Fall 11-12-2020

The Lived Experiences of Indian International Female Graduate Students in American Higher Education

Sarita Revulagadda
Seton Hall University, smarthala@enrichlearningnj.com

Recommended Citation

The Lived Experiences of Indian International Female Graduate Students in American Higher

Education

by

Sarita Revulagadda

Dissertation Committee

Martin Finkelstein, Ph.D., Mentor

Kathleen Smith, Ph.D.

David Reid, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Department of Education, Management, Leadership, and Policy

Seton Hall University

2020

Seton Hall University

College of Education & Human Services

Department of Education Leadership Management & Policy

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DISSERTATION

Doctoral Candidate, **Sarita Revulagadda**, has successfully defended and made required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ph.D. during the Fall Semester 2020

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

_____(Date) _____

Martin Finkelstein, Ph.D.

Research Mentor, Seton Hall University

_____(Date) _____

Katie Smith, Ph.D.

Member of Dissertation Committee, Seton Hall University

_____(Date) _____

David Reid, Ph.D.

Member of Dissertation Committee, Seton Hall University

ABSTRACT

The United States continues to be the primary country of destination that international students choose for enrollment in American colleges and universities. Indian international students constitute the second largest enrollment among international students in America with over 200,000 enrolled in 2019 (Institute of International Education, 2020). However, research on the transition experiences of international students is relatively devoid of critical explorations on the transition experiences of Indian international female students to the effects of acculturation.

The current research explored the lived experiences of twelve Indian international female students enrolled in graduate programs at five American universities. The participants' descriptions of their transition experiences as they adjust to their new cultural and academic environment in the United States provided rich information. The data was analyzed using the theoretical underpinnings of the research that included Schlossberg's transition theory and Berry's bidimensional acculturation theory. Several primary and subthemes emerged from a thick analysis of the data, which proved to shed light on the lived experiences of the participants.

Participants in the study typically faced challenges in adapting to academic expectations, adjusting to cultural differences and practical life stressors, and transitioning to new career prospects in the United States. However, supportive factors included their resilient attitudes and supportive relationships with their families, professors and mentors, and other Indian international students. In addition, implications for education, research, and practice were discussed.

Keywords: Indian international students, Indian international female students, Asian-Indian students, female international students, narrative inquiry, acculturation, transition, lived experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the support and guidance that I have received from many of my colleagues, faculty staff, committee, and family during my Ph.D. journey. I would like to recognize my dissertation committee members for their continuous support and feedback:

Dr. Finkelstein, I am grateful for challenging me during my journey, preparing me for the defense, and allowing me to excel in various fields. I am very thankful for your timely support and excellent guidance. I accredit my confidence in completing my research to your guidance. Thank you for pushing me to excel during this whole journey.

Dr. Smith, I am grateful for all your support during every step of my program, especially during major dissertation milestones and the complete process. I sincerely thank you for your leadership and precise and timely guidance that enabled me to complete my study on this challenging topic. Thank you for your leadership and continuous support.

Dr. Reid, I am thankful for your support and guidance and for assisting me during my journey. I am grateful to your expert feedback despite the tight schedule. I am thankful for your knowledge in the methodology that immensely helped and supported my research.

I would especially like to thank my husband for pushing me to achieve my dream and for always being there for me. My greatest acknowledgement should go to my son Nihal for being the best five year old any mom can dream of and for sitting with me for hours in the library as I worked on my dissertation.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the amazing women who participated in my research and many others like them who are breaking barriers and overcoming challenges every day to pave the way for themselves and the others that come after them. I am amazed, challenged, inspired, humbled and awe-struck.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

International student mobility has grown rapidly over the last few decades. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Education at a Glance report indicates that the number of international students has grown from 0.8 million in 1975 to 5.3 million in 2019 and is projected to reach about 8 million by 2025 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019). United States continues to be the "global leader" in the international tertiary education market, according to the OECD report, by hosting the largest proportion of international students among all OECD countries. Among OECD countries, 22% of all internationally mobile students and 26% of globally mobile doctoral students chose United States as the country of destination (Institute of International Education, 2019). In 2018/19, the number of international students studying in the United States increased to 1,095,299 students (National Center of Education Statistics, 2018).

Students from India make up the largest percentage of international students in the United States after China. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), 18.4% of international students studying in the US in 2019 were from India (Institute of International Education, 2019a). Indian students topped the list of international students who immigrated to study in the United States from 2001-2009. Currently, there are 202,014 Indian international students studying in the American colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2019b). Among them, 56.3% are enrolled in graduate programs with about 83.3% of them

enrolled in STEM fields compared to Chinese students, who at 41% are enrolled in

undergraduate programs (Institute of International Education, 2019b).

Problem Statement

With a large percentage of international students enrolling in American colleges and

universities, there is no dearth of literature emphasizing the transition challenges faced by

international students in adapting to a new cultural, social and educational environment while

living and studying here. In fact, multiple studies have highlighted the various adjustment issues

experienced by international students transitioning to American colleges and universities (e.g.,

Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Morris, 1960; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Surdam & Collins, 1984;

Wang, 2009; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2008; Wilkening, 1965; Yeh & Inose, 2003;

Zimmermann , 1995). These challenges range from social, cultural, academic, linguistic and

psychological issues (McClure, 2007; Okorocha, 1996; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sheehan & Pearson,

1995; Wei, Ku, Russell, Mallinckrodt & Liao, 2008; Zhai, 2004).

Several studies have concluded that international students from collectivistic cultures

particularly experience significant acculturative stress due to the low interconnectedness with the

American culture and face difficulties in forming strong social relationships with American

students (Belkin & Jordan, 2016; Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Pan, Wong & Ye,

2013;Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yeh and Inose (2003) noted that Asian international students face

greater acculturation stressors than international students from European countries. Wang,

Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang (2012) found that acculturative stress among Asian

international students remained "consistently distressed or culture-shocked" even after three

semesters in the United States (p. 430), which indicated that acculturative stress is a long term

challenge among international students. Wang et al., believed the reason for their higher levels of acculturative stress could be the result of "higher perfectionistic discrepancy, lower self-esteem, and negative problem-solving appraisal" (p. 432).

Research also found significant gender differences in acculturation experiences of international students, particularly from Asian countries. For example, Zhou (2000) found evidence to suggest that Chinese women, when making the transition from Chinese culture to American culture, developed stress regarding their perceived need to change their traditional Chinese gender role identities and behavior patterns to American standards, which they perceived as conflicting with traditional Chinese stereotypes of women. Zhou found that the women reported low self-esteem and considerable confusion about their gender roles after moving to the United States and complained about being disproportionately responsible for doing the housework even when they were employed outside the home. Another study of South Korean students that explored the impact of gender on career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) found that there was direct relationship between implicit gender-career stereotyping and CDSE, which was significant only for female students (Yun-Jeong, Eun, & Seo, 2018). The findings implied that South Korean women were likely to have "more traditional stereotypical attitudes (male with career and female with family)" which produced "lower career adaptability via lower CDSE" (Yun-Jeong et al., p.81). The authors argue that the results point at the effects of "internalized sexism" which they believe has been "continuously enhanced and confirmed" within the South Korean culture (p. 81).

Lowinger, He, Lin, and Chang (2014) studied male and female Chinese students and found that discrimination and homesickness was associated with academic procrastination for

male Chinese students, while female Chinese students' academic procrastination was associated with academic self-efficacy, English language ability, culture shock and stress. Another study by Dao, Lee, and Chang (2007) found that in their sample of 112 Taiwanese international graduate students, female participants were more likely to be at risk of depression and had low levels of acculturation and low levels of perceived English fluency and thus were more socially and academically challenged than their male counterparts while adjusting to their life in the United States. A study that examined the mental health of 155 Japanese graduate students in the United States found that being female, having low perceived social support from a "special person" and friends and having a weak belief in western values significantly increased the risk of serious mental illness (Kuwahara, 2010). On the other hand, Lee, Park, and Kim (2009) found that Korean female students had a higher level of psychological adjustment than their male counterparts.

Despite the above-mentioned studies, research on the experiences of international women students in general, and international women students from India, is lacking. Hune (1998) pointed out that the issues and problems of Asian American women have gone unrecognized and overlooked in American higher education. Hune (1998) argued that Asian American women are treated as peripheral to the Black/White racial framework, which has led to a lack of understanding of the complexity and intensity of their intergroup dynamics, and thereby discounts their status in higher education. Another issue that becomes apparent in the research is that most of the findings are generalized to students from all Asian countries. Researchers argue that this generalization can obscure the experiences of several diverse ethnic groups which fall under the umbrella term "Asian." Despite various general similarities among several of these ethnic groups, there may be significant differences in their acculturative experiences, that will be

completely missed due to this "lumping" (Cooper & Yarbrough, 2016). For example, Cooper and Yarbrough (2016), who studied female Asian-Indian international students, found that although these women seemed to express some "universal feelings of homesickness", they associated loneliness particularly with "vast vacant space with no one to help," unlike their American counterparts, and stated that they missed the "safety that they believed was afforded by physical closeness" (p. 1047). The researchers found that this population used a unique combination of Ayurveda (an ancient Indian health system) and biomedical approaches for maintaining health and treating illnesses, which would be significantly different than the approach of women from other Asian countries.

