding against specific cultural influences.** Another theme identified was the tendency to guard against specific cultural influences, by reinforcing culture of origin values and personal beliefs. A large number of participants (8) identified the need to guard against specific cultural influences, such as the high divorce rate in the U.S. and other behaviors deemed “irresponsible.” The participants used descriptors like “safeguards,” “shock absorbers,” “boundaries,” “keeping to ourselves,” and “building cushions within the marriage” when talking about different ways of guarding against particular cultural influences.

C8M took a vehement stance against the materialism promoted in the U.S. culture. He described his family’s tendency to come closer together in an attempt to protect and strengthen the spiritual values and orientation promoted by the African culture:

America is top of the world ... Wife’s car, husband’s car, their first born’s car, three cars in the compound. They are fighting. All the time. You know, you see them smile in public, they get into their house. Everybody is in their cocoon. The man goes hunting, the woman goes doing what, and when do they ever sit down and analyze their lives and know one another, get filled in? You know, they have
a lot of material good things, but aren’t happy, that’s why they get divorces. It’s getting in and out, getting in and out. You know ... it enhanced my marriage enough that my marriage is not material. Marriage is a very strong spiritual thing. It has nothing to do with how much money you have, or the size of your house. You and your spouse can live in a cave and feed on hunted meat and gather your foods, yet you can raise up a family that is so happy and knitted together, than that of somebody who is having zillions of dollars in their account, but in their heart it’s about the things. In me, I’ve learned it is ... all the problems I’ve gone through and the challenges is to appreciate that I have come to understand that my relationship with my wife and my children is spiritual. Not here ... ‘When are you coming home? Please, come home, I’ll cook your best food.’ Why is that? Because, you know, the kid doesn’t want to come home. Because at the age of 18 you threw them out. You are lending them money. That has brought my family closer, knowing that it is not material things, but the spiritual connection between mommy and daddy, between us and our children. It is the spiritual to guard against all men of destruction. So, that’s taught me a lot, really.

Additionally, he explained how clear expectations and pre-knowledge of the host culture have helped him and his wife deal with the values of the host culture, in a manner which is predictable and consistent with culture of origin values:

I walked into this with a very definitive way of how I would handle females. When my wife came here she knew exactly how she was going to handle all males, and how we are going to keep our marriage healthy. It’s a decision we’ve made even before we stepped out of our country. So I could say that we’ve been wise, by the grace of God, very wise. As a teaching assistant, I handle so many young, beautiful women. But because of the decisions we’ve made before coming here, and then evaluating that this country is material and our culture is spiritual, and understanding that spiritual is better than material, it does not come crashing on us, the only trouble is sometimes, as a man, there is this thing that you are not fitting in. Other than that, nothing else.

“Building cushions” within the marriage, and the use of “shock absorbers,” were other ways of guarding the marriage against specific cultural influences. C8M explained how by building cushions within the marriage, one can selectively allow certain cultural influences, while enhancing the marital fiber:

You have to be selective. You have your own philosophy that informs your marital culture and then you start building on that. So that wherever you go, your marriage can withstand those influences, and does not change all the time. You
can’t allow every influence that comes at you, sooner or later you won’t have a history. And you have to have known that your marriage was never meant to be able to absorb everything, you should be able to just have to cushion, so you just adjust shock absorbers in your marriage and you continue with life. Because in America, if you don’t do that, America changes every hour, every hour, every hour. So if you’re going to change as America changes, you will find that after three years you have to get married to somebody else.

On a similar note, as a way of coping with specific cultural influences, C9M introduced the idea of “safeguards” that can be implemented into the marriage to counteract the negative cultural influences. He explained how communication and working on addressing ongoing financial pressures constitute some of these safeguards:

This [divorce] is a reality that can catch up with you anywhere, although here the divorce rate is much higher than in our country, but I think that one has to think of some safeguards. So in a nutshell, is to look at the things that make marriage tick, like communication, and ensuring to work on it as a couple. Of course this culture is a culture which restrains people a lot. In most cases, people work so much and so you become exhausted physically and this can physically show in the way you relate with your spouse. You can become intolerant of certain things, and then the way you talk sometime, so you have to be mindful of what you say, because words are very powerful … and words can mean so many things for people. But when your body is so tired and your mind is exhausted, you don’t want to tolerate certain things; as a result of that, something which is simple, you can blow out of proportion and that can really strain relationships. The other person begins to fear or wonder, ‘what is happening to my friend?’ So that communication aspect has to be worked on. And also there are things which also strain relationships, for example…the financial demands that are there … so we just have to work together and see how best we can manage the gaps that are there.

Another modality of guarding against specific cultural influences employed by three couples in the study (C7, C8, and C9) was recreating culture of origin communities. C7M cautioned against mixing too much with American people and stated “We are kind of in a separate cage here. So even though we are in America, we are in Sri Lanka, kind of.” A similar idea was described by C9F when talking about the support system present in the U.S.: “So although we live in two separate houses, we live as one, and the kids are
either here, or there, and we share. We [C9 and C8] share the cars, the food, so live in our small Africa, right here.” C8F described a similar tendency: “So if I am not here, then I am there (pointing to the African couple’s house across the street) [laughter]. Otherwise we’d just be confined in this house for having no connection.”

C7M expressed a tendency to “keep to themselves” and not associate with any American people in an attempt to avoid detrimental cultural influences. He did, however, acknowledge the need to socialize with American people at some point in the future, to accommodate the growing needs of his children:

We are happy this way. If we can stay this way, we will still be good. I mean … without much exposure to the culture. We have our own qualities, and I think we can preserve them better if we stay this way. I think we’ll know from our instincts, because we have been brought up in a particular way, so we will know which is right and which is wrong. And if you don’t open the door too much, I think it’s best to keep it closed as much as possible, but it doesn’t mean that you have to be completely isolated, because again, our kids will have friends, and we’ll have to open up somewhat. If we become too isolated, our kids will be in trouble. So we will have to get involved in that. For example, going to a party with our kids, which they will love, that is an okay thing, right? But if we go and she starts drinking, that is not right, so we will not do that. I don’t drink either. Other people drinking, doesn’t mean that we have to also. We go to the party and we enjoy the things, and let our kids enjoy themselves, but we keep to ourselves.

Similarly, C6F and C6M talked about being selective in terms of the influences they allow in their marriage. C6F discussed how boundaries in the relationships with others help her and her husband make healthy choices in their marriage. The presence of an evaluative process, as well as a conscious decision to either accept or reject cultural influences is apparent:

That’s why we don’t want to go and meet with all kinds of people. We have our own boundaries. If we are not getting anything, no problem, but see … what we are losing? If we are getting this much, but we are losing this much, ‘ok, I don’t want this.’ So we have our own boundaries … I said that ‘ok, if we have to mix
with this culture, we have to go for this, this, and this. But we can’t go for this.’ It’s not good for us, so we stop.

It appears also that some couples come closer together and guard against cultural influences simply as an effect of noticing and evaluating cultural trends and behaviors of people in the host culture. C1F stated:

You know why the culture brings couples together here … If you look around you say ‘Oh, those people are not having fun being divorced, single, raising kids, and failing at their goals in life because they stray away doing things which are not so productive …’. So they say ‘Oh, our values are good, let’s implement them, let’s keep them’ and the couples come together against that cultural influence, so they would not allow it into their own homes.

C7M’s opinion reinforces the above statement: “Seeing people who think marriage is a simple thing, makes our bond stronger. So people doing silly things in their marriages, that makes our bond stronger.”

**Focus on Identity as a Couple/Nuclear Family**

Another theme that emerged from the within-case and cross-case analyses was the participants’ tendency to focus on identity as a couple/family as an effect of experiencing the U.S. culture. Several participants (7) acknowledged this tendency; they cited primarily the increased privacy in the U.S., the lack of family interference from home, and the ability to work on developing common goals.

C2F described how the relationship with her husband has benefited from increased privacy in the U.S.:

Oh actually if I would stay in India after marriage, there are many people in our house, his father, mother, grandmother they are living together so we stay with their family. Only at night we are living together; to some extent it’s good, to some extent it’s bad, but here he always stays with me, it’s our family and we
discuss many problems. It’s really good; to some extent it’s really good because I have so many problems because this one night is not enough.

A similar idea was expressed by C6F, also from India:

The relationship has improved a lot. Again, in India, every woman suffers, almost every woman. We used to live in joint families, where you can’t get privacy. But here, because of more privacy, we feel more free. In my home country, after marriage, if you want to talk, you have to be careful. Some people can hear you. Because in a joint family, there are so many people, like mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, their family are living together. So we have to take care, you can’t kiss each other. So it wasn’t so good. After marriage, I think you should stay alone.

The presence of privacy and boundaries in relationships appears to have motivated C6 to selectively adopt cultural influences to help benefit their marriage. C6F exemplified how progressively drawing boundaries in her relationships with others has helped increase her family focus:

Yeah, like before we were thinking that ‘okay, there are more boundaries, we can’t go to someone’s place because that person is busy, let’s do something so we can also be busy.’ If someone has to come to our place, we are also ‘Don’t come, because we are busy.’ Like here there is the tradition, people are used to living like this. They are all busy, they are working, they are studying, anything…So me and [C6M] decided ‘Let’s too … Let’s live like they are living. Don’t live like in India, because it is not India.’ So if we behave like in India maybe we will be in trouble. And that way we can make ourselves busy and then we don’t feel that ‘Ok, see, now we are also busy.’ We make some activities, we have some activities to make ourselves busy, we have also some goals, so we don’t feel like, you know … we are just keeping busy.

Other participants cited the lack of interference from family members from home as instrumental in their attempt to focus on their identity as a couple/family and develop a “better bond.” C8F acknowledged the presence of “dilated” family relationships back home, replaced with greater emphasis on the nuclear family in the U.S. culture:

As I was saying, back home we have extended family, so its very easy for relationships to be dilated, because we have so many people to relate with, but when we are here it’s me and him and our kids, so that’s all there is for us. So that
has helped us really, too, to bond better, to know each other better, to help each other better, because back home, if I needed help, he could say ‘You have maids, so why should I come to help you?’ but here, if I am really tired or sick, and I say ‘Could you please do this?’ you know, he’s there to help. And that creates a better bond.

Similarly, C9F, also from Africa, acknowledged the tendency to focus on the nuclear family: “We are more close together than the way we were at home, and at home the attention was divided to all these other people out there, but now we are ... we focus on the family and ourselves.” C5F also addressed the benefits of non-interference from other people from home and the tendency to focus on identity as a couple:

The experience to go outside it’s very important for us and I just like the experience. Maybe in China we fight every day or quarrel every day because of the interference from others ... but here we build our marriage in a more solid way, we care more about each other and love each other more. I think this is very good for us.

C4F expressed a similar idea: “I think if we didn’t come here and we married and we stayed with the parents, I don’t know if we could have worked it out.”