Cooper and Yarbrough (2016) found it striking that these women had mixed feelings about their present independence and worried about their "later repatriation and family relationships" (p. 1047). The researchers learned that Indian female students carried components of cultural traditions associated with Hinduism and Ayurveda, which helped "sustain them as they address the challenges of their experience as education sojourners" and described them as "having one step in tradition and one step in modernity" (p. 1049). Finally, the authors highlighted the importance of understanding the influence of particular life experiences and culture on international female students' coping behaviors and argued that this can help researchers develop a "more culturally relevant survey tools," while also helping these students have a "more positive academic experience" (p. 1049). They argued that lumping of all students from Asian countries as one homogenous group, fails to highlight the ethno-linguistic differences that make up their unique life experiences and such studies are based on "western assumptions" (Cooper & Yarbrough, p. 1036). Kim and Green (2005) contended that significant attention given to any respective ethnic group would be valuable in gaining a more in-depth understanding

5

of their unique experiences in higher education, especially in relation to racial and gender stereotypes.

Purpose of the Study

There is little research examining how Asian female Indian students are similar to or are different from other international student groups. One of the general characteristics of the Indian international students compared to other Asian students from China and South Korea is that a large percentage of these students come from larger cities and towns (Terrazas, 2008). Unlike Chinese and Korean students, about half of the Indian students enroll in graduate programs, with more than 80% in the STEM fields (Institute of International Education, 2009). Due to these and other differences, each Indian international student faces a unique set of challenges after migration. An in-depth exploration of the Indian female international student's views of their transition experiences largely remains unexplored. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand and describe the unique lived experiences of international female students from India enrolled in graduate programs at American universities. This study attempted to identify the unique strengths, skills, knowledge, and resources of Indian international female graduate students that come into play in their process of their acculturation. The study was more focused on their individual experiences and explored the personal meanings attributed to their transition experiences by these students.

Rationale for Focusing on the Experiences of Female, Graduate Students

Gender-role stereotypes are defined as fixed ideas about men and women's functions and responsibilities that are widely accepted by a society (Chen & Cheung, 2011). It is more

desirable for Indian women to be docile, domestic, generous, innocent, polite, religious, and submissive (Allen & Sethi, 1981). Indian women are seen as the bearers of tradition. Dasgupta (1996) suggested that the responsibility for keeping the honor attached to the family name seems to fall disproportionately on Indian women, since they are viewed as the bearers and transmitters of Indian tradition and culture. Indian women are expected to derive status through marriage and to continue that tradition in their families (Dasgupta, 1996). Indian parents often fear that their daughters' exposure to certain American customs such as premarital dating might provoke societal censure and tarnish familial integrity in India (Inman, Constantine, & Ladany, 1999).

Dalmia (2004) states that the effect of attaining a higher degree is the opposite for Indian men who demand more dowry from their potential brides because of their higher educational qualifications (as cited in Munshi, 2012, p. 118). In the article, *Education and Dowry: An Economic Exploration*, Munshi (2012) argues that in India, "women with more education have to pay a larger net dowry" (p. 117). Wastlund, Norlander & Archer (2001) found that Indian parents protect and control their daughters to a degree seen as "overprotection" in the United States and which is likely to create high cultural value conflict for unmarried Indian women in America (p.2). Indian women are expected to adhere to strict gender roles and to give attention to a large, well-defined repertoire of family responsibilities within traditional Indian culture (Jayakar, 1994). According to the Global Education Monitoring Report (2019), 80% of respondents in India agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "women's primary role is to be wives, housewives and caregivers" (p. 19). According to the results of the latest World Values Survey, carried out between 2010 and 2014 in 51 countries, half of respondents from India agreed or strongly agreed that 'when a woman works for pay, the children suffer' (Global Education Monitoring Report 2019, p. 19). According to the report, gender stereotypes such as these create

a general acceptance of women's subordination and disadvantage. Thus, Indian women who immigrate to the United States from culturally and socially conservative, collectivist society will likely experience degrees of cultural value conflict that vary, based on factors such as generational and marital status (Inman et al., 1999).

Meanwhile, graduate education has been described as a process of socialization to prepare for an eventual professional role (Baird, 1990; Isaac, Quinlan, & Walker, 1992; Stein & Weidmen, 1990) that involves learning the "specialized knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, norms, and interests of profession" (Bragg, 1976, p. 1). It has been assumed that because graduate students have completed undergraduate degrees, they have developed to the point where they can handle the new responsibilities of graduate study on their own. Yet the experiences during graduate school can be overwhelming. Fatima (2001) opined that despite the steadily increasing number of international female graduate students, "knowledge" about their experiences studying in the higher educational institutions of America has not been explored (p.6).

Fatima (2001) points to a potential situation of double jeopardy for international female graduate students as this population may suffer from specific problems of being international graduate students and being female graduate students (p. 10). She argued that a "thorough understanding" of the problems encountered by these international female graduate students and their ways of handling these problems may lead to more "successful ways of dealing with them" and also help them in their own adjustments (Fatima, 2001, p. 7). Although these students may share some of the characteristics of acculturation with other Asian international students, there

needs to be more research devoted to aspects affecting Indian international female graduate student's acculturation.

Significance

Relocating to a new culture can be challenging experience for many people (Inman, Ladany, Constantine, & Morano, 2001; Sodowsky & Lai, 1997) and these cultural adjustment challenges can contribute to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and loneliness (Sue & Sue, 2003; Uba, 1994). However, many international students successfully navigate the cultural transition process. Understanding the meaning-making processes of these students from socio-cultural standpoint contributes to the knowledge base that could shed light on how successful transition of Indian female international graduate students can be supported. This study will provide researchers more information about this cultural sub-group, which may lead to a better understanding of their needs and help bridge the gap between those needs and the services available. Moreover, universities and professors will be better informed and thus be able to serve this population in a culturally sensitive and effective manner. As Cooper and Yarbrough (2016) pointed out, this understanding is important not only for practical purposes such as recruitment and retention, but also for "humanistic reasons" (p. 1049).

Theoretical Framework

International students from India are continually adapting to the social, cultural and educational environments in the host country. The various sociocultural and educational systems that the students are a part of, have an impact on how they experience themselves and the world. In order to examine and understand the transition experiences of international female students

from India, who are living and studying in the United States, a conceptual framework comprising of Schlossberg's (1995) Transition theory and Berry's bidimensional acculturation theory (Berry, 1992, 1997) was employed. Schlossberg's Transition theory served as the backbone for my conceptual framework as it provides a foundation for understanding the common elements of individuals' transition experiences while respecting their unique personal circumstances (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1985b; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). Berry's (1997) acculturation framework served as a guidance for the current research to depict the acculturation and adjustment of Indian international female graduate students in their new cultural environment as immigrants.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) transition model provided insights into factors related to transition, and the degree of its impact on the participants as well as their environment. According to Schlossberg et al., (1995), four major set of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition are: situation, self, support, and strategies, collectively referred to as the 4Ss. The researchers argue that although a single event, such as immigration, can activate transition, dealing with it is often extended over a period of time and can result in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (p. 27).

In the case of Indian international female students, immigrating to the United States for educational purposes could act as a situation to trigger the transition process. While the "Self" could include a set of personal, demographic and psychological factors, Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012) argue that gender can greatly impact the transition experiences of women and labeled the relationship between gender and the transition process as "complex" (p. 75).

Anderson et al., claim that the "issues of career choice, identity, and transition experienced by women are strongly affected by family influence along with social gender role expectations" (p. 7). As discussed previously, gender has a significant influence on the transition process and the intensity of the impact depends on the extent of differences in the treatment of women in the host country compared to the country of origin. When there is a major difference between the host culture and the culture of origin, women may attempt to adopt new roles in the host society which may cause them to experience conflicts with their own native culture and traditional roles (Moghadam, Ditto, & Taylor, 1990).

Acculturation is defined as the process when groups of individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into continuous first-hand contact with another culture that results in subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). According to Berry (2001), acculturation is an adjustment process that occurs as a result of the interplay between the immigrants' emotional attitudes and reactions and the attitudes of the people who make up their new environments (Berry, 2001). In other words, acculturation is psychosocial and behavioral in nature and involves adoption of culturally acceptable norms, values, attitudes and activities or behaviors by the immigrants (Berry, 2003; Kim & Abreu, 2005). It is evident that acculturation permeates all dimensions of an immigrant's life, including international students from India, and requires effective coping skills in negotiating the new stress inducing demands of immigration.

According to Berry (1998) members of the ethnic minority groups may use four strategies to handle acculturative stress: integration, marginalization, assimilation, and separation. The question of what type of acculturation attitude the ethnic minority individual will

11

assume depends on two main issues. The first issue, "cultural maintenance," is the extent to which the ethnic immigrant finds it valuable to maintain his/her own cultural identity. The second issue: "contact and participation" is the extent to which the immigrant wishes to have contact with the host culture and how much he/she values the said contact. Berry (1998) argues that individuals concerned with both maintaining their own cultural identity and extending relationships in the host community are considered to have an integrated acculturation attitude, while individuals reporting little concern in either area are considered to be marginalized. An individual who has an assimilated acculturation attitude is interested in integrating into the host culture rather than maintaining their home culture. These individuals seek daily interaction with the majority culture and assume the cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes of the dominant society. Separation involves individuals who place a greater emphasis on maintaining elements of the home culture rather than connecting with the host one. These individuals largely avoid interaction with individuals from the host culture and wish to maintain their own culture of origin. Research suggests that integration is associated with better psychological health, whereas marginalization and separation are associated with the most negative acculturation stress. Berry and Kim (1988) suggest that immigrants with integrated or assimilated attitudes experience fewer transition issues.