Developing common goals was another factor which seemed to contribute to the participants’ ability to focus on identity as a couple. C5F, C6F, and C10M discussed the importance of developing shared goals in their marriages. C5F stated being able to “discuss the future life with each other” and learning to resolve conflict in a healthy fashion. Likewise, C6F identified developing common goals and “keeping busy” by creating activities for the whole family, as an effect of experiencing the presence of strict boundaries in the relationships with others. On a similar note, C10M described the need to develop common goals with C10F and “find a common topic” to improve the relationship and grow as a couple.
No relationship changes noted. Several participants (5) denied that living in the U.S. culture has had any major impact on their marital relationships. However, some of the participants later acknowledged that living in the host culture has brought about changes. An example is C1F who originally expressed ambivalence regarding these influences on her marriage: “I don’t know, I think that our marriage was great, so I’m not sure.” Later during the couple interview, she stated: “Yeah, I think closer together. We got to be away from the family so we had to rely on each other more …” A similar attitude was noticed in C9F, who originally denied the impact of the U.S. culture on the marriage, but later stated:

All I notice is that here we have more time together than home, because he was working, I was working, but here, because we don’t go out there, we live to ourselves, so we find that we are more close together than the way we were at home.

Similarly, although C1M originally denied changes in the marriage, he later indicated “So we got to trust each other more. And through our experience we managed to believe in each other, because now we are all here, so we take care of each other.”

Two participants (C2M and C3M), both men, denied the impact of U.S. cultural influences on their marital relationships. C2M stated: “It doesn’t have anything to do with that. It’s just our relationship. It doesn’t matter where you are.” On a similar note, C3M explained how the quality of the relationship depends on an individual’s decision (“our mind”), and less on the cultural context: “No, it’s not cultural, it’s individual. Of course I thought that the environment and culture are important, but the first thing is I think our mind.” He further explained how his personal change process influenced his opinion:

Honestly, when I was in Korea I worked for a business company, so I worked so hard and got stressed out very much, that I didn’t care about my family. My wife,
my daughter, but now I quit my job and I came here, so this is strange, a strange environment to me, but until now I’ve been trying to improve my relationship with my wife, so ... Yeah, I’ve made up my mind.

**Increased responsibility to improve marital relationship.** Two participants (C3M, C5F) noted a tendency to feel increased responsibility in the host culture toward their spouses and marital relationship. C5F explained how living in the U.S. culture has positively impacted her attitude toward marriage and the responsibility toward her spouse:

The American people respect the people that get married. So we just feel the responsibility to maintain our marriage and improve our marriage. And so I think it changed our mind about marriage because in China, the big city people easily get married and easily get divorced. There is a very high divorce rate in Shanghai, so I think they don’t think very thoroughly about their marriage and they just get married quickly. So it helped us a lot to think about our marriage, to maintain our marriage, and improve it.

C3M identified similar benefits from living in the U.S. culture: “I think, you know, this is a strange environment, so I am concerned about my wife more than ever and my wife is more concerned about me. Maybe the environment is very important I think.”

**Conflict due to uneven levels of acculturation and education.** During the interviews with C1 and C4, the women in these couples showed higher levels of acculturation, demonstrated by a willingness to stay longer in the U.S. and postpone the return home, while their husbands expressed a desire to return home sooner. They also presented with higher levels of differentiation from their families of origin. C1F expressed a desire to travel within the United States and Canada and prolong the exposure of the children to this unique cultural experience. Likewise, C4F wanted to continue to live in the United States, enjoy the non-interference of her in-laws in her family’s life, and feel in control of her choices. She even expressed a preference to see a marriage
counselor to work through issues of attachment and differentiation. C1M stated a desire to return home promptly, upon completion of his Ph.D.; he stated "So I got to know how life is here. But I have a yearning to go back to Jordan because my family and my roots are there." Similarly, C4M expressed a willingness to return home, live with, and care for his aging parents for whom he feels a great deal of responsibility. Throughout the interviews, it was noted that the return home constituted an area of mild conflict for both couples.

Another area of conflict that emerged during the couple interview with C10 was the uneven education levels between the two spouses. It appears that the new cultural context emphasized particular individual differences and brought them to the forefront. C10M discussed how he and C10F “lost the common topic” and had difficulties communicating with each other. He explained:

I think the conflict is about the opinion about life, like she wants to just stay in the apartment, just to stay at home. And be a housewife. That’s not what I want her to do. I hope she can become first a professional researcher. But she doesn’t want to do like that. Not only just one person to study and another one to stay at home, it’s difficult for each other, I think. I think they need to do something together, because two persons stay together, they need to communicate much time, so if they lost the common topic, there will be some problem. If I don’t know your interest and what you want to do, there will be some problem. We need to learn something, and then we will have something inside, then we can share. If we didn’t learn, we have not something to share. She was a teacher for such a long time, she didn’t study something new, so she cannot share something with me, I think that’s the problem. And still she doesn’t like to talk about something she was thinking. So I don’t know, I don’t know her.

This section documented the findings from the cross-case analyses of participants’ responses to the second research question of the study. The section provided an understanding of the ways in which the cultural context impacts the marital relationship of the study participants, and the ways in which the participants respond to these
perceived cultural influences. The next section will describe the ways in which the marital relationship influences the participants’ experiences of adjustment to the U.S. culture.

Influence of Being Married on Adjustment to the U.S. Culture

Research Question 3: How does the marital relationship influence the experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture?

The participants in the study cited both positive and negative influences of their marital relationships on personal adjustment to the U.S. culture. When discussing this issue, the participants used descriptors like “responsible,” “committed,” “supportive,” “fitting in,” but also “pressure,” and “interferes.” Some of the positive influences of marriage on personal adjustment to the culture are that it helps decrease feelings of alienation, helps the individual act in responsible ways, provides a source of self-esteem and sense of belonging, and improves eating habits and overall health. The negative influences cited were increased financial pressure and interference with studying and academic responsibilities. Two participants expressed a neutral point of view, stating that personal adjustment to culture is a function of personal beliefs and values, irrespective of marital status.

Marriage Helps Decrease Feelings of Alienation

Several participants (6) in the study discussed how experiencing the host culture as a married person helped decrease feelings of alienation. A few participants explained
how being married in the host culture helped fight off loneliness. Others explained how being married fulfilled a need for sharing.

C4F stated: “I think being married the benefit is you do not feel lonely.” C7F noted: “I think ... if I came alone in this country I would be really lost.” C5F shared the ways in which having a married status is benefiting her husband: “If he is alone, I think maybe he cannot adjust to the American culture. We go to church together and I think if he is lonely he won’t go to church or something.” Being married also fulfills a need for sharing. C2F stated:

Happy situation or unhappy situation, they are together, share the situation, because if you are alone you can’t resolve the situation, you can’t speak your problem with your friend if he or she is not your best friend; if he or she is your best friend then you can speak your problem and it relieves your mind.

Similarly, C3M indicated: “Because a single person has to accept his or her pains and then a single person is relating to themselves, but married person, married people, they can talk about their difficulty, I suppose.” A related idea was stressed by C7M:

I think that it helped, there is always some supporting person, to talk to when in trouble, and I think it’s better than just being here alone. You come home and you feel home. You have someone to talk to and you feel home.

Marriage Helps the Individual Act in Responsible Ways

Three participants identified making responsible choices as an effect of experiencing the U.S. culture as a married individual. They indicated that because of the multitude of “temptations” available in the host culture, being married provided them with the context for acting in a responsible fashion. C1M stated:

Well, it protects against the temptation of being separate, and having a free mind and being carefree, and acting irresponsible. I wanted this commitment, I like it,
and before I came here, this is what I wanted. I want my children to be here too. Mainly this … it protects from irresponsibility. I am not referring to other liberal ways of life, but just a way to be responsible.

Similarly, C7M described the potential difficulties associated with being single in the host culture and "mixing too much with the local people;" he also emphasized the "sheltering" function of having a married status:

Because if you are single, because if you are not careful, you can get into, you know … you can go in the wrong direction, too. Because then you are mixing with the local people too much, so being a married person I do not go out a lot with Americans. We are kind of in a separate cage here. So even though we are in America, we are in Sri Lanka, kind of. So if someone is single, they will mix a lot more with Americans and their culture. So if someone is not careful, they can get onto the wrong path.

C8M explained how the openness to his wife’s feedback and guidance throughout the years has helped him act in responsible ways:

I don’t think there’s anybody in the world that understands me better than my wife. My father, mother may do, but they understand me as a... at the age of 18-20, but I’ve spent 12 years with this woman, she understands my emotions, my ups and downs, she knows exactly what to say … she knows when to put her foot down and say ‘You are not going to go there, you are going back here’ And you say ‘if she was able to help me then, she must be feeling something.’ And I’ve known that women have a sixth sense that I don’t know, and that’s intuition. They know what is good for their husbands, especially if they are in a clear, transparent relationship. They will know what is wrong for you, they know what is going to be beneficial for you. So my wife is a very strong point to measure. ‘No, I don’t think it’s good for you to get involved with this person. They don’t look genuine.’ And they help you to adjust yourself.

Being Married Helps Improve Self-Esteem and Sense of Belonging

A few participants (3) in the study associated being married with increased self-esteem and feelings of belonging. C3F explained how she initially encountered difficulties making friends with her American colleagues and people from church, when
her husband was not in the United States. She clarified that once her husband and daughter joined her, their attitudes towards her changed:

After that moment it was just easier to talk with them, I think. I don’t know, maybe because they saw my little one, or because they knew that I was married, because he mentioned that he didn’t think that I was married. So I guess he wanted to keep like a little bit of distance. So, so far I have like two male friends and they are very friendly. Right now even one of my friends he loves to come to my house because I have my husband and my little one there. He talked with my husband a lot, so … because I don’t want to get a boyfriend over here. I just want to make a friend, but it was so hard. But now they know about my family situation. In my opinion they talk a little more freely than before when they didn’t know about my marriage.

C5F explained how being married has helped her feel more accepted in the mainstream culture. Her perception of the host culture is that it is validating and accepting of married people. It is important to note that C5F came in contact with married couples primarily through church:

I think American people respect the married people because they think that married people are stable and honest or something. So they are more aware of the family. So when we go to friends, they ask him to take your wife or something. I think this is very important for us to improve our friendship with each other. Plus, when we buy car insurance and he said we’re married so we’ll get a discount, yeah, I think American culture is more aware of the family values. This is different from China, I think.

C8M described how the presence of his wife constituted an endless source of self-esteem, “a strong point to measure,” and a way to preserve a healthy sense of self in the context of the host culture values:

Yeah, I think it has helped me so much in that I had one person that understood me, to talk to. At home, I’ve got somebody who understands me that if I tell her what somebody else is saying about me, she will say, ‘Don’t believe them, they don’t know who you are. They don’t know where you come from, they don’t know the accomplishments in your life, they don’t know whatever. That is them.’ It gives you some kind of self-worth because self-worth in America is in terms of how much you have, how much money you command.
Marriage Helps Improve Overall Health and Eating Habits

Three participants in the study indicated that being married has helped improve their overall health and wellbeing. C7F described how she contributed to her husband’s wellbeing by preparing food on a regular basis. Additionally, C10F stated:

I think it’s good for the individual, because when my husband was alone here, he didn’t care a lot about his eating, and his health, so after I come here I think we can take care of each other and eat better, and have a time schedule about study or rest, I think it’s good for him.