I chose Schlossberg's Transition Model (1995) because it provided a solid base for exploring both the internal and external resources that might have aided in the transitions of Indian international female students in their new environments. In an examination of the model, I found that its design lent to supplementation with other models that might address specific resources, such as Support. Because the study focused on female students from a collectivist culture and in light of the literature revealing that factors such as self-efficacy outlined in the

transition model have "cultural determinants" (Anderson et al, 2012. P. 178), I incorporated the acculturation model (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok 1987). On an individual level, acculturation refers to how individuals change and adapt as a result of longer term, continuous contact with a new culture (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Furthermore, because the population being studied represented a specific culture with unique values and norms, I made the decision to highlight elements of those values within the framework. As such, the research questions were framed to emphasize the perceived challenges and coping strategies that international female graduate students from India value and benefit from.

In addition, very little research has qualitatively evaluated these theories with regard to Indian international female graduate students' transition experiences in the United States. There is a modest body of research on international students' adjustment issues, and a somewhat larger literature on immigrants in general that may be relevant to understanding Indian international students' transition experiences. However, it is my belief that a deep understanding of the transition experiences of International female graduate students from India, viewed through the lens of Schlossberg's transition model and Berry's acculturation model, will illuminate the lived experiences of these students and how they see themselves fitting into the host culture.

Research Questions

This study intended to explore both the positive and negative aspects of the Indian international female students' acculturation experiences. The overarching research question that I was interested to explore was: *what are the unique lived experiences of Indian international female graduate students' studying at five American universities?* Specifically,

a) What perceived challenges did Indian international female graduate students face before and during their transition?

b) What are Indian international female graduate students' perceptions of the factors that helped support their transition?

c) How do Indian international female graduate students describe their personal experiences of transitioning to the United States?

Limitations/Assumptions

Limitations are the factors that limit the ability to generalize the findings of the study completely as a result of the methodology the author chooses to use (Bryant, 2004). Because each immigrant group has a different immigration history and settlement status, the unique nature of the sample needs to be considered. Depending on the unique characteristics of the groups, the relevance of Berry's four categories of acculturation may vary (Jang, Kim, Chiriboga & King-Kallimanis (2007). This study relied heavily on self-reported data of the students during interviews. Because these individuals may view and make meaning of their experiences differently than other international women students from India, a different sample of participants may produce different data. The small number of students who participated in this study also limits the range of experiences and understandings, and the ability to generalize the findings of this study to other international students. Additionally, the time of data collection and the online interview method used could have an influence on the data and on the themes produced. Other modes of data collection, including participant observation, and other forms of qualitative research designs could produce other results.

Further, in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument, making meaning of the data. For this reason, my own assumptions and understandings affected the themes this study produced. The study relied on memories of transition experiences for parts of the qualitative data gathered. It was assumed that the memories were correct and that the feedback from participants was open and honest.

Definition of Terms

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative studies must define terms that readers may not know or the specific sense of which in the context of this study may not be clear. This study employed the following definitions:

Acculturation. Cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture; also: a merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Asian Indian International Graduate Student or Indian International Graduate Student. used interchangeably in this study to refer to full-time graduate students from India who have been admitted to American universities to pursue graduate studies on an "F1" or "J1" student visa. For the purposes of this study, the subject group, Indian international graduate students, were full-time students for at least one year who had completed their first year in a graduate program. In addition, it was also their first year in the United States.

Graduate Students. Individuals in a graduate school seeking an advanced degree such as a masters or a doctorate degree (Stevens, Emil & Yamashita, 2009).

International Students. 'International students' are defined as foreign nationals who study at any Japanese university, graduate school, junior college, college of technology, professional training college or university preparatory course on a 'college student' visa, as defined by the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act.

Asian-Indian. This is a term introduced by the US Census Bureau to avoid confusion with American Indian. Asian-Indian refers to people of South Asian descent with ancestors in India.

USCIS. United States Customs and Immigration Services

F1 *Students*. An F1 visa is a nonimmigrant visa for those wishing to study in the United States. You must file an F1 visa application if you plan on entering the US to attend a university or college, high school, private elementary school, seminary, conservatory, language training program, or other academic institution.

OPT. Optional Practical Training is defined by the USCIS as temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study. Eligible students can apply to receive up to 12 months of OPT employment authorization before completing their academic studies (pre-completion) and/or after completing their academic studies (post-completion). New policy which came into effect during the trump administration gives F1 students 60 days to find employment within the specified immigration parameters, failing which they will have to leave the country immediately.

SEVP. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is a part of the National Security Investigations Division and acts as a bridge for government organizations that have an

interest in information on nonimmigrants whose primary reason for coming to the United States is to be students.

SEVIS. Both SEVP and DoS use the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to track and monitor schools; exchange visitor programs; and F, M and J nonimmigrants while they visit the United States and participate in the American education system. The department of homeland security compiles *SEVIS by the numbers* report[1], which details the number of international students from each country along with their majors, and the level of education.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters, followed by a reference list and appendices. In Chapter Two, the review of literature relating to international student transition experiences, acculturation, acculturative stress, Asian international students, and Indian international students is presented. In Chapter Three, the methodology is described, and rationalization of the research design is presented. Details regarding participant selection, recruitment, interviews, transcribing, and data analysis are provided. The findings, including the themes that were generated during data analysis are discussed in Chapter Four. In the final chapter, Chapter Five, a discussion of the significance of the results relating to the theoretical framework of the study, the implications for practice and suggestions for future research are presented.

---

[1] The most recent report can be accessed here: https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/sevisByTheNumbers2018.pdf. The raw data on all international students was used in this study, which can be accessed here: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-data-mapping-tool/january-2020-sevis-data-mapping-tool-data

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of literature relating to international student transition experiences, acculturation, acculturative stress and impact of gender on the transition experiences. First, I discuss in detail the elements of both Schlossberg's transition theory and Berry's acculturation theory. I then present a synthesis of research available on international students' acculturative experiences and transition issues. The discussion regarding transition experiences will include literature on culture shock and acculturative stress which will highlight the cultural and assimilation challenges that many international students, including Indian women face. Lastly, I discuss the research on Indian international students in particular.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

One of the theoretical bases through which I set out to view and make meaning of the data I collected for this study is Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1985b; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg (1995) defines transition as an event or non-event that over time, results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles (p. 27). She posited that the transition process is ongoing and involves an individual determining the type of transition, how much it will impact their life (specifically their roles, relationships, routines and assumptions) and how to cope with it (Schlossberg, 2005). Transition is a process that takes place over time rather than at one point in time (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012), and every transition begins with an ending

(Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) explained transition as

an event that creates a disruption of roles, routine, and relationships for the individual

experiencing the transition. (Anderson et al., 2012) add that a transition can be anticipated or

unanticipated, can occur at a "better or worse times" and may make it "easier or more difficult"

for individuals to go through the transition process (pp. 68-69).

Anderson et al. (2012) argue that some transitions are "internal, a deliberate decision"

take by the individual while others could be "completely external" and "forced upon" on the

individual by other people or circumstances (p. 69). Most importantly, many transitions can

involve role change, such as "role gains" or "role losses" which can help determine "the impact

of a transition" (p. 70). The authors argue that some degree of stress always accompanies a

transition, irrespective of whether it involves role gain or loss (p. 70). Schlossberg suggested that

the transition process is ongoing and involves an individual determining the type of transition,

how much it will impact their life (specifically their roles, relationships, routines and

assumptions) and how to cope with it (Schlossberg, 2005).

Although one single event, such as immigration, can activate transition, which can

disrupt lives and create changes in the way one experiences existence and prompts individuals to

formulate new assumptions about themselves and their future. Schlossberg (2008) posited that

those in transition experience a major life disturbance that necessitates a tremendous amount of

adaptation "even when the benefits far outweigh the deficits" (p. 89). The goal, according to

Anderson et al. (2012), is for the person in transition to experience a positive "emergent growth

process" (p. 49) during the transition.

According to Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory, which outlined a framework to understand the different phases of transition such as: Moving in, moving through and moving out. Schlossberg explained that each phase of the transition allows for a way of viewing and navigating the transition. Moving in represents an assessment and planning period, which for first- time college students, prompts anxieties of moving to a new campus, having a potential stranger as a roommate, learning how to select and register for classes, and similar things that are new for the student. All of these stressors could be applied to international students who are moving into a new country, a new educational system and a new socio-cultural environment. Moving through represents a time in transition for achieving as much learning about the new roles, relationships, and routines as possible. Moving through characterizes a time of balancing school, friends, and family, focusing on class content, and maintaining grades. In addition to all these, international students have cultural and psychological stressors that are compounded by gender. Finally, moving out represents the process of completing a "smooth, solid transition to the next part of life" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002, p. xv). Moving out might signify graduation, applying for jobs, or looking for a new place to live after graduation.

Briefly described, Schlossberg views transitions in an integrated way. As she understands it, we are all involved in a transition at any point in time, whether we are moving in, moving through, or moving out of a situation. Sometimes we can even be in different places in various transitions at one time. This is particularly true for Indian international students because they are moving to another country and are moving into their new role as an international student, and possibly moving into new friendships as well. Simultaneously, they are moving out of their home country, moving out of their role at their last job, and moving out of friendships, and established

routines. Hence, Indian international female students are involved in multiple states of various transitions.

Schlossberg (2005) posited that the transition process is ongoing and involves an individual determining the type of transition, the impact it may have on their life, specifically related to their roles, relationships, routines and assumptions. Finally, the transition, which can be categorized as anticipated, unanticipated or non-event, involves the strategies that they use to cope with it. In order to assist someone in successfully navigating through a transition, Anderson, et al., (2012) envision three steps: 1) Approaching Transitions – This involves identifying the transition and how much it will change a person's life as well as where the individual is in the transition process. 2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System. 3) Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources. The resources that Schlossberg describes fall under four categories, and in any given situation, can be viewed as assets to a successful transition or liabilities, depending on how they are viewed by the individual and how they assist in her transition or make the transition more difficult.

The 4 S System

The 4S system illustrates how individuals experience their transitions in a unique manner, depending on their particular Situation, certain aspects of their Self, the Support they have available, and the Strategies they are currently using (Anderson et al., pp. 98-99).

• Situation includes factors such as trigger, timing, level of control, role impact, duration, other stressors, previous experience with this type of transition and perception of the transition (p. 67).

• Self includes factors such as an individual's personal characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, ethnicity, culture as well as psychological resources such as self-efficacy, values, spirituality and resilience (p.73).

• Support, which Anderson et al., argue is the "key to handling stress," includes different kinds of social support from intimate relationships, family, friends, and their academic community/institution (p.84); and finally,

• Strategies, which are coping strategies that include seeking information, taking direct action and restricting action (p.87).

Schlossberg's theory illuminates the fact that an individual experiences and perceives transitions differently based on their personal skills and mind-set, as well as support strategies and resources (Anderson et al., p. 43). It is important to note that perception plays a key role in transitions as an event, or non-event, meets the definition of a transition only if it is so defined by the individual experiencing it. This may account for the differences in adjustment levels among international students (Wang, 2009) and shows that while there are some common challenges, personal coping and perspectives are significant factors worthy of being explored. For example, coping resources can be perceived as assets or liabilities by an individual, who can deal with a transition by balancing them. Coping assets are any resources that are described by the authors under the categories of situation, self, support, or strategies, which assist an individual in coping with, or successfully managing, a transition (Anderson et al., Schlossberg, 2012). Coping liabilities, on the other hand, are those that inhibit an individual's ability to cope with, or successfully manage, a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The ratio of assets to liabilities helps to explain "why individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person

reacts differently at different times" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 92). Cheng and Cheung (2005) explored individual differences in appraising and dealing with stressful situations among 127 Chinese university students and found that individuals who coped more flexibly differentiated stressful events in "controllability and impact" and thus deploy more integrated strategies in dealing with stress (p. 859).

Schlossberg's transition theory has been applied in the research studies such as on people who lost their job at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) (Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980), university clerical workers (Charner & Schlossberg, 1986), transitions related to geographical mobility (Schlossberg, 1981), and even adult college learners (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). However, Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010), assert, regarding the wide applicability of Schlossberg's theory, that "research studies supporting its validity are scant, particularly in higher education" (p. 225) and that "until further research is conducted, however, it is impossible to acknowledge that the transition process occurs in the manner in which Schlossberg and her colleagues have outlined it" (pp. 225-226). Evans, et al., declare that both quantitative and qualitative studies on Schlossberg's transition theory are needed, but caution that quantitative work might be difficult due to the lack of measurement tools available to assess the variables Schlossberg discusses related to transitions. They state that "qualitative research might present a better place to start in that transitions could be viewed holistically, as perceived by individuals experiencing them" (p. 226). Evans, et al. also call for more research related to marginalized student populations "to increase our understanding of, and ability to assist with, various transitions that these students experience while moving into, moving through, and moving out of our higher education settings" (p. 226).

In the case of Indian international female students, immigrating to the United States and living and studying in a different cultural and academic setting could act as a situation to trigger the transition process. While the "Self" could include a set of personal, demographic and psychological factors including gender. Anderson, et al., (2012) argue that gender can greatly impact the transition experiences of women and labeled the relationship between gender and the transition process as "complex" (p. 75). Anderson et al. claim that the "issues of career choice, identity, and transition experienced by women are strongly affected by family influence along with social gender role expectations" (p. 7).

Berry's Bidimensional Model of Acculturation

In addition to the transition challenges that all college students generally encounter, international students also experience acculturation issues when they choose to study and live in a foreign country. Acculturation was formally defined as a "phenomenon which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, Herskovits, 1936). However, Graves (1967) coined the term psychological acculturation, which recognized acculturation as a change in the psychology of an individual, which was distinct from previous definitions of acculturation which categorized it as a group level phenomenon. Graves's (1967) definition termed acculturation as "the changes an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures, or participating in the acculturation that one's cultural or ethnic group is undergoing" (Berry, 1990, p. 203, as cited in Sam, 2015).

In the 1910s, the theory of "melting pot" was brought up in the United States by Robert Park and other theorists (Persons, 1987). Berry (1980) was the first scholar to systematically

review how immigrants adapt to a new culture (i.e., acculturate) at the individual level. Krishnan and Berry (1992) posited that acculturation is a "continuous first-hand contact with a new culture" that imposes pressures on the immigrants to change in order to adapt to their new environment (p. 188). Berry (1997) argued that acculturation occurs both at a group and an individual level and can be reactive: resistant to change; creative: producing new cultural forms; or delayed: significant change occurs over a long period of time (Berry, 1997). Berry (2005) added that during the process of acculturation, changes are "co-occurring on an individual level (psychological acculturation) and on a group level (cultural acculturation) in both cultures" (p. 698). For example, acculturative change occurs in international students as well as in their host culture.

Berry argues that this distinction between levels is important because all individuals in a group may not participate to the same extent in the general acculturation being experienced by their group (Berry, 1997). Berry (1997) theorized that groups and individuals develop strategies on how to acculturate in their daily encounters with each other. However, the level of acculturation depends on two major issues such as:

- Cultural maintenance: which relates to the extent to which an individual's cultural identity and characteristics are important to them, and will determine if they want to continue to maintain their own culture;
- Contact and participation: which relates to their intent to either become involved in other cultural groups or connect only with their own cultural group (p. 9).

Berry argued that in dealing with acculturation, individuals facing acculturation essentially have to decide how much they value their cultural identity and assess their level of

need to maintain their cultural identity. In addition, they also have to determine their level of involvement with other cultural groups (Berry, 1997). Berry developed a conceptual framework which put forth four acculturation strategies individuals use in their daily encounters with the host culture. These four strategies are conceptualized from the "point of view of non-dominant groups" or immigrants (Berry, 1997, p. 9). They are as follows:

- assimilation (giving up one's heritage culture and identity, and seeking the relationship with other cultures),

- separation (valuing the heritage culture and identity, and avoiding relationship with other cultures),

- integration (maintaining both heritage and host culture and seeking interactions in both cultures), and

- marginalization (little maintenance of either heritage culture and identity, and avoidance of interactions with others).

Assimilation refers to the strategy where individuals do not wish to maintain their own cultural identity and engage in daily interaction with people from other cultures. In contrast, Separation is the strategy where individuals wish to maintain their "original culture" and avoid any interaction with individuals from the dominant culture. Integration occurs when individuals are interested in maintaining their original culture but simultaneously engage in daily interaction with the other cultural groups. These individuals participate in the "larger social network" while maintaining "some degree of cultural integrity" (Berry, 1997, p. 9). Lastly, Marginalization occurs when individuals neither maintain their own cultural integrity nor integrate with individuals of other cultural groups. Berry (1997) suggests these individuals may not be able to

26

maintain their own cultural identity due to lack of possibility related to "enforced cultural loss" and they may not integrate with the dominant group due to exclusion or discrimination (p. 9).

Berry (1997) added that, even though an individual may prefer one strategy among the four in the acculturation process, it is possible for someone to utilize more than one strategy at the same time. In Berry's conceptual framework, a variety of variables can impact acculturation experiences of individuals before the process begins, such as: age, gender, education, motivation for migrating, expectations, personality, and cultural distance. Meanwhile, moderating factors that can impact acculturation during the process include: length of time, acculturation strategies used, coping resources, social support and the presence of either prejudice and/or discrimination. These variables are similar to the "situation" and "self" elements in 4 S system proposed by Anderson et al., (2012) but allow for a deeper examination of the impact of culture on transition experiences.