C5M mentioned a similar benefit:

My wife here is a very good chef. So unlike other international students here, I can also eat more. I can have Chinese food every day. I think it’s the best advantage for a married man. You need your food, you’re eating, and also, my wife can take care of my life.

Financial Pressure

A few participants (3) identified financial pressures stemming from having a married student status. C5M reported difficulties providing for two people and living on a stipend that is really meant to support one person:

Because I think most of the challenge comes from financial status...because the financial support from the university cannot provide support for both of us, so I have to ... make good investment and make good financial planning for the year, so ... I think this is most challenging.

C7M reported a similar challenge, but also cited an ability to budget well and even put money aside each month to send home to his family.
Marriage Interferes with Studying

Two participants discussed how being a married student in the host culture can interfere with studying and academic responsibilities. It is notable that the participants (C3F and C10M) have reunited with their spouses after several years of separation; it is possible, therefore, that they are going through a period of readjustment and reconciliation of individual differences. C10M’s statement illustrated this idea: “Maybe the first half time, when she came here, sometimes we quarreled about something, so I feel very angry and very unhappy, so I think it would destroy my study.” Likewise, C3F described her struggles managing multiple roles in the host culture:

Yeah, because well, being a graduate student is very hard. I should be a graduate assistant. I should be a mom. I should be a wife. Even my husband helps me a lot as a woman. I have to do some things as a woman. So it was so hard to separate. Now we are here together but the problem is that I cannot manage very well compared to my expectation to manage my house. But it is also very hard to be together. So if I can compare the two, I can tell you that alone, single, it’s definitely better to be here.

No Influences Acknowledged

Two participants stressed the role of personal values and beliefs in personal adjustment to culture. They indicated that their adjustment to the U.S. culture was a function of their ability to fit in anywhere they go, irrespective of marital status. Interestingly, both C1F and C9F have previously lived in and traveled to other countries and these experiences have likely shaped effective coping skills that they can access in new cultural contexts.
Hopes and Dreams for the Future

The participants in the study also identified hopes for the future as a couple in terms of living in the U.S. culture. Many participants (7) expressed a willingness to continue to improve their marital relationship; others (6) talked about their desire to enroll in graduate work and pursue a graduate degree. Some participants (5) shared their goal to return to their country of origin upon graduation; others (5) had hopes of finding employment in the U.S. Four participants expressed a desire to maintain the changes made in the U.S. upon return to their country of origin; others (3) discussed a desire to preserve their own values and beliefs. A few participants (3) shared their goal to improve their material condition, while others (3) expressed a desire to have (more) children. Other hopes expressed were providing a good education for the kids (2) and contributing to more diversified programs for international students (3).

Several participants identified a desire to maintain and continue to further the growth of their marriage. Several women expressed their hope to continue to share household responsibilities with their spouses and thus shape more equal participation in household matters, including child rearing and engagement in non-traditional roles. C9F’s statement encapsulates the desire expressed by many women participants in this study:

I hope he doesn’t become someone who would want to be served everything on the table, who would not do anything ... So I would like to see this change. So take with him what he has learned. I think it’s very good and exemplary, and I think it also empowers women, so you could be an example of somebody who has empowered his wife. Not just to make her sit in the kitchen and not be able read.... So he can comfortably talk to people about allowing their wives to go on study, because at the end of the day it makes the family better. Because I got a job after my Ph.D., the family should be a better place.
Advice for Other Couples

The participants also provided advice for couples who may be planning to come to the U.S. in a similar capacity. Many participants (5) stressed the need to have realistic expectations; a few (3) discussed the need to safeguard the marriage against particular cultural influences. Other less frequent responses were the need to be mutually supportive (3); get involved in the culture (2); be flexible (1); pursue an education (for accompanying spouses) (1); and come here married or choose wisely if coming here single (1).

Many participants stressed the need to come prepared, with clear expectations of how things are going to unfold in the U.S. culture and how they are going to conduct themselves. Based on the participants’ advice, especially those who have previously worked and enjoyed working in their home countries, it is important to come prepared with the expectation that no work will be available to them. C8F described: “If you come to the United States to stay home, come prepared to stay home. Not thinking that I am going to change this over night.” Additionally, C8M explained the need to have a solid “marital philosophy” that informs the couples’ actions so that they do not try to develop one in the context of the host culture, one that they may not be able to sustain. He explained:

You have to be selective. You have your own philosophy that informs your marital culture and then you start building on that. So that wherever you go your marriage can stand that. You can’t allow all influences, everything that comes at you change that, and you change that, sooner or later you don’t have a history.

This section presented the findings from the cross-case analyses of the participants’ responses to the third research question of this study. The section captured
the participants’ experiences of transitioning to the U.S. culture, as influenced by the context of their marriage.

Summary

Chapter IV documented the findings of this study. The first part of the chapter provided a summary of the cases included in the study. The case summaries provided information about the participants’ personal background, status in the U.S. culture, career background, and the DAS score reflecting their level of marital adjustment. Results of the within-case analyses were also documented in the case summaries section of Chapter IV.

The second part of the chapter focused on documenting the results from the cross-case analyses in three major sections. The first section emphasized the cultural differences identified by the participants in the study, along with their individual experiences in the host culture. The second section focused on the experience of the participants in the study as couples, with particular emphasis on the ways in which the U.S. cultural context impacts the marital relationship. The third section focused on documenting the ways in which the marital relationship impacts the overall adjustment of participants to the host culture. The key findings presented in this chapter will be discussed and compared with previous literature in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V  
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section covers the findings of the study and their implications. The second part of this chapter addresses the study's strengths and limitations. The third part is comprised of recommendations for future research and practice, followed by a conclusion about this study.

Discussion of the Findings and Implications

This study was designed to explore the experiences of married international graduate students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture. The following research questions were investigated:

1. What do married graduate international students studying in the U.S. and their accompanying spouses experience at the contact with the new culture?

2. How is the marital relationship influenced by the experience in the host culture?

3. How does the marital relationship influence the experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture?
Experiences in the U.S. Culture

The first research question helped provide an understanding of the essence of the experience of married international students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture. In formulating their perspectives, the participants also evoked issues related to cultural differences, which seem to have impacted their overall experience in the host culture. Thus, the participants’ responses to this research question are organized in three major categories: cultural differences, student spouses’ experiences in the U.S. culture, and accompanying spouses’ experiences in the U.S. culture.

Cultural Differences

The participants in the study identified several differences between the host and original cultures, which will later be referred to as cultural factors. The main differences identified were in interpersonal relationships, people’s attitudes toward marriage, parenting practices, academic environment, community organizational structures, physical environment, and views of Americans. These differences between the host and original cultures appear to set the stage for difficulties experienced by the participants in the study while living in the U.S. Thus, many of the challenges evoked by the participants in this study originate in these cultural differences. This finding is consistent with the research literature indicating that major differences (e.g., educational, social norms, climate, and food) between a student’s country of origin and the host culture set the stage for cultural shock (Pedersen, 1991).
In this study, the most frequently cited cultural differences were related to interpersonal relationships and people’s attitudes toward marriage. Other salient differences which seemed to have had an impact on the participants in this study refer to differences in academic environment, community organizational structures, and views of Americans.

**Interpersonal relationships.** A large number of participants shared their perceptions of interpersonal relationships in the U.S. culture. Some of the most commonly cited themes were: privacy and presence of boundaries in relationships, superficial relationships, focus on the nuclear family, absence of community and family norms to regulate individual behavior, individualistic society, gender and class issues, and public behavior. Interpersonal relationships appear to be one of the most salient factors impacting the individual experiences of both student spouses and accompanying spouses, as well as their experiences as couples. Several student spouse participants addressed their inability to develop friendships and build meaningful relationships with people in the host culture. A few discussed their desire to return to their home countries within the first semester of their stay in the U.S. Likewise, several accompanying spouses addressed their inability to get to know American people and build friendships with them. They noted the emphasis on privacy and lack of welcoming attitudes of American people towards friends and family. Some of the differences noted, however, were perceived as positive. For example, several participants in the study remarked people’s ability to share affection publicly, an aspect which benefited their marriages. Others identified the lack of obvious social class issues in the U.S., from which they benefited personally.
The findings of this study are consistent with the research literature stressing that international students perceive social relationships in the U.S. to be superficial (Cross, 1995), which translates in their inability to form close relationships with American students (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). The findings of this study also suggest that the way American people conceptualize the meaning of friendship is different than in other cultures where people tend to prioritize relationships and take a more relationship-focused approach. This idea is also reflected in the work of other authors who indicate that international students may feel confused by the emphasis on individualism, independence, assertiveness, and self-reliance (Cross, 1995). It appears that international students and their accompanying spouses face a double jeopardy: the loss of their social support network from home is accompanied by an environment characterized by what are perceived as superficial relationships, where boundaries and inability to connect with people at a meaningful, satisfying level prevail.

It appears that in time, the lack of meaningful connectedness with people from the majority culture translates into increased closeness in the marital relationship or with people from one's country of origin. Meeting needs for social connection is a critical aspect in ensuring healthy wellbeing. Thus, the new participants in the host culture find creative ways of coping and surviving in an environment perceived as unable to support and nurture these needs.

**Attitudes toward marriage.** Another area of difference lies in people's attitudes toward marriage in the U.S. culture. The participants identified the following occurrences: high rate of divorce and the ease to get a divorce in the U.S., individualistic approach to relationships, lack of support from family/community, and perceived positive
attitudes of American people toward marriage. American people’s attitudes toward marriage appear to be one of the most salient factors impacting the participants’ experiences as couples in this study. It is noteworthy that not all the differences identified were negative. A couple of participants noted the presence of a balanced division of labor in marital relationships, where husbands and wives share responsibilities. This appears to be an influential factor for some of the participants in the study, who ultimately decided to implement it in their own marriages.

**Academic environment.** Many of the participants in this study, primarily student spouse participants, identified the presence of differences between the academic environment in the host culture and original culture. The following comprise participants’ responses in this category: impolite classroom behavior, interactive relationships between professors and students and less obvious power differentials in these relationships, and classroom curriculum. It appears that many of the challenges associated with experiencing the culture in a student capacity originate in these differences. One of the most salient factors which translated in challenges for international students is related to the interactive relationships between professors and students and the less obvious power differentials in these relationships. Similar findings were reported by Ross and Krider (1992), who identified that some of the challenges that international students experience in the American classroom originate in instructional preparation, English usage, cultural awareness, and the behaviors of American students.

**Community organizational structures.** Some of the participants in the study identified differences between the original and host cultures stemming from societal organizational structures and the way the socio-economic system runs. Some of the most
common responses were: unfriendly laws toward accompanying spouses, bureaucratic system/highly organized relationships/presence of rigid rules, presence of laws that people respect, good health care for pregnant women, and lack of social class issues. Community organizational structures appear to have the most salience for the accompanying spouse participants in the study who discussed the inability to secure work and affordable medical insurance.

According to the findings of this study, it appears that the same superficiality that characterizes interpersonal relationships transpires in the government’s structures as well. There appear to be clear hierarchical lines which prevent people from building meaningful, close relationships, and where the rules and procedures reign over an individual’s uniqueness and concerns.

**Views of Americans.** Some of the participants in this study shared their perceptions of American people when prompted to comment on the cultural differences noted. Two categories emerged from the participants’ responses: favorable and unfavorable views of Americans. Some of the unfavorable views were: insincere, people have loose morals in terms of sexual practices, rude/impolite, ignorant, poor financial planners, use the English language improperly, and have access to guns. It appears that many of these unfavorable views contributed to challenges for the participants in this study and complicated their adjustment process to the host culture. However, a few participants shared their positive views of American people. They saw Americans as friendly, law-abiding, polite, assertive and confident, professional/hard-working, kind/nice, confident/proud/arrogant, helpful/generous, diverse and humanitarian, and having independent senior citizens. This was a salient factor for some of the participants.
in this study, as it appears that their experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture was
influenced by these positive perceptions they share about American people. It appears that
many of the personal changes identified by the participants in the study were influenced
by their positive views of American people. They also talked about integrating these
aspects into their identities. The participants mentioned feeling more confident and
striving toward more independence, obeying the laws, adopting a positive attitude, and
being hard working, as effects of being exposed to these positive models.

This section provided an overview of the most important cultural differences
between the original and host cultures noted by the participants in the study. As stated in
an earlier paragraph, these differences also constitute the cultural factors which have
impacted the participants’ experiences in the U.S. culture. Some factors may be more
salient for one group of participants than another. It is again important to note that these
cultural factors set the stage for challenges associated with living and studying in the U.S.

**Student Spouses’ Experiences**

**Challenges.** The student spouse participants in the study identified challenges
originating in the cultural factors described above, as well as challenges originating in
roles fulfilled in the U.S. culture. Personal factors, such as knowledge of English
language, and financial status also play a role. The following challenges were identified
by the student participants in the study: balancing multiple roles, finances, language,
academic environment, difficulty socializing with Americans, homesickness and
loneliness, racism and discrimination, and issues with the office serving international
students.
The present study also documented difficulties stemming from the participants’ immigration statuses, those of married students and accompanying spouses. Many participants discussed the difficulties associated with being a teaching assistant, international student, husband/wife, and parent. The professional literature documents the difficulties of international students balancing roles such as teaching assistant and student (Ross & Krider, 1992), but there appears to be a gap in the literature addressing the multitude of issues that international students in marital relationships experience in the host culture. The findings of this study suggest that besides fulfilling roles that emerge from their international student status (e.g., teaching assistant and student), students in marital relationships may experience additional stress associated with providing financially and feeling responsible for other family members. However, the issues that may be a source of difficulty and stress may also contribute to the wellbeing of student spouses in the host culture (see supportive presence of spouse below).

Of the cultural differences identified, the academic environment was one of the most salient factors that contributed to the difficulties experienced by the student spouse participants in the study. The presence of interactive relationships in the U.S. academic environment, as well as the lack of an obvious power differential in the American classroom leading to behaviors deemed as rude and impolite were among some of the most frequently cited challenges. The findings of this study are consistent with the research literature suggesting that the interactive style of teaching, classroom behavior, English usage, and limited cultural awareness contribute to difficulties for international students (Ross & Krider, 1992).
Another salient factor with implications on the adjustment of the student spouse participants involved interpersonal relationships, primarily the presence of boundaries in relationships and focus on privacy. A few participants identified the difficulty socializing with Americans and described feelings of loneliness and homesickness stemming from an inability to develop meaningful relationships with the people in the host culture. Incidentally, these participants came here alone but were later joined by their spouses. The findings of this study are consistent with the research literature which indicates that low levels of social connectedness and social support satisfaction are among the predictors of high levels of acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

The difficulties experienced at the contact with the new culture suggest the presence of a stage during which the participants react to the cultural differences identified. However, it appears that these reactions are also influenced by other non-cultural factors, personal factors, such as familiarity with the English language, financial status, and ability to manage multiple roles.

**Benefits.** The student spouse participants identified several benefits associated with living in the U.S. They cited mostly personal, marital, and family benefits. Some of the personal benefits refer to academic and cultural gains, learning self-responsibility, engaging in hobbies and interests that are not easily accessible in the original culture, practicing a positive attitude, learning to be more assertive and individualistic, and learning to value and respect the law. The marital benefits include exposure to American couples that model supportive attitudes between spouses, and the family gains refer mostly to educational, cultural, and entertainment gains for the children and accompanying spouse. The fact that the student participants in this study identified a
multitude of benefits suggests that a new appreciation for the host culture has emerged and while they acknowledge the presence of challenges associated with living in the U.S. culture, they can also identify the positive aspects that emerge from it.

**Coping.** The most frequently cited coping mechanism was the presence of a support network. The majority of the student participants cited the supportive presence of their spouses. This finding is congruent with the research literature indicating that the quality of the marital relationship is the most significant predictor of psychological adjustment of people new to the U.S. culture (Stone Fenstein & Ward, 1990). Many participants also disclosed a tendency to recreate culture of origin communities as a way of dealing with cultural differences. Others talked about a tendency to come in contact with Americans through church. Yet others described a pattern of keeping to themselves and limiting socializing.

Some of the challenges stemming from participants’ personal factors, such as financial issues, are resolved through careful planning and wise budgeting. Some participants cited the help received from the government in the form of food stamps and cash assistance for their children. Several students discussed how they resolved language difficulties by accessing help from their American host family and auditing courses.

Another coping mechanism cited by the participants in the study is engaging in an evaluative process of the culture to identify the highly adaptable behaviors. Other participants cited the presence of realistic expectations and “pre-knowledge” of the culture that helped them anticipate potential difficulties and plan ahead.

The presence of functional coping mechanisms speaks to the participants’ ability to engage in a process of mobilizing internal and external resources to resolve the
challenges associated with cultural and personal factors. This seems to mark the beginning of a new phase, during which the participants start making sense of the differences in the new culture, and are able to engage in a process of learning and performing their roles in a competent fashion.

**Personal changes.** The participants in the study identified several positive changes associated with living and studying in the U.S. culture: increased confidence, learning to obey the law, adopting a positive attitude, being hard-working, being more respectful and responsible, and increased personal reflection. Two participants denied the presence of any significant changes. It appears that some of these personal changes are the result of the exposure to existent role models in the host culture. Based on the participants' stories and experiences, it also appears that these changes are the result of a progressive, forward movement that they engaged in, marked by a significant shift in self-concept.

The challenges, benefits, coping mechanisms, and personal changes identified by the student spouse participants in this study appear to be congruent with the research literature documenting the presence of four stages of cultural shock: (1) honeymoon or tourist phase, (2) crisis or disintegration phase, (3) reorientation and re-integration phase, and (4) adaptation and resolution phase (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994). Interestingly enough, the last stage is associated with either assimilation in the new culture (when international students are either unable or unwilling to hold on to their cultural values); separation (when students aim to maintain their original cultural identity); exclusion or marginalization (when the students' efforts to maintain original culture identity is blocked and so are their efforts to join groups in the new culture); and integration (which refers to
an interest in maintaining aspects from one's original culture while participating as an active participant in the new culture) (Berry, 1997).

The findings of this study suggest similar attitudes. Thus, some of the participants (C4M, C6M, C7M, C9F) decided to resolve cultural challenges by keeping to themselves or socializing with culture of origin people only, indicative of separation. Others, as it is the case of C2M, are moving toward assimilation, in that they are very receptive to host culture values and appear to be unable to hold on to their original culture values. Other participants (C5M, C1M, C10M) seem to be moving toward integration, in that they are willing to preserve culture of origin values, while participating in the host culture via occasional contacts with people from church and in the community. C3F appears to be experiencing a sense of exclusion or marginalization, as she struggles to build relationships with the people in the host culture but is unsuccessful, and does not have access to other people from her culture of origin. However, it appears that since her husband joined her in the U.S. she has been having more contact with Americans, which suggests a movement toward integration.

Despite the relatively lengthy stay in the U.S., C8M from Africa continues to experience symptoms indicative of cultural shock. This is not unusual, as variables like cultural distance (defined as greater differences between cultures), and experiences with discrimination and racism mediate the experience of acculturative stress. As differences between the host and original cultures increase, so do the problems experienced by people new to the culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Students from Asia, Africa, and Latin/Central America are more likely to experience acculturative stress compared with students from Europe (Yeh & Inose, 2003).
In summary, the experience of married international graduate students seems to be the result of an interplay between the challenges originating primarily in the academic and interpersonal arena, as well as the multitude of roles fulfilled in the U.S. culture. The identification of personal benefits of living and studying in the host culture may suggest that an appreciation for the host culture has emerged and they are not as immersed in dealing with cultural challenges. The student spouse participants discussed their ability to identify and use effective coping skills, of which the presence of a supportive network of people (including accompanying spouse) and evaluative process of the culture to identify the most adaptive behaviors are the most significant. All these processes, including challenges, benefits, and coping skills, seem to culminate in positive personal changes for many, marking a new stage of cultural adaptation. The tendency to engage in an evaluative process to identify the most adaptable behaviors in the host culture appears to be the trademark of the student spouse’s experience.

**Accompanying Spouses’ Experiences**

**Challenges.** Of the cultural differences identified, it appears that interpersonal relationships and organizational structures are among the most salient factors that contributed to the challenges experienced by the accompanying spouse participants in the study. A large number of participants identified loneliness/homesickness in their initial period of time in the U.S. This challenge originates with the loss of the support system from home but is also exacerbated by an inability to build meaningful relationships with members of the host culture. Other challenges like role shock, lack of medical insurance, and the difficulties qualifying for employment, originate in the organizational structures
of the host culture. Of these, the bureaucratic system in place, with highly organized relationships and unfriendly laws toward the accompanying spouse are the most salient factors. Other challenges identified by the accompanying spouses in this study included language barriers, lack of finances, religion issues, issues concerning safety, and lack of transportation. Some of these challenges originate in personal factors (e.g., language barriers; finances) while others (e.g., personal safety, lack of transportation) originate in cultural factors, like the physical environment.

C3M talked about the “strangeness” of the host culture and being a “foreigner,” and identified marked feelings of isolation and issues consistent with cultural shock. It is important to note that at the time of the interview C3M, from South Korea, had been in the U.S. for 4 months and he was also working on reconciling differences with his wife from whom he had been separated for several years.

These findings mirror the results of other studies done with international students’ spouses in the U.S. culture suggesting that accompanying spouses experience language difficulties, feeling a loss of control, losing a support network, losing one’s professional identity, suffering hardship, homesickness and loneliness (De Verthelyi, 1995). They are also congruent with the experiences of people in the cultural shock stage of the cultural shock and adaptation model (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994).