According to Berry (1997), positive assimilation outcome is when individuals "fit" into their new environment and are accepted by the dominant society. A negative assimilation outcome occurs when individuals experience conflict and stress as a result of feeling segregated and marginalized (p. 14). Berry stresses that the integration strategy "can only be pursued in societies that are explicitly multicultural" where mutual accommodation is mandated (Berry, 1997, p. 11). This strategy requires non-dominant groups to adopt the "basic values of the larger society", while the dominant group must be prepared to be open and accepting of the cultural diversity (Berry, 1997, p. 10-11). To create a multicultural society, there must be relatively low levels of prejudice including minimal ethnocentrism, racism, and discrimination, a positive

mutual attitude among cultural groups, and a sense of attachment to the larger society by all groups (Berry, 1997, p. 11).

Although acculturation inevitably brings social and psychological problems, when individuals are constrained in their choice of strategy, or when there is a "very limited role of personal preference", "acculturative stress" may develop (Berry, 1997, p. 12). Berry (1997) defined acculturative stress as a "stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation" (p. 19). It refers to the greater levels of conflict experienced by individuals during acculturation, which although overwhelming are "controllable and surmountable" (p. 20). When the cause of acculturative stress has not been successfully dealt with, it could lead to a substantial amount of negative and debilitating stress levels and cause "personal crises", "anxiety and depression" (Berry, 1997, p. 20).

Several studies have found that integration with the host culture leads positive acculturation experiences, while identifying with only either home or host culture such as in assimilation or separation, will have some acculturative stress, compared to individuals who do not identify with any cultural group, who experience the most acculturative stress (Berry, 2003, 2005; Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry & Sam, 1997; López & Contreras, 2005; Phinney, Chavira, & Williamson, 1992; Schmitz, 1992; Torres, 2010; Wei et al., 2010). Furthermore, studies have shown that individuals in the integrated group experience less psychological distress (López & Contreras, 2005; E. P. Vasquez, Gonzalez-Guarda, & De Santis, 2011; Wei et al., 2010), less anxiety (López & Contreras, 2005), higher levels of self-esteem (Berry, 2005), better coping efficacy (Torres & Rollock, 2007), and better psychological adjustment (Berry, 2005; López & Contreras, 2005).

According to Berry (1997), gender also has an influence on the acculturation process and thus may be the cause of experiencing increased acculturative stress. Although there is substantial evidence that females may be more at risk for problems than males, the acculturation itself depends on the relative status and differential treatment of females in the two cultures. For example, If the origin culture has "substantial difference" in the gender roles of women compared to the host culture, attempts by women "to take on new roles" could create role conflict between their host and home culture and could put them at risk (p. 22). Berry argues that discussions about acculturation must pay special attention to gender, including gender roles and gender expectations. While individualistic cultures tend to promote gender equality, collectivist cultures often subscribe to very specific gender roles for males and females (Marin, Tschann, Gomez & Kegeles, 1993; Tong, 2013). Thus, gender influences both the process of acculturation and the extent to which cultural conflicts are experienced by international students.

Sumer, Poyrazli, and Grahame (2008) discussed the connection between anxiety and stress and noted that acculturative stress can lead to anxiety and depression. Furnham and Bochner (1986) (as cited in Kovtun, 2011) indicated that higher levels of dissonance between the host culture and original culture makes it more difficult for students to adjust and learn to adapt. This could be particularly relevant to international students from collectivistic cultures such as India. According to Berry (1997), the collective stressors that occur during the process of acculturation can impact the mental health of the acculturating individual.

Acculturative Stress and International Students

As discussed above, acculturative stress, which is referred to the collective stressors that occur during the process of acculturation of an individual, could result in the individual

29

experiencing anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened

psychosomatic symptoms, and identity confusion (Williams & Berry, 1991). Previous research

has found that students who transition to college from high school face transition issues such as

academic challenges, health challenges, interpersonal conflicts, loneliness and adjusting to

personal autonomy (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Hoffman, 1984). However, these difficulties are

compounded for international students, who face additional challenges such as

language/communication difficulties, financial stress, immigration difficulties, homesickness,

transitioning to a new educational system and cultural adjustment or shock (Boyer & Sedlacek,

1988; Church, 1982; Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010; Sumer,

Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008). Even before international students arrive into the country, they

express concerns during the pre-admission stage regarding finances, distance from family and

friends, visa issues, language barriers, safety and cultural adjustment (Ruffalo Noel-Levitz,

2015). In addition, according to Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn

(2002), international students generally have less social support than domestic students.

Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) argue that international students experience a

higher level of acculturative stress compared to other immigrant groups because of their unique

demographic factors such as age, gender, and level of study. Researcher have also found that the

experiences of international students differ from other immigrant groups because they immigrate

to the United States on a temporary visa, struggle with isolation and distance from family and

friends, and are under considerable pressure to perform well in a new and demanding academic

and cultural environment (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003;

Olaniran, 1993). Smith and Khawaja (2011) found that acculturative stressors that international

students experience include: language barriers that can affect both academic and social contexts;

educational stressors, which is getting used to a new educational system/culture; sociocultural stressors, which arise as the try to form new friendships, while also missing their family and friends who they leave behind in their home countries; discrimination which could range from verbal insults to job discrimination to physical attacks; and practical stressors such as transportation, accommodation, higher tuition costs and financial difficulties.

Several studies have concluded that international students from collectivistic cultures particularly experience significant acculturative stress due to the low interconnectedness of the American culture and face difficulties in forming strong social relationships (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003 Belkin & Jordan, 2016; Pan, Wong & Ye, 2013). Yeh and Inose (2003) noted that Asian international students face greater acculturation stressors than international students from European countries. According to Yeh and Inose (2003), language skills, social support satisfaction and social connectedness impact acculturative stress due to the difficulties faced in the pressure to adapt to a new environment. Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, (2012) found that acculturative stress among Chinese international students remained "consistently distressed or culture-shocked" even after three semesters in the U.S (p. 430), which indicated that acculturative stress is a long term challenge among international students.

Culture also impacts the perception and beliefs related to learning as research found people from different cultural backgrounds perceive the learning and achievement in different ways. For example, it was found that students from western countries focus more on individual characteristics such as independence, task efficiency, self-esteem, and competition (Li, 2002). On the other hand, Asian students focused more on collaborative learning, harmony,

memorization and recitation, and respect for authority such as their professors (Chen, 1998). In addition, the value of education for international students as a way to further their educational and career opportunities superseded the challenges that they may face acculturating to a new country (Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994). Kaczmarek et al., (1994), who compared the experiences of international and American students, found major differences among domestic and international students in the process of adjusting to college. The study inferred that cultural differences, reluctance to seek help and lack of engagement in campus activities or life were major differences for international students in the process of adjusting to college.

Cheng, Myles & Curtis (2004), Haydon (2003), Trice (2003) and Zhai (2002) identified lack of English language proficiency as an adjustment factor that can lead to social isolation of international students, as well as create significant challenges in academic success and interaction with faculty. Chapedelaine and Alexitch (2004) indicated that cultural differences and navigating host culture norms and rules can also have an isolating effect on international students. Abe, Talbot & Gellhoed (1998) reported that international students do not use resources offered by career services, the counseling center and the student employment office and researchers (Arthur, 1997; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) found that this reluctance to seek help or utilize counseling and other university support services is often influenced by cultural norms of the international student's home country and can be a barrier to international student success. International students often rely on other international peers and family for help and support when facing challenges (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Zhai, 2002). McLachlan and Justice's (2009) study indicated that international students experienced a significant amount of adjustment distress including academic and social distress and

32

acculturative challenges in their first 6-12 months of moving and beginning studies in the United States. Ying (2005) found that acculturative stressors appear to be most intense shortly after arrival to a new environment and follow a slow linear decline before reaching an equilibrium point after the first year.

Research has found that the acculturative stress for Asian international students is compounded by the fact that they do not seek professional help to resolve some of the challenges they experience (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Zhang & Dixon, 2003; Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Arnault, 2002). Lin's (2006) qualitative research, which explored the stressors impacting Chinese international students, revealed that Chinese international students reported challenges including pre-arrival stressors, language barrier, separation from family, and boredom. The research highlighted informational, emotional, tangible, and intellectual support from the institution of their enrollment as being crucial in helping them during their transition. Research on Asian international students has emphasized the significance of the students' perceived lack of English language skills and the overwhelming differences between Chinese and American cultures, as the two continual stressors for them (Liao & Wei, 2014; Yan & Berliner, 2011).

In addition to inadequate English-language proficiency and unfamiliarity with the host culture, navigation through conflicting value systems could contribute to an increase in the experience of acculturative stress (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Barlow, 2002). Exposure to contradictory value systems could encourage many international students to question features of both native and host cultures which can accentuate their ambiguity (Mori, 2000; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). For example, a female Asian Indian student might find a sense of freedom

in asserting her individualism and at the same time experience turmoil from being cut off or

alienated from her family or peers as a result of expressing individualism.

Researcher have argued that when these challenges of culture shock (Lin, 2006; Moores

& Popadiuk, 2011) and transition shock (Bennett, 1998; McLachlan & Justice, 2009) remain

unaddressed, they may compound into acculturative stress for international students (Berry,

1997; Yakunina, Weigold, & Weigold, 2013; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Acculturative stress can

have a profound and negative impact on the experiences of international students as a group,

including Indian international students (Bertram et al., 2014; Tsai & Wong, 2012; Wang et al.,

2012; Wang, Wei, & Chen, 2015).