**Benefits.** Many accompanying spouses discussed having benefited from experiencing the U.S. culture. The participants cited personal, marital, and family benefits as positive effects of living in the host culture. The personal benefits are comprised of new learning, enjoying the accompanying spouse role, the ability to make more independent choices, and the convenience of life. The marital benefits refer to increased
feelings of responsibility toward the spouse, increased closeness in the marital relationship, and privacy. The family benefits include family reunification, benefits for the children, integration of elements from the host culture in the parenting of children, and non-interference of other extended family members from home. The benefits identified suggest the presence of an attitude of appreciation for certain aspects of the new culture, which will likely help in making the transition toward a new stage of cultural adjustment.

**Coping.** The accompanying spouse participants in this study identified the use of internal and external coping mechanisms to deal with the difficulties experienced in the U.S. The primary coping mechanisms identified included making connections with people, setting personal goals, and seeking meaning. Some of the accompanying spouse participants described a tendency to focus more on self, draw more boundaries in their relationships with others, and become more independent and self-reliant as an effect of living in the U.S. culture.

The accompanying spouse participants in this study talked about their ability to move past personal challenges experienced in the U.S. culture, and mobilize internal and external resources to deal with these differences, thus moving toward the re-integration phase of cultural adaptation (Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994). Developing a supportive network of people helps the participants overcome feelings of loneliness and homesickness experienced in the host culture. Likewise, it appears that the loss of control associated with losing one's professional identity translates to a new understanding of the role in the host culture, which helps provide new meaning and purpose and engages the participant in a process of shaping a new sense of self.
Personal changes. The accompanying spouses in the study acknowledged the presence of positive personal changes as an effect of living in the U.S. culture. They cited: increased independence and self-reliance, increased awareness of spousal responsibilities, and discovering meaning in the stay-at-home parent role. These changes appear to be the result of exposure to role-models in the host culture, and also a gradual process of transformation that marks a new phase in the adjustment to the new culture and the demands of the accompanying spouse role. These changes also seem to mark the transition to a new sense of self that is more suitable in the context of the host culture.

Just like the student spouse participants in this study, it appears that the accompanying spouse participants have reached one type of adaptation or another. C2F appears to be very much immersed in the U.S. culture, socializing mostly with Americans, attending parties and engaging in behaviors that are reprimanded by the Indian culture, indicative of assimilation. C1F, C5F, and C10F seem to be moving toward integration, as they come in contact with people of various nationalities, including Americans. Despite the role shock experienced, C3M and C9M also appear to be displaying behaviors congruent with a movement toward integration. Other participants decided to resolve cultural challenges by keeping to themselves (C6F) or socializing with culture of origin people only (C7F), indicative of separation. Despite her receptivity to specific cultural influences (such as focus on the nuclear family, non-interference of family members, and good senior citizen care in the U.S.) C4F's efforts of connecting meaningfully with people in the host culture remain unrewarded, indicative of separation. For other participants (C8F) the role shock experienced continues to be most salient, suggesting that the quest for one type of adaptation or another continues.
In summary, the experience of accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture seems to be the result of an interplay between challenges originating primarily in the interpersonal and organizational structures of the host culture, and personal factors, such as language ability, financial status, professional identity in the original culture, and gender role expectations. The participants identified positive aspects associated with living in the U.S. culture, with emphasis on personal, marital, and family gains, thus marking a stage of appreciation for certain host culture values. The participants identified the use of internal and external coping mechanisms such as making connections with people, setting personal goals, and seeking meaning to deal with cultural challenges. All of these processes seem to culminate in personal changes such as increased independence and self-reliance, increased awareness of spousal responsibilities, and an ability to find meaning in the stay-at-home parent role. It appears that the essence of the accompanying spouse’s experience lies in the tendency to seek/find meaning and set personal goals.

Other Findings

Three particular issues arose from the experiences associated with being an accompanying spouse and student spouse in the U.S. culture. First, it appears that the accompanying spouses who had well defined professional identities in their countries of origin experience the host culture in different ways than those who had short work histories, or did not work in their home countries. Second, the findings indicate that male accompanying spouses may experience their status in the U.S. differently than their female counterparts; thus, the role of gender will be addressed. Third, the findings of the study suggest that participants from countries with a strong religious/spiritual orientation
experience the host culture differently than those from countries with less spiritual and religious emphasis.

The experiences of accompanying spouses with an established professional identity. Half of the accompanying spouse participants had well defined professional identities in their cultures of origin. This was the case of C3M, C6F, C8F, C9M, and C10F. It appears that all of these participants, with the exception of C10F who was still new to the American culture (only 4 months at the time of the interview), experienced additional stress compared with the accompanying spouses who did not work or had very short work histories in their home countries. Many of these participants had to undergo the challenge of letting go of a once rewarding professional identity and shaping a new identity in the host culture environment around housekeeping and child rearing responsibilities. Each of these participants engaged in a process of self-reflection and questioned the meaning and worthiness of their presence in the U.S. culture. The findings of the study show that all of these participants engaged in a process of meaning-making in an attempt to accept their new roles and cope with the reality of all these changes.

C3M found meaning in being a stay-at-home father and husband and stressed the importance of being able to spend time with his daughter during her formative years. He came to understand the importance of family after having spent a lot of time away from his family building a professional identity. He was also able to identify the disadvantages of focusing too much on one’s career and fostering a “careless” attitude about his family life.

C8F used to be very active in her professional career; she traveled several days per week and her involvement in housekeeping and child rearing was minimal. She shared
feelings of frustration and disillusionment associated with her experience as a stay-at-home spouse in the U.S. culture, in light of the visa limitations and restrictions placed on dependent spouses. She was able to find meaning in spending time with her children and laying a strong foundation for them. She continues, however, to apply for jobs nationally and internationally, as a coping mechanism and way of feeling more in control of her life and personal choices.

C6F also expressed frustration over losing her identity as a professional woman. After several unsuccessful attempts of applying for jobs in the U.S., she decided to focus on child rearing and return to school to pursue a second degree.

C9M left the position as a successful pastor in Africa to join his wife and children in the U.S. Just like other accompanying spouses who used to work in their home countries, he questioned the worthiness of his role in the host culture. He found consolation in the time-limited commitment of this experience and acknowledged the educational and cultural gains for his family. He also found meaning in prayer and fellowship with people at church.

These findings draw attention to the multitude of difficulties experienced by people with a well-defined professional identity who come to the U.S. culture in the capacity of an accompanying spouse. It appears that their experience of adjustment to the host culture is complicated by the role shock experienced, in light of the visa limitations, bureaucratic procedures in place, and very strict employment rules.

The role of gender. This section discusses the impact of the participants’ gender on their experience of their status in the U.S. culture, especially when the status in the host culture conflicts with gender role expectations set by the original culture.
Traditionally, in most cultures, the stay-at-home parent role is performed by women. Two of the accompanying spouse participants included in this study are males, and they are expected to perform the roles and responsibilities of a stay-at-home parent and spouse.

C3M used to be the primary breadwinner in his home country, and was very much career-focused. He acknowledged that in South Korea, because of his career orientation, he did not focus on his family or relationship with his wife. The participant appeared to experience a great deal of challenges associated with this role-reversal, and complicated by language difficulties, loneliness, and marked feelings of alienation in the host culture.

C9M found himself in a similar position. However, the stress associated with the non-traditional role experienced in the U.S. did not seem to be any greater than that of other female accompanying spouses with well defined professional identities. C9M left his job as a spiritual leader to join his wife and children in the U.S. He admitted to the fact that back home his wife earned more money than him and had a privileged position in the African government. Therefore, it is possible that he was already accustomed to the presence of a power differential in his marriage and is more flexible in situations which require non-traditional roles such as this.

The findings of this study suggest that the experiences of males in accompanying spouse roles may be different than those of women in accompanying spouse roles. Future studies conducted with accompanying spouses should pay attention to the role of gender and the ramifications of this, such as added stress, marked internal conflict, and responses from extended family members stemming from assuming non-traditional gender roles.

**The role of church and religion/spirituality.** The findings of this study suggest that participants from spiritually-oriented cultures may experience additional cultural
shock and acculturative stress in contact with the U.S. culture. Several couples (C6, C7, C8, C9) identified specific trends in the U.S. which are incompatible with their spiritual or religious orientation. C7M talked about his inability to connect and socialize with Americans, stemming from an uneven economic status and socializing behaviors that are reprimanded by his culture, such as drinking, partying, and other behaviors deemed “irresponsible.” C6M described a similar idea and indicated that the host culture values are not congruent with his Hindu orientation. C6 expressed how they avoid socializing with American people, especially gatherings where people consume alcohol, tobacco, and meat. C7F identified difficulties associated with practicing her religious beliefs in the host culture, due to lack of a Buddhist temple nearby.

C8 and C9 appear to have been the most impacted by the experience of cultural differences regarding spirituality. These two couples often cited the materialistic orientation to living in the U.S. culture, which contradicts profoundly with the spiritual approach to African living. The individualism in the host culture also contradicts with the collectivistic views of people in the African culture. C8M talked extensively about his inability to understand the people in the host culture, connect with them meaningfully, and fulfill his spiritual needs in relationships.

The findings of this study suggest that spirituality and religion may play a large part in the experience of adjustment to a new culture. It appears that the experience of adjustment to a new culture may be complicated by factors like spirituality/religious beliefs, especially when there is a large gap between the two cultures on this dimension.
Impact of Culture on Marriages

The second research question explored the impact of cultural influences on couples’ marital relationships. The researcher inquired about the relationship quality over time, prior to coming to the U.S., 2 months after arrival in the U.S., and at the time of the interview. The researcher also inquired about the ways in which the participants dealt with specific cultural influences as couples and the ways in which the new cultural context impacted their marital relationship.

Marital Relationship Over Time

Some participants in the study described limited time spent together prior to coming to the U.S., due to work responsibilities and interference from other family members. Others talked about engaging in mutually-supportive relationships, and encouraging each other to pursue personal goals, such as joining an American university to further their education. A few participants described excitement congruent with the honeymoon stage of a romantic relationship, while others talked about relationship disconnect.

Several participants identified experiencing relationship distress and tension two months after arrival in the U.S. It is possible that the relationship distress experienced at that time was caused by the immersion in the crisis stage of the cultural shock and adaptation model. For some couples, however, as it is the case of C2, C3, and C10, the relationship conflict may be an expression of marital (re)adjustment.
An overwhelming number of participants (19) described improved marital relationship at the time of the interview. A few participants identified an increased ability to work through conflict and negotiate differences without other people’s interference. The findings of the study suggest that the participants’ marital relationships have improved over time, as a result of spending more time together, focusing more on each other, and improving their conflict-resolution skills in the absence of other mediators.

**Impact of Cultural Influences on Marital Relationships**

It appears that the most salient cultural differences that influenced the marital relationships of the participants in the study are interpersonal relationships and marital attitudes of American people. Many participants acknowledged the tendency to move closer together as an effect of living in the U.S. culture. It appears that the isolation experienced in the host culture due to the inability to develop meaningful relationships with people translates in increased closeness in and reliance upon the marital relationship. Additionally, navigating challenges together and helping one another seems to contribute to the increased closeness in the relationship. Some aspects of the host cultural context like engaging in public displays of affection are facilitative of increased closeness in the relationships as well.

Guarding against specific negative cultural influences was another common theme identified. The participants discussed the need to develop “safeguards” within the marriage, “shock absorbers” and “cushions,” to guard against specific influences such as the high rate of divorce. Some participants addressed the need to selectively allow cultural influences, but only those that enhance the marital fiber of the relationship.
Others described a tendency to recreate culture of origin communities, and avoid contact with people in the host culture. A few participants expressed a desire to keep to themselves and progressively draw boundaries in their relationships with others.

Many participants also noted a tendency to focus on their identity as a couple, because of increased privacy in relationships and non-interference of extended family members and other people. Developing common goals was another factor which contributed to the ability to focus on identity as a couple.

Two couples (C1 and C4) reported conflict stemming from differing levels of acculturation. The accompanying spouses (both females) in these couples expressed more receptivity to particular host culture values such as a focus on the nuclear family and non-interference of family members. In some cultures, traditionally, young women are the primary caretakers, living in multigenerational families, and caring for the elderly and the spouse’s parents. Additionally, extended family members influence the couple’s decisions and are involved in children’s lives. This was the case of C4F who is facing the real possibility of returning to Thailand after her husband completes his studies in the U.S. to live with her spouse’s parents and provide care for them. C1F appeared to appreciate the freedom in the U.S. and her ability to focus on her nuclear family. Both C1F and C4F expressed a desire to extend their stay in the U.S.; however, C1M and C4M indicated a desire to return to their home countries soon after finishing their studies in the U.S. This discrepancy in goals regarding the length of stay in the U.S. appeared to be a source of tacit conflict for C1 and C4. These findings are consistent with results from research studies documenting the link between differing levels of acculturation and marital
distress. Thomas (1995) indicated that in the context of the new culture the patriarchal family structure is often threatened by the liberal values of the host society.

In general, the findings suggest that most of the participants in the study were able to come together and confront the difficulties associated with this stressful cultural experience; they were able to figure out a way to cope with challenges as a couple. They were left to cope with this adjustment by themselves, dyadically. Therefore, the two partners come together, bond together, and the relationship becomes more prominent. The findings of the current study are also congruent with the current research literature on dyadic coping, and empathic responding in particular, which emphasizes the benefits of relationship-focused coping in dealing with stressful situations and adjustments, which in turn may lead to stronger marital bonds (O’Brien, DeLongis, Pomaki, Puterman, & Zwicker, 2009). Several participants in the study addressed the increased feelings of responsibility toward their spouses through their experiences in the host culture as an effect of engaging in a process of empathic understanding of the partner’s situation and concerns.

The experiences of the married couples included in this study are the result of an evaluative process of the host culture context, with emphasis on factors like interpersonal relationships and people’s attitudes toward marriage. Couples seem to come closer together as a couple as an effect of this evaluative process, while guarding against cultural influences deemed as detrimental and selectively allowing influences that enhance the marital fiber.

Three additional factors emerged from the participants’ responses to this research question. The first refers to the length of marriage and participants’ receptivity to cultural
influences, while the second involves reciprocity for one couple who both had taken on the student and accompanying spouse roles over a longer period of time. The third factor suggests that the experiences for couples who had U.S.-born children may be different than those with children born overseas.

**Length of Marriage and Participants’ Receptivity to Cultural Influences**

This section focuses on the length of participants’ marital relationships and their receptivity to various cultural influences. The assumption that there may be a connection between these two factors took shape when I observed that a particular couple in the study, C2, expressed an unusual amount of receptivity to cultural influences, despite the cultural distance between American and Indian cultures. It is important to note that the length of the participants’ marriages in this study ranges from 1.1 years to 18 years. C2 had been married for 1.1 years, thus having the shortest marital relationship in the study, and a relatively amorphous identity as a married couple. The couple is very immersed in the U.S. culture, attending American parties, and engaging in behaviors that are reprimanded by the Indian culture, such as drinking and eating beef.

C5, married for 2 years, also expressed more receptivity to cultural influences. They seem to have more connections with people in the U.S. culture, primarily through church. They also shared their perception of marriages as being stable and committed in the host culture, while the general trend expressed by the majority of the participants in the study was just the opposite.

The longest marital relationships were noted in C8 who had been married for 12 years, and C9, married for 18 years. Despite issues like cultural distance, it appears that
C8 and C9 have more awareness of cultural differences and share well-developed identities as couples. They also discussed engaging in an evaluative process of the host culture to identify the adaptable behaviors and safeguard against cultural differences deemed as detrimental to the health of their marriages and families as a whole.

It is possible that the receptivity to host culture influences is a function of participants’ ages, not necessarily length of marriage. C2F (age 27) and C5F (age 28) were the youngest female participants in the study. C5M (age 30) was the youngest male participant in the study. It is possible that younger people with less developed cultural and personal identities may be more receptive to new experiences and cultural influences. The findings of this study suggest that couples with less developed identities as couples are more likely to be receptive to cultural influences and vice-versa: couples with more established marital identities are more likely to engage in an evaluative process of the host culture and develop mechanisms to help filter these influences. Future research should take into consideration these issues and establish the relationship between length of the marital relationship, the ages of people new to the U.S. culture, and receptivity to cultural influences in the context of a new culture.

**Relationship Reciprocity in Assuming the Student and Accompanying Spousal Roles**

One of the couples in this study was in the unique position of each partner having experienced both the student and accompanying spousal roles in a foreign culture environment. C8, from Africa, previously lived in Australia for 2 years while C8F pursued a master’s degree. C8M was the accompanying spouse at the time, and now in
the U.S., those roles are reversed. It appears that the accompanying spouse's experience in the Australian culture was different than the accompanying spouse's experience in the American culture. This difference seemed to be influenced by factors such as employment availability and cultural distance. C8M as an accompanying spouse was able to work part-time in Australia while C8F cannot do so in the U.S. It is possible that C8F may have used her experience in Australia to help shape her expectations of rights and roles of accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture. Likewise, C8M may have used Australian standards to shape his expectations of living and studying in the U.S.

Despite these issues, it is possible that familiarity with one role or the other may help shape more realistic expectations and better prepare the spouses for potential challenges. Additionally, it may also help increase feelings of mutual sympathy and understanding, as an effect of having experienced similar challenges first hand. This is an area worthy of further exploration, and future research should consider the implications of such reciprocity in married international students’ relationships.

**Couples with Children Born in the U.S.**

Seven couples in this study had children at the time of the interviews. Of the seven couples with children, four had children in the U.S. It appears that the experiences of couples with children born in the U.S. are different than those who had children in their home countries.

First, the accompanying spouses who had children born in the U.S. (C1F, C4F, C6F, and C7F) have come in contact with American medical personnel and for the most
part appreciated the medical care provided. Additionally, at least while pregnant and shortly after the delivery they were covered by medical insurance.

Second, the families of children born in the U.S. experience increased benefits, such as government assistance (e.g., food stamps and cash assistance) and access to free medical insurance for the U.S. born citizens. Families with children born overseas, as it is the case of C3, C8, and C9 do not have access to such privileges. Therefore, it appears that the overall experience in the host culture is influenced by factors like timing of having children and children's citizenship status, which suggest that families with non-U.S. born children may experience increased financial hardship and medical concerns.

**Impact of Being Married on Adjustment**

This research question explored the impact of marriage on participants’ personal adjustment to the U.S. culture. The findings of the study revealed both positive and negative influences.

Many participants identified the positive influences of marriage on personal adjustment to the culture. Marriage seems to help: decrease feelings of alienation, individuals to act in responsible ways, improve feelings of self-esteem and sense of belonging, and improve overall health and eating habits. These results are consistent with the results of a study conducted by Sweatman (1999) which examined the relationship between overall marital satisfaction and psychological distress in missionary couples. The findings of this study revealed that the quality of the marital relationship acted as a stress moderator, with higher levels of marital relationship quality decreasing or minimizing symptoms of depression and anxiety. In his study, Sweatman also alluded to the
capability of the marital relationship to minimize the demands associated with adaptation, and increase one’s feelings of competency and worthiness. These results are congruent with the findings of the current study, which suggest that marriage helps improve one’s feelings of self-esteem and sense of belonging.

The researcher used the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) to measure the participants’ views on their adjustment to marriage. The scores on the DAS range from 0 to 151, with a cutoff score of 98 indicating a distressed couple. Higher scores indicate better adjustment to marriage. It is interesting to note that 19 of the 20 participants scored above the cutoff for distressed couples, indicating overall that the couples in this study viewed their marriage as being relatively well adjusted, despite the stressors of being in a new culture for educational purposes. The highest DAS scores were obtained by C6M (141) and C5F (143), suggesting high levels of adjustment to marriage. It is not surprising, as C5F expressed an increased awareness of her spousal responsibilities and an ability to take her supportive role very seriously. Likewise, C6M referred to his wife and himself as “inseparable,” thus suggesting a high degree of marital adjustment.

Only one participant (C10M) had a score (92) below the cutoff for distressed couples. C10 had just recently reunited after a period of several years of separation when they lived in different cities in China. Therefore, it is possible that the couple is in the process of making marital readjustments, marked by a certain amount of conflict and working through relationship differences. This couple was described above as having difficulty dealing with differences in educational levels. C3 identified similar difficulties; the partners reunited after a separation of 2 years. It appears that they too are going
through a process of readjustment to marriage, illustrated by C3M’s DAS score (104) which is close to the cutoff for distressed couples.

Given the small sample size and the fact that statistical methods beyond descriptive statistics for the DAS presented here were not used, the following discussion is tentative, but points to some trends in the data. The mean DAS score for accompanying spouses was 123.2 (range of 104-143), and the mean score for student spouses was 121.2 (range of 92-141), which reveals similar scores.

Additionally, females overall scored an average of 124.4 on the DAS, and males 120, similar scores. Male accompanying spouses ($n = 2$) averaged 111.5, while female accompanying spouses ($n = 8$) averaged 126.1. The lower average score for male accompanying spouses compared with that of female accompanying spouses may suggest difficulties associated with performing non-traditional gender roles in the U.S. culture, and overall dissatisfaction with their roles in the U.S. culture. Female student spouses ($n = 2$) had a mean score of 117.5, and male student spouses averaged a score of 122.1. These scores may be related to the non-traditional gender roles embraced by these female student participants, and more familiarity with the student spouse roles for male participants. It would be interesting to see if some of these trends hold up with a larger sample.

A few participants identified financial pressure associated with being married in the U.S. culture. They did, however, explain that budgeting well and making wise financial investments help minimize this issue. Two participants (C3F and C10M) also discussed how being married interferes with studying. C3F, as noted above, is working on reconciling differences with her husband after a period of separation which lasted several
years. C3M scored closer to the cut-off score indicating a distressed couple (104). Additionally, C10M’s DAS score (92) suggests a distressed couple. These results are consistent with the aforementioned literature findings which suggest that a distressed marital relationship correlates with low levels of psychological adjustment (Stone et al., 1990).