Acculturative Stress and Social Support

Despite the several life stress and academic stressors faced by international students,

several studies have found that this stress can be mediated by social support (Mishra, Crist, &

Burant, 2003; Poyrazli, et al, 2004). Sumer, Poyrazli, and Grahame (2008) found that

international students with strong social support and social network satisfaction tended to adjust

better and have lower levels of depression and acculturative stress (Sumer et al., 2008). Sullivan

and Kashubeck-West (2015) found that "intentionally developing connections" with people in

the host country and having "higher levels of social support from host nationals" positively

correlated with lower acculturative stress among international students (p.7). Lee, Koeske and

Sales (2004) found that higher levels of social support in addition to higher levels of

identification with American culture were associated with lower levels of acculturative stress

with Korean graduate students in the United States. Students with greater acculturation levels

such as those comfortable and familiar with the host culture and people and confident in their language skills tend to have less acculturative stress (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007).

Previous Research on Indian International Students

Despite the extensive research on the experiences of international students, only a few have focused on the specific experiences of Indian international students. To my knowledge, only six studies assessed the adjustment of Asian Indian international students at American colleges and universities. Rice and colleagues[2] (2012) studied 129 Chinese students and 166 Asian Indian students and found that the effects of self-critical perfectionism were stronger for Asian Indian students compared to Chinese students. In addition, the authors found that acculturative stress was more strongly related to depressive symptoms for Asian Indian students compared with Chinese students. Rahman and Rollock (2004) studied 199 South Asian international students, including Indian students in the United States, and found higher levels of depressive symptoms among students who had higher perceived prejudice and lower self-reported competence in work, personal/social efficacy, and intracultural behaviors. Tochkov, Levine, and Sanaka (2010) compared Asian Indian international students with American freshman and found that American students were more depressed based on their Beck Depression Inventory scores, while Asian Indian students who had lived in the United States longer reported higher levels of homesickness. Atri, Sharma, and Cottrell (2006) studied 185 Asian Indian students enrolled at two large public universities in Ohio and found that social support, acculturation and prejudice of acculturation scale, and commitment and control of hardiness were all predictive of mental health. Another study by Meghani and Harvey (2016)

---

[2] Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero, & Anderson, (2012)

examined group-based differences in depression, acculturation, and enculturation trajectories and

identified predictors of depression trajectories for 114 Asian Indian graduate students during

their first academic year in the United States. The authors recommended the identification of

patterns related to acculturation and enculturation could help predict depression among these

students. Cooper and Yarbrough (2016) explored the health related perspectives of seven female

Asian-Indian international students enrolled in a mid-size public university in the United States

and described the students "as having one step in tradition and one in modernity" (p. 1049). The

authors found that the students held on to cultural traditions associated with Hinduism and

Ayurveda that helped sustain them in their challenges as they experienced their life as

international students in America.

Gap in Literature

As is evident from the literature review, research on Indian international students is fairly

limited. Only three categorized Asian Indians separately from other Asians in the analyses, only

two categorized male and female data separately, and only one used a qualitative methodology.

Although these findings are noteworthy, significant gaps still exist in the literature. Additionally,

predictors that may be particularly relevant to Asian Indian female students' acculturative stress

and the impact of gender and culturally based coping strategies were not assessed in any of these

studies. Berry (2008) consistently emphasized the individual variation in acculturation strategies

and adaptation as well, and highlighted the need to understand nested contexts, that individuals

live in groups that exist in communities and countries with varying national policies and attitudes

regarding immigration. Juang and Syed (2019) argue that most studies on individual-level

acculturative experiences are flawed if they ignore the "contextual complexity" of the strategies

employed by the individuals in transition (pgs. 241-242). Finally, none of the studies used a combination of transition model and acculturation model to understand the experiences of Asian Indian female graduate students.

Summary

The current chapter presented a brief summary of the components in the two theoretical frameworks mentioned in chapter 1, along with a summary of research on international students, Asian international students and finally Indian international students transition experiences and acculturative stress. Findings from various studies provide insight into some of the most common challenges faced by international students and a few studies highlight some of the strategies that can help international students cope with the challenges. The next chapter provides details regarding the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a theoretical framework and details regarding the methodology of this research study. The purpose of this study was to understand the unique lived experiences of Indian international female students who enrolled in graduate programs at institutions of higher education in the United States. This study intended to understand the transition experiences of these students with an acculturative perspective. In this research, the primary research question I was interested to explore was: W*hat are the unique lived experiences of Indian international female graduate students' studying at American universities?*

First, I present the rationale and description of the qualitative research paradigm. Next, I explain how research participants were selected and recruited and how data was collected. Afterward, I describe the procedures that were followed during data analysis, and finally, data verification methods and ethics are addressed.

Rationale for Qualitative Design

In an effort to address the purpose and the research question proposed in this study, a qualitative design was used. Patton (2002) asserted that qualitative and quantitative methods involve trade-offs between breadth and depth. According to Patton, qualitative inquiry allows researcher to collect data that is greater in depth, but requires a "careful attention to detail, context, and nuance" (p.227). On the other hand, quantitative research instruments can gather and compare responses across several participants through statistical aggregation but could "limit responses" to predetermined categories. Patton maintained that quantitative instruments often do

not produce the "wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases" as thoroughly as qualitative research methods (Patton, 2002, p. 227).

It is important to note that most international student transition studies mentioned in the preceding chapters are quantitative studies. While these studies have provided valuable insight into the general adjustment and coping issues/patterns, only a small number of studies have been qualitative in nature. It is important to employ qualitative research methods to understand the transition issues of international students, because it will allow for individual perspectives that give "voice" to personal experiences of international students. In addition, as Patton (2002) affirmed, it will provide a deeper understanding of the many facets of the international student transition experience (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Creswell (2009) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. Shimahara (as cited in Sherman & Webb, 1988) argues that human behavior experience is shaped in context and that events cannot be understood adequately if isolated from their contexts. He adds that "context stripping" is a key feature of a quantitative approach, while qualitative inquiry questions or searches with an "intent or objective in mind" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p.5). A qualitative study facilitates exploration of the specific context within which the research participants behave, and the "influence" that this said context may have on their actions (Maxwell, 2005, p.22).

Punch (2009) argues that quantitative research approach is "inherently positivistic" since it entails constructing concepts and measuring variables, while in contrast, qualitative research is

"multidimensional and pluralistic" (p. 115). Qualitative methodology, he believes, operates on the basis of recognition that research is a "human construction" that is framed and presented within a particular set of ideologies (Punch, 2009, pp. 115-116). Edson (as cited in Sherman & Webb, 1988) argues that qualitative inquiry is a form of "moral discourse," an attempt to understand ourselves in relation to the larger world (p.3). Creswell (2009), further explained that inherent in the process of qualitative research is the ability to empower participants to have their voices and experiences heard; valuing and recognizing the context and settings in which the participants are situated; and appreciating the uniqueness of the study participants.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) clarified that giving voice means "providing a space for particular narratives" (p. 215). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), qualitative data emphasizes lived experiences, is appropriate method for locating the "meanings" people place on events, processes and structures of their lives and connecting these meanings to the social world around them (p. 9). In line with that, the current research study aimed to understand the lived experiences of Indian international female students, who immigrated to the United States to enroll in graduate programs.

Overview of Narrative Inquiry

The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods defines narrative inquiry as the "first and the foremost way to understand experience" (Given, 2008, p. 541). According to the encyclopedia, narrative inquiry is "view of the phenomena of people's experiences" and a "methodology for narratively inquiring into experience" allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences "over time and in context" (p. 541). The use of narrative inquiry is assuming a higher profile within social science research, including

educational research, and involves assembling stories, verbal, oral or visual, with a focus on capturing the meanings that people attribute to their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Josselson, 1996; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996; Riessman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry can include a range of approaches and methods including "informal conversation and life stories" (Trahar, 2013, p. 75). According to Fry (2002), a narrative method accepts the idea that knowledge can be held in stories that can be relayed, stored, and retrieved. Riley & Hawe (2005) enumerate that narrative inquiry, as a method, can help a researcher understand how people think through events and what they value and "captures how people make sense of the world" (p. 229).

Selecting an appropriate methodology is fundamental to any research undertaking as it can provide a strong foundation to build the research upon. In addition, researchers argue that the human centeredness of narrative inquiry occurs within a context and in collaboration with the researcher and the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). As the researchers have all pointed out that narrative inquiry possesses the unique features of putting emphasis on experience, assuming collaborative research-participant relationship, and conducting inquiry by storytelling. Thus, my research fits in well with the description of this methodology because, firstly, I wanted to understand how international women students from India perceive their transition experiences, more specifically, how they make meaning out of their experiences. Secondly, the data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Thirdly, I, as the researcher, was both the instrument of data collection and the primary instrument of data analysis. The research process was primarily inductive as I sought to identify themes and build hypotheses emergent from the data, rather than deductively testing hypotheses.