**Study Strengths and Limitations**

This study was designed to capture the meaning of the experiences of married international graduate students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture using qualitative research methodology, and phenomenology in particular. The study was designed to fill a gap in the research literature, by giving voice to an “invisible” population in the U.S. culture, accompanying spouses, and further explore the role of marriage in the overall experience of adjustment to the host culture. This section focuses on the strengths and limitations of this study.

**Strengths**

One of the strengths of this study lies in the inclusion of multiple participant perspectives. Thus, three perspectives were captured, those of married international students, their accompanying student spouses, and married couples. This process was facilitated by individual interviews with each student and accompanying spouse, followed by interviews with each couple. Overall, there were three interviews with each case, for a total of thirty interviews. This helped add to the trustworthiness of the findings and provided a richer understanding of a complex phenomenon from different perspectives.
Furthermore, the sample was comprised of participants from a range of countries, such as China, India, Africa, South Korea, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Jordan, which helped contribute to the diversity of the sample. China, India, and Africa were represented by two couples each, which added to the breadth of participants’ perspectives. The sample also included some gender diversity in that two males were accompanying spouses, and thus two females were student spouses. This helped highlight the experiences of participants who assumed non-traditional gender roles in the host culture, such as males in accompanying spouse roles.

The researcher’s familiarity with the phenomenon investigated is another strength of this study. As a married graduate student with an international background, I could identify with some of the challenges and difficulties experienced by the participants in the study. This enabled me to build rapport with them, connect with them in a meaningful fashion, and gain privileged access into their home environments to explore individual and marital issues.

Another strength stems from the reciprocal nature of the data collection and analysis. Immediately following each individual interview, the researcher filled out a contact summary sheet documenting personal reflections and observations, as well as the main themes identified during the contact. The information included in the contact summary sheet helped inform the issues discussed during the couple interview and highlighted the main areas of interest. Additionally, each individual interview was transcribed and the transcripts were shared with the individual participants prior to the couple interview, and feedback was solicited. The data provided by the contact summary sheet, demographic questionnaire, and Dyadic Adjustment Scale guided subsequent
couple interview questions and helped the researcher modify the data gathering during the
couple interview as needed. Finally, the findings of this research were shared with the
participants, who were invited to reflect on these findings and provide feedback.

Limitations

Several limitations result from the research design and methodology used in this
study. First, the researcher was the sole interviewer, coder, reporter of findings, and has a
married international student status. Thus, it is possible that some of the researcher’s
biases and assumptions might have influenced the way in which these various steps in the
study were approached. However, the study was designed in such a way as to not allow
personal biases and assumptions to unduly influence the process or findings of the study.
These personal beliefs and assumptions have been previously documented in Chapter III.
Sharing the individual interview transcripts with the participants was a way to control for
some of these undesirable effects. Additionally, the reciprocal interplay between the data
collection and analysis helped contribute to the richness of the data. The use of an
established measurement tool such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale helped add to the
qualitative data.

Another limitation relates to the method of participant recruitment, which relied
upon a local convenience sample and on snowball sampling. The researcher used
participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study to locate other suitable cases.
All the participants were recruited from the same university and four of the participants
were from the same program of study. It is possible that at universities of different sizes,
international students and their accompanying spouses may have varied resources to
access and therefore may face a different set of issues. Several participants expressed
dissatisfaction with the university’s office for international students, thus this may have
also influenced participants’ experiences.

Additionally, the interviews were conducted in a language other than the
participants’ native language. This may have posed challenges for some as they were
attempting to capture a subjective experience in a different language. Therefore, the
meaning of their inner experiences may have been altered by the use of the English
language, especially when certain feelings may be difficult to translate in another
language or may not have an equivalent in that language.

Another limitation stems from the fact that a few couples had not been married for
one year prior to joining a U.S. institution, while others had been married for much
longer. This range of length of marriage may have made it difficult to distinguish marital
adjustment related to being newlyweds from adjustments related to being in the U.S.
culture for one spouse’s graduate education. Newlyweds included two Indian couples, C2
and C6. One of the couples had been married for six months prior to coming to the U.S.,
while the other couple came to the U.S. immediately after their official ceremony. It
appears that participants from countries with traditional arranged marriages have very
short courtships and come to the U.S. not long after getting married. It is this researcher’s
understanding that coming to the U.S. shortly after getting married is common for many
young Indian people. Two other couples (C5 and C7) that had been married less than one
year were the Sri Lankan and one of the Chinese couples. The Sri Lankan couple got
married five months before coming to the U.S., while the Chinese couple got married six
months before coming to the U.S. The decision of getting married was precipitated by
C7M’s and C5M’s admission to a graduate program in the U.S. It is possible that this may be a trend for many young international couples faced with the decision of leaving their countries to join universities in the U.S. The U.S. immigration laws do not allow unmarried couples to come to the U.S.; therefore, many of these young couples have to legalize their relationships to be able to come together. Future studies might wish to focus on the experiences of specific types of couples such as those who were married shortly before coming to the U.S. for education, couples from arranged marriages, more established marital couples, or couples with children.

Despite these limitations, the researcher attempted to capture the essence of the experiences of married graduate international students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture in an accurate, objective manner. It is believed that some of these limitations contributed to the richness of information in this study and allowed for new understandings and avenues of possible explorations to emerge.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This study identified that married international graduate students’ and their accompanying spouses’ experiences in the host culture is the result of an interplay between challenges, personal benefits, activation of internal and external coping mechanisms, culminating in personal changes and adjustments. The findings of this study have implications for professionals in the counselor education field, college counseling, and student affairs.
Counselor Education

First, it is recommended that counselor education programs diversify their counseling curricula and include up-to-date information about cross-cultural transitions, the specific needs of international students and their accompanying spouses, the challenges they experience at the contact with the host culture, and the most effective coping mechanisms utilized by these populations. Additionally, counselor educators should consult the most recent research literature to identify and teach culturally sensitive therapy models to help train culturally sensitive therapists.

It has been this researcher’s experience in a graduate counseling program that the counselor education curricula pay little attention to international students’ issues. There are very few courses that address the needs of this population. Those that do, however, stress the experiences of single international students. It appears that married international students’ issues have been excluded from counseling curricula. Counselor educators need to take a more inclusive approach and integrate aspects related to the unique needs of married international students, by teaching counselors-in-training not only culturally-sensitive approaches, but also role- and status-sensitive approaches. This would ensure future counselors’ preparation for working not only with married international students, but also their non-student spouses.

College Counseling

For professionals working in the college counseling field, it is recommended that they create on-campus educational awareness programs for both professional staff that
come in contact with married international students and their accompanying spouses, as well as married international students and their spouses. These programs should focus on cross-cultural issues, stages of cultural shock, and the availability of services to support international students and their spouses. Accompanying spouses should be allowed to access counseling services as needed and it is of critical importance to address marital issues, based upon the important role that marriage plays as revealed by the participants in this study.

If not currently available at university counseling centers, it is also recommended to initiate support groups for international students and their spouses that can serve as an outlet for stress and meet their needs for social support. These groups should address the challenges related to being married in the host culture environment, specific ways of coping with cultural influences, and help the participants shape realistic expectations about their experiences in the U.S. culture.

However, according to the findings of this study, married international students may utilize non-traditional supports, and rely mostly on naturally occurring social supports to overcome cultural difficulties and may not take advantage of the traditional forms of counseling in place. Some of the social supports most often utilized appear to be one’s spouse and people from one’s country of origin present in the host culture. Other social outlets that they are likely to access are American host families, people at church, and support from their department chair, academic advisor, and peers in the academic program. Thus, college counselors might want to integrate these means of coping in their work and use them as viable strategies with international students and their accompanying spouses. One way of offering traditional forms of help in a non-traditional
format is by initiating support groups for international students and/or their accompanying spouses on-site, in the community center of the university apartment complex where they reside. Other options may include direct “coaching” of advisors and people who come in contact with international students and their families on specific issues, and flexibility of counselors to conduct counseling in locations other than the counseling center.

College counselors should identify and use culturally sensitive and role-sensitive techniques in their work with married international students and their accompanying spouses, particularly if a large group of international students from the same country or region is present at the university. The development of a needs-based approach may also be useful. College counselors could conduct a thorough assessment to identify challenges experienced, perceived cultural differences, and other non-cultural factors such as multiple roles or role shock, that may influence their adjustment. Based on this initial assessment, they could identify appropriate interventions (including non-traditional interventions listed above) and choose culturally- and role-sensitive techniques. It appears that the quality of marriage has a great impact on an individual’s personal adjustment to the U.S. culture. Thus, college counselors may want to take into consideration aspects related to marital satisfaction. When needed, they could use culturally sensitive instruments to assess the quality of marriage and draw from marital and family therapies to help resolve relationship issues in the marriage.
Student Affairs

Professionals in various student affairs offices, including those directly involved with serving the particular needs of international students, should develop a centralized system of handling international students' issues to limit the amount of acculturative stress caused by what this study's participants viewed as cumbersome and impersonal bureaucratic procedures. These offices should also advocate for the development of university programs that meet the needs of accompanying spouses and their families by assisting them with issues such as daycare and transportation.

Additionally, offices serving international students need to improve the efficacy of their programs and procedures, and respond to international students' concerns in a sensitive, prompt fashion. This was an area of concern expressed by some of the participants in the study who reported dissatisfaction with the services provided by the on-campus office serving international students. Participants talked about the inefficiency of services. One of them discussed how his ability to secure a job in the U.S., which is a critical issue for international students, was negatively affected by this office's failure to process the necessary documents for employment. Situations like these could be easily avoided with the right procedures in place and trained professionals capable of handling in a sensitive manner international students' issues. Their main mission is to support international students; one way of justifying their existence is by providing good quality services to international students and their families.
Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on the experiences of international students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture at a large Midwestern public university; the study included 20 participants. The study could be replicated with an expanded, more diverse sample, with students and accompanying spouses from multiple universities. Future studies could use more culturally representative samples, by including participants from Europe, Asia, Africa, Central and South America, Australia, and so forth. Additionally, studies focusing on the experiences of specific cultural groups could be conducted to provide a more in-depth understanding of their marital experiences in the U.S. culture and personal adjustment to the U.S. culture.

The current study focused on the experiences of married graduate international students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture. A study could be designed to look at the experiences of married undergraduate international students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture, and possibly explore the relationship between length of marital relationship, participants’ ages, and receptivity to cultural influences in the context of the host culture. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods could be employed to accurately assess the nature of these relationships.

The findings from this study also suggest that gender role expectations may impact one’s experience of their status in the U.S. culture. The study included eight male student participants and only two male accompanying spouse participants. Future studies might include a more balanced gender representation, and compare the experiences of male accompanying spouses with those of female accompanying spouses to better
understand the impact of gender role expectations on the overall experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture. Similar studies could be conducted to capture the impact of culture of origin type (e.g., patriarchal vs. matriarchal) on the overall experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative methods could be employed to contrast the experiences of males and females with different cultural backgrounds fulfilling various spousal roles in the U.S.

The findings related to one unique couple from the current study imply that the experiences of participants who have previously experienced foreign culture environments in the capacity of student spouse and accompanying spouse roles and later reversed these roles may have a different experience than those who experience a foreign culture environment for the first time. Future studies should consider the implications of such reciprocal relationships on couples’ marital relationships and the individuals’ adjustment to the host culture.