Data Collection

Participants

According to Patton (2002), "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (p. 244) and qualitative research often utilizes very small samples in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) also pointed out that qualitative studies have smaller samples in order to preserve the ability to accomplish in-depth exploration and analysis, which can be compromised if additional participants are added. To facilitate this in-depth understanding, purposeful criterion sampling is recommended to ensure that the participants will be a potent, substantial source of information related to the research topic (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) further explained that the purpose of the study, the relevance and credibility of information that the researcher is seeking, and the manageability of that information in terms of the researcher's time and resources, all determine the size of the sample.

Merriam (2009) concurred that the goal is to select an appropriate sample size that will answer the research questions and fit the purpose statement. In the book titled: *Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research: A realist approach*, Emmel (2013) noted that the detail and richness of narrative inquiry invariably means a lot of data that needs to be "transcribed, checked, read, coded, and then parts of these transcripts analyzed" (p. 141). Emmel argues that personal and practical limitations on resources must be at the forefront of researchers' minds when considering a sample size and the relevance of the information to be included in the research. Hence qualitative samples are "invariably small" because in collecting rich insight these "data will be bulky" (Emmel, 2013, p. 141).

For the purpose of this research, I have selected twelve international female graduate students from India who volunteered to participate in individual interviews. Participants were recruited purposively using the snowball method through word of mouth and campus announcements. Since the study was intended to explore the lived experiences of Indian women in particular, the inclusion criteria for participation in the research were that the participants be female, self-identify as an Asian-Indian international student, and currently enrolled in graduate program at an American university. There were no restrictions related to GPA, marital status or discipline. All the participants were on either F1 visa or Optional Practical Training (OPT) during the time of the interview. The purpose of this study was not to make generalizations about international students' experiences but to explore the experiences related to immigration and determine its impact on them. Participants were selected with the goal of understanding the rich personal experiences of international students from India that could illuminate their lived experiences as students in the United States.

Participant Recruitment. Research participants were recruited through a letter of solicitation sent out to selected universities in the New York/New Jersey area. I initially emailed the director of the Offices of International Programs. It was also noted in the letter that due to the interests of the study, only women students from India would qualify as a research subject. I also used social media to contact the Facebook pages of Graduate Students Association, International Students Association and Indian Students Association pages at each university. I received responses from the three universities, who agreed to publish a "Call for Participants" in their monthly newsletters. I also received emails from six international students from India, expressing their interest to participate in the study, even as I was preparing my application for Institutional Review Board's approval. Once I received the IRB approval in June, an email

containing the letter of solicitation, which provided information about me as the researcher, and described the purpose of the study, was sent out. The participants were guaranteed anonymity upon request and were assured of safe handling of all information provided by them. However, I had a difficult time connecting with both the university offices, which were closed due to COVID-19, and the students who had previously volunteered. I intensified my recruitment approaches by "casting a wider net," by posting on social media pages of Indian Students in America groups, websites frequented by Indian diaspora and also on international students group in America pages on the "Homies" app. Due to safety reasons, I only posted summary of the research study and asked volunteers to contact me at a non-seton hall email address to know further details.

According to Mack et al., (2005) sample sizes are determined by the study objectives as well as the "resources and time available" (p.5). Despite the initial difficulty recruiting participants, the current study employed both snow-ball sampling and purposive sampling methods. Both snowball sampling and purposeful sampling was used in order to select information-rich cases strategically and purposefully and develop an understanding of their transition experiences. Mack et al., (2005) describe snowball sampling as a "chain referral sampling" method, where the researcher is referred to other potential participants of the study by the current participants. Patton (2002) notes, "purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). Patton's advice on selecting "information-rich" cases to enrich the process of data collection was considered. Polkinghorn (2005) states that "individuals who can provide relevant descriptions of an experience are primarily those who have had or are having the experience" (p. 140).

44

The first participant contacted nearly a month later, and then referred her roommate, who also fit the study criteria, to participate in the research. About four more women were recruited through referrals from these two participants. The last two participants also had friends who wanted to participate in the research, and this is where I employed purposeful sampling. I paused recruiting from the same university and intensified recruiting strategies to reach out to students from other universities. Mack et al., define purposive sample sizes as those that are determined by "theoretical saturation" (p.5). I was already transcribing the interviews of the previous six participants from the same university, I began to see common factors in their transition experiences. I believed that new participants from the same university may not "bring additional insights" into the current research. I was also concerned that too many participants from the same university may skew the findings. This decision was very difficult one to make at the time when I was also anxious to meet my ideal sample size.

Meanwhile, another student contacting me via social media after seeing my message on the Facebook page for Bengali (Indians from the state of West Bengal) students in New York. She recruited her friend, who was enrolled in another university in the New York area, to participate in the study. I was also contacted by one participant from the 'Homies' group. She recruited her friend at another university on the West Coast to participate in the study. Soon, I interviewed twelve participants, through referrals. The letter of solicitation was sent out on June 8th, 2020. Interested volunteers then responded to me personally, after which I followed up with them through private email messages and phone calls to clear any remaining questions or concerns and set up an interview. The interviews were conducted during the months of July and August 2020. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participants.

Table 1

Demographics of the Study Participants

Name	Age	Place of Birth	Date of Arrival	Institution	Level	Discipline	Marital Status
Zune	27	Kadalur, Tamil Nadu	2016	Private research university	MS➔ Ph.D.	Material Science	In-relationship (Appr)
Appu	29	Kolkatta, West Bengal	2018	Private Ivy league NY	MS➔ Ph. D	Computer Science	Married
Joe	25	Mumbai, Maharashtra	2016	Private research university	MS➔ Ph.D.	Imaging Science	Single
Maya	28	Indore, Madhya Pradesh	2016	Private research university	MS➔ Internships	Industrial Design	In-Relationship (Un-app)
Reema	26	Kolkatta, West Bengal	2018	Private Ivy league (NY)-> Maryland	MS ➔ Ph. D	Information Technology	Single
Bhanu	28	Kottayam, Kerala	2017	Private research university	MS (dropped out of MS in Oklahoma)	Physics	Single
Kashi	29	Muzzafarpur, Bihar	2016	Private research university	MS➔ Internships	Computer Science	Single
Shubh	31	Jalgaon, Pune	2015	Private research university	MS➔Ph. D	Bio-medical	Divorced
Ritu	29	Indore, Madhya Pradesh	2015	Private research university (California)	MS➔ OPT	Computer Science	In-Relationship (Un-appr)
Dhara	28	Pune, Maharashtra	2016	Private research university-NY	MS	Computer Science	Single
Alka	26	Hyderabad, Telangana	2019	Private research university (PA)	MS	Business Analytics	Single
Sam	25	New Delhi	2018	Private research university in the NY city	MA	Social sciences	Single

Background of the Participants. The participants came from all over India, including big cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, New Delhi as well as smaller towns such as Jalgaon and Muzzaffarpur and ranged in age from 25-31 years. All the participants in the study self-identified as female and were pursuing graduate education at American universities. Six participants were enrolled in master's programs while the rest were enrolled in doctoral programs. All, except for one participant, were pursuing a degree in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) related fields.

Six of the twelve participants reported being single while four of the 12 participants were either dating or were engaged. Two participants were married before coming to the United States and one of them, Appu, applied to study in the United States to accompany her husband who intended to study in America. The other married participant, Shubh, is currently separated from her husband and in the process of obtaining a divorce. Her, now ex-husband was already working in the United States when they married (arranged marriage) and she enrolled in the University immediately upon arriving.

All the participants studied in private schools until their 12th grade, with three of them stating that their parents moved to nearby towns or cities so that their kids can have access to private schools. Despite public schools in India offering free of charge access to education, most parents in India choose to send their children to expensive private schools. A recent report by Central Square foundation, which analyzed government data on private and public schools in India, found that 73% of students in urban areas attend private schools (Central Square Foundation, 2020). The foundation reported that enrollment to public schools has continued to

decline from 74% in 1978 to 52% in 2017, while enrollment in private schools continued to increase during the same period (Central Square Foundation, 2020). There are more than a million public schools in the country compared to 460,000 private schools. However, according to the report, nearly 50% of all students in India are enrolled in private schools (Central Square Foundation, 2020).

According to another report titled: Household Social Consumption on Education in India published by Government of India's National Statistical Office, "quality of education in nearby government schools is perceived to be not satisfactory" by the parents (p. 98). Along with the perceived lack of "quality" education in government schools, the English medium of instruction is another prominent factor that drives Indian parents to enroll their children in private schools. Interestingly, despite the perception of better quality education in private schools, all the participants reported that they also enrolled in an after/before school tutoring in Math and Science, particularly while enrolled in middle and high school grades to prepare themselves for competitive exams. This is true to the current situation in India where most of the students go for additional tutoring, often referred to as "tuition" in science, English, and mathematics. Kalimili (2014) reports that a system of "private tuition" parallel to the formal system of education exists in India. Biswal (1999) terms this phenomenon as a form of corruption perpetrated by school teachers, whose "conscious efforts…create a market for private tutoring or coaching," due to "the existence of wage deferential" and imperfect monitoring of classroom teaching in both private and public schools (p. 222).