Last, the current study highlighted only some of the needs and concerns of married graduate international students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. Future studies may identify other areas of concern and recommend appropriate programs to meet the complex needs of this population.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to capture the experiences of married international graduate students and their accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture. Additionally, the study explored the impact of cultural influences on participants’ marital relationships and the effects of marriage on adjustment to the culture.
In conclusion, according to these findings, the experience of accompanying spouses transitioning to the U.S. culture encompasses a multifaceted experience influenced by cultural factors, such as one’s support network and satisfaction with this network, bureaucratic laws that regulate employment; and personal factors such as language mastery, professional identity, spiritual/religious orientation, familiarity with non-traditional gender roles, and length and quality of marriage. The essence of the experiences of accompanying spouses in the U.S. culture appears to lie in the ability to make meaning and set personal goals. Likewise, the experience of student spouse participants transitioning to the U.S. culture encompasses a multifaceted experience impacted by cultural factors such as academic issues, social support network and satisfaction with this network; and personal factors such as ability to juggle multiple roles, finances, language mastery, spiritual/religious orientation, and length and quality of marital relationship. Based on the findings of this study, the essence of the student spouses’ experiences appears to lie in the ability to engage in an evaluative process of the culture to identify the most adaptable behaviors.

The findings stressed that many married couples experience increased closeness in the U.S. culture as a result of the isolation experienced and the non-interference of family members from home. The increased closeness is also influenced by couples’ tendencies to consciously filter cultural influences and guard against specific cultural influences, with the end result of focusing on their identity as a couple. The findings also revealed the presence of conflict in a few cases, impacted by the experience of marital re-adjustment, uneven levels of education and acculturation, or exacerbation of pre-existent areas of difference in the relationship. The essence of the experience of participants as married
couples is the increased closeness and tendency to guard against negative cultural influences.

The results of this study have helped illuminate specific areas of need in the research literature, particularly those related to accompanying spouses and their marital relationships. Although cross-cultural transitions are often associated with major challenges and significant acculturative stress, the participants in the study demonstrated an ability to recover from such overwhelming tasks, mobilize internal and external resources in dealing with challenges, and ultimately make superior adaptations that ensured a new state of homeostasis. Some participants even expressed a desire to develop a bicultural identity by combining elements from their original culture with particular elements from their experiences in the U.S. that were deemed positive, and cultivating an attitude of appreciation for both.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

Protocol Clearance Letter from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Date: March 15, 2007

To: Gary Bischof, Principal Investigator
   Adriana Fox, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 07-02-30

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “The Experience of Married International Graduate Students and Their Accompanying Spouses in the US Culture” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 15, 2008
Appendix B

Initial Contact Script
Initial Contact Script

Hi, _______________:

My name is Adriana Fox and I am a doctoral student from the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. I am contacting you as a follow-up to your initial call/email in which you expressed an interest in my research study.

I will be conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Gary Bischof at Western Michigan University. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of married international students and their spouses in the US culture.

My study will target graduate international students who joined Western Michigan University for education purposes, and their non-student spouses. To be included in this study, you must have been married for at least one year prior to coming to the US, must have the same nationality as your spouse, and must have experienced living together in your home country. You must have also experienced the US culture for at least four months, must be conversant in the English language, and be able to express yourself in English.

This study uses a demographic questionnaire, an instrument rating your overall adjustment to marriage, and two interviews. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Fill out a brief demographic questionnaire, which will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.
2. Fill out a relationship questionnaire with 32 items, which will take about 15 minutes to complete.
3. Participate in two semi-structured audio-taped interviews, which will take about 60 minutes each. The first interview will be individual, and the second interview will include both you and your spouse.

This research study is qualitative in nature. Therefore, a series of questions will be asked that are designed to explore your and your spouse’s experience in the US culture and the impact of this experience on your marital relationship. Your participation in this study may increase your understanding of the challenges and benefits associated with studying/living in the US culture, as well as the dynamics of your marital relationship in the context of the new culture. In the future, others may benefit from the knowledge you contribute to this research.

Risks are minimal and may include minor discomfort when talking about yourself or your relationship during the interviews. Your responses are entirely confidential and code numbers or pseudonyms will be used when coding the data and presenting the findings.
Do you have any questions at this point?

(If potential participant continues to show interest in the study):
I will be mailing to you a demographic questionnaire and two copies of the informed consent document, which you will be able to look over and fill out at your convenience. You may keep a copy of the informed consent document and mail back to me the demographic questionnaire which you have filled out, along with a signed copy of the informed consent document. After receiving these documents, I will be contacting you immediately to agree upon a location for our interviews. Thank you for your interest in this study.

(If potential participant is not interested in the study):
I understand that at this point you are not interested in this research opportunity. Do you know of any married international students who may be interested in this study? Thank you for taking the time to learn about this research opportunity.
Appendix C

Demographic and Relationship History Questionnaire
Demographic and Relationship History Questionnaire

Name: ____________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________

Phone numbers: Home: ___________________________ Cell: ___________________________

e-mail address: ____________________________________________

Age: ____________________________

Country of Origin/Nationality: ____________________________________________

Program of Study in the U.S. (student spouse): ____________________________

Time in the U.S. (in years and/or months): ____________________________

Years together as a couple prior to getting married: ____________________________

Years married: ____________________________

Number of children and ages (if applicable): ____________________________

Highest level of education completed (or years of education completed): ____________________________

Occupation in home country: ____________________________________________

Number of hours worked per week in the home country before moving: ____________________________

Rate your fluency in English on a scale 1 to 5

(1-no knowledge of English; 5-very fluent): _____
Appendix D

Individual Interview Guide Questions
Interview Guide Questions

Individual Interview

**Initial Question:**

Do you have any questions or concerns related to this study that you would like to express before we get started?

**Research Question 1:**

*What do married graduate international students studying in the US and their accompanying spouses experience at the contact with the new culture?*

Interview questions associated with research question:

1. How have you found the U.S. culture to be different than your own?
2. Describe your current social support system (i.e., friends, acquaintances, etc.)
3. Describe your personal experience upon arrival in the United States (i.e., refer to ways of feeling, thinking, and acting at that time).
4. In what ways have you benefited from experiencing this culture? What personal opportunities have you encountered in this culture that you may not have been able to experience in your country?
5. What were some of the issues you found especially challenging? How did you cope with all these challenges?
6. What was most helpful in your adjustment to the new culture?
7. Describe the ways in which you’ve changed.
8. (to the accompanying spouse): Describe your experience as an accompanying wife/husband in the new culture.
Research Question 2:

How is the marital relationship influenced by the experience in the host culture?

Interview Questions associated with Research Question 2:

1. How would you describe your relationship with your spouse prior to coming to the US?
2. How would you describe your relationship two months into your stay in the U.S.? How is the relationship now?
3. How has this international experience enhanced your marriage? How has it negatively impacted your marriage?

Research Question 3

How does the marital relationship influence the experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture?

Interview questions associated with Research Question 3:

1. How has the experience of being in a committed relationship influenced your adjustment to the host culture? Any benefits of being married? Any challenges due to being married?
2. How would you describe your experience in the host culture as a married woman/man?

Ending Questions:

1. What are your hopes for the future as a married international student/accompanying spouse in this culture?
2. Is there anything you would like to add related to this study or do you have additional questions/concerns you would like to express?
Appendix E

Couple Interview Guide Questions
Interview Guide Questions

Couple Interview

Initial Questions:

1. Do you have any questions or concerns related to this study that you would like to express before we get started?

2. Do you have any comments/additions to make that would clarify the issues discussed in our first interview?

3. How did you meet?

4. How did you make the decision to come to the U.S.?

5. What was your relationship and routines like in your home country?

Research Question 2:

How is the marital relationship influenced by the experience in the host culture?

Interview Questions associated with Research Question 2:

1. How has it been for you as a couple to live in this culture?

2. Researcher will share summaries of what was learned during individual interviews. Generate discussions.

3. What kinds of changes (if any) have you noticed in your relationship or personal interactions with each other after moving to the U.S.?

Research Question 3:

How does the marital relationship influence the experience of adjustment to the U.S. culture?
Interview Questions associated with Research Question 3:

1. You mentioned in the individual interview that... was especially challenging at first. How did you manage to deal with this challenge as a couple?

2. Would you say that being in a committed relationship was helpful in experiencing this culture? If yes, in what ways was it helpful? If not, what are the reasons?

Ending Questions:

1. What are your hopes for the future as a couple in terms of living in this culture? What changes would you like to see in your relationship?

2. Is there anything you would like to add or do you have any comments about this study?

3. From your experiences, what recommendations/advice might you offer to other couples who may be planning to come to study in the U.S. as you have?
Appendix F

Contact Summary Sheet
Contact Summary Sheet

Date:

Participant Code:

Site:

Length of Interview:

1. Personal observations and reflections during the interview

2. Main issues and themes identified during this contact

3. What research questions was the interview focused on during this contact?
   What target questions should I focus on in the couple interview?

4. Any other salient, interesting or illuminating information during this contact?

(adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994)
Appendix G

Table: Summary of Participants' Background
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Legend:  
SS: Student Spouse  
AS: Accompanying Spouse  
DAS: Dyadic Adjustment Scale (scores of 98 and lower are indicative of marital distress)
Appendix H

Diagram with Summary of Study Findings
Summary of Cross-Case Study Findings

**Cultural Factors**

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<th>Academic Environment</th>
<th>Interpersonal Relationships</th>
<th>Marriage Attitudes</th>
<th>Views of Americans</th>
<th>Parenting Practices</th>
<th>Community Organizational Structure</th>
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<td>- Impolite behaviors</td>
<td>- Privacy in relationships</td>
<td>- High divorce rate</td>
<td>- Favorable</td>
<td>- Superficial parent-child relationships</td>
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<td>- Interactive relationships</td>
<td>- Superficial relationships</td>
<td>- Individualism in marriage</td>
<td>- Unfavorable</td>
<td>- Permissive relationships</td>
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**Challenges**
- Balancing multiple roles, finances, language, academic environment; difficulty socializing with Americans, homesickness and loneliness
- Increased closeness
- Guard against negative cultural influences
- Focus on identify as a couple/nuclear family
- Increased responsibility to improve marital relationship
- Conflict due to uneven education & acculturation levels
- Loneliness and homesickness
- Language barriers; role shock
- Lack of medical insurance;
- Unfriendly laws toward accompanying spouses

**Benefits**
- Academic & cultural benefits, increased support from spouse, learning to value and respect the law, benefits for the entire family, learning self-responsibility, learning to be more individualistic and assertive, practicing a positive attitude, increased privacy
- Personal gains (e.g., increased independence, enjoying AS role, comfort in living)
- Marital & family benefits

**Coping**
- Supportive network of people
- Setting personal goals
- Seeking meaning
- Clear expectations

**Personal Changes**
- Increased independence and self-reliance
- Increased awareness of spousal responsibilities
- Discovering meaning in the stay-at-home parent role