All the participants spoke at least one language termed as mother-tongue, other than English and some even spoke three languages. All the participants reported that English was the

language of instruction in their school (K-12) and undergraduate education. About half of the participants were from smaller towns and traveled to bigger cities for undergraduate education and six of the participants reported working in India for one to two years, sometimes in jobs unrelated to their degree, before traveling to the United States.

Push and Pull Factors. Previous research found that many international students travel to America due to the push factor of enhanced job opportunities (Alcott, 2004), combined with the pull factor of American higher education quality and institutional reputation (Bodycott, 2009). This was true for my participants as well who expressed belief in an American education that would lead to improved career prospects. Parents played a significant role in the participants' decision to leave India and often the participants expressed that the decision was made jointly by both (parents and participants) hoping that there would be better job opportunities with an American degree.

In addition, barriers such as India's higher education system's inability to meet the demand for enrollment in higher education also served as a push factor. For example, 374,520 applicants competed over 800 available seats in MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) programs at India's top-rated All India Institute of Medical Sciences in 2018 (The Economic Times, 2018). The entrance requirement for high-quality programs at top institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) is extremely demanding with an admission rate of below 2% from a pool of nearly 500,000 applicants (The New York Times, 2011). Some of the participants applied to similar entrance exams to pursue higher education in India after taking additional coaching but reported that they did not make the cut.

Reema, who stated that she lost admission by only one point, blamed affirmative action in India for offering admission to students with lower score than her because of their caste. For example, in the state of West Bengal, which the participant was from, there is a 45% "reservation," (as affirmative action is referred to in India) in government jobs and educational institutions for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. In addition to that, in 2019 the state government added another 10% reservations for "economically weaker sections" which is designated for people in the upper castes who fit within the low-income category. This brought up the reservation quota to 55%, which is higher than the 50% reservation cap mandated by the Supreme Court of India (Press Trust of India, 2019). This scenario is indicative of the highly complex nature of reservations in India that differ vastly from state to state and are often determined by the percentage of people (referred to as vote bank) belonging to various castes living within the state. Politicians in India are often blamed for creating policies to appease the vote bank to ensure election/re-election. Other states such as Maharashtra with 78%, Tamil Nadu with 69% and Telangana at 62% have also crossed the Supreme Court's 50% reservation quota cap in educational institutions and government jobs.

It may not be a coincidence that six of the 12 participants belonged to these three states and two more participants were from the State of West Bengal. This means that 66% of the participants came from top four states in India with the highest percentage of reservation quotas. While reservations may be considered a valid push factor, it may only apply to students belonging to upper castes and who have the financial resources to study abroad. Meanwhile, some participants also expressed that India did not have the variety of programs that they were particularly interested in. They also believed that American universities have better technical

50

facilities and upgraded labs compared to educational institutions in India, which was also a motivational factor in choosing United States as a destination of study.

Funding and Financial Aid. Ten of the 12 participants in this study reported that their parents funded their education in the United States**.** Six of them reported that their parents secured bank loans to fund their education. In most cases, the participants' father was a government employee, which helped secure the bank loan. In India, government employees can get loans from banks to sponsor their children's education. Students, themselves are not given education loans by banks like they do in America. Hence, only those students whose parents either have government jobs, or who own property, such as land and houses, can obtain a bank loan to send their children abroad. Studying abroad especially traveling to America is an unattainable dream for many who do not have these financial resources.

One participant, Maya, reported that government of the state that she lived in provided her with a loan after she acquired her I-20[3] from the university. The state of Madhya Pradesh has created a program to support women's higher education because of the high gender discrimination and female feticide (aborting a fetus after gender determination) in the state. The state gender ratio is one of the lowest in the country with 930 females for every 1000 males and hence runs various schemes to prevent abortion of female child and incentivizes their education with various government schemes. Maya stated that she got a loan from the state government without any interest to be payable after she acquired a job.

---

[3] The i-20 is a document issued by the American university stating that an international student has been admitted into a full-time study in a graduate or undergraduate program. The i-20 is titled the "Certificate of Eligibility" because with it, students are "eligible" to apply for an F-1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate in their country to get a visa stamp to travel to the United States.

Four participants reported that their parents took out personal loans as they were business owners and not government employees. Appu, who came to the United States with her husband was sponsored by her in-laws, while Shubh, who was also married when she arrived in the United States, received 80% scholarship.

Interviews

In-depth individual interviewing was used to collect data in this study. Patton (2002) notes, "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (p. 341)." There are essentially three different approaches to interviewing: the unstandardized, informal conversational interview; the general interview guide approach; and the standardized, open-ended interview. The informal conversational interview relies on the spontaneous generation of questions in the interview process. The general interview guide approach uses a pre-generated list of issues to be explored. The standardized open-ended interview relies on a set of carefully crafted questions. While there are strengths and weaknesses to each of these approaches, this study will use an integrated approach to the interviewing process. In other words, this study used a semi-structured and non-directive approach with the understanding that the interview approach must adapt to the emerging data. In short, this study relied on a general interview guide containing a set of pre-interview questions while maintaining the flexibility to use unstandardized questions to clarify and probe so as to explore and understand the multi-layered experiences of the participants.

I developed the general interview guide by outlining the following broad categories under investigation: Experiences as an Indian international graduate student in an American university; life prior to migration; relationships with family members, peers, and community members; and

52

experiences related to adjustment to life in the United States. Once the participants and I decided on an interview date, I sent them a google hangouts link. The participants texted me if they had any trouble accessing the link. I asked them to access the link on a laptop or a desktop and not their phone, so I do not have sound issues while recording. Although technology presented certain problems related to connectivity and sound quality, overall, it helped because I was able to interview participants in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Los Angeles and California.

Open-ended questions that were straightforward, clear, and concise were developed. The structured and unstandardized questions helped elicit information from what Patton (2002) calls the six categories of interview questions: behaviors, opinions, feelings, knowledge, sensory data, and demographics. In the interview process, sequencing the questions is essential in order to elicit information from the participants (Patton). I followed Patton's recommendation of progressing from noncontroversial questions oriented toward present behavior to questions that address opinions and feelings with demographic questions posed strategically throughout the interview.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is a complex and multifaceted process that includes examining, comparing and interpreting patterns and themes. Patton (2002) suggests that qualitative analysis is a process of transformation, transmutation, conversion, and synthesis by which a researcher makes sense of data and reconstructs the whole from parts. Insights about the directions for the analysis might occur while data collection is underway; while these insights are part of the fieldwork, they are also the beginning of analysis (Patton, 2002). A multilayered or thick analysis of a qualitative research is possible when the researcher is able to overlap data analysis

and data collection (Miles & Huberman, 2002). In short, qualitative data analysis is a recursive process that researchers must be aware of during the data collection process. One of the primary steps in qualitative analysis is the management of the voluminous data. Once the data collection and transcriptions are complete, checking for the quality of information collected and getting a sense of the whole is important (Patton, 2002).

Thematic Analysis Approach

Thematic analysis approach was employed in making sense of all the data that was transcribed from the interviews. According to Neuendorf (2018), the "recorded messages" themselves are considered data in thematic analysis (p. 212). The researcher develops "codes" as they examine the data closely and subsequently, themes are generated "inductively from the texts" (Neuendorf, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87; Braun, Clarke, & Rance, 2015, pp. 188–189) outlined six phases in the process of thematic analysis. The authors explain that although these phases are "sequential", it is a "recursive" process wherein movement between different phases is allowed and determined by the data itself (p. 86). The six phases are as follows: familiarizing with data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes and producing the report.

Phase 1: Familiarizing With the Data. Braun and Clarke recommend reading and re-reading the data to "become immersed and intimately familiar" with it. I practiced active listening during the interviews and took notes as I was conducting the interview. I tried using transcribing software initially to save time, but due to the varied English accents of my participants, the software was not able to transcribe accurately. In addition, some participants used Hindi language words randomly and, of course, the software did not recognize those terms.

Very early on, it became very clear that I will be spending more time correcting the transcribed files. Hence, I transcribed the audio files and completed the transcriptions verbatim. This took time and patience, however, this helped me enormously by helping me "immerse" myself in the data. By the end of it, I was able to identify similar codes within the interview. After transcription, I once again went over each interview and highlighted topics related to the participant's experiences in America and India.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes. The second phase of the analysis is identifying important topics and ideas of the data to generate initial codes and then applying the codes to the dataset. I began by identifying similar ideas and topics that the interviewees spoke about in the same interview at different time points. I grouped together those comments if they seemed to be related or connected with each other in a meaningful way. I coded them under one category and then compared to see if similar ideas or topics were mentioned by other interviewees as well.

Then, I began comparing this data across different interviews. I did not conduct any follow-up interviews as the stories and experiences shared by the participants was elaborate enough and I did not need any further clarification. For example, one interviewee mentioned food as one of the challenges she faced during her transition. She spoke about missing Indian food and because Indian restaurants are expensive, she had to learn cooking. Food was also mentioned when she spoke about friendship, where she narrated how she and her roommate, who is also her best friend, support each other by shopping for Indian groceries together, and cooking together. At a later point in the interview, she mentioned food when talking about her religion where she mentioned not eating pork and beef. When she spoke again about the changes in her attitude and behavior, she mentioned how her food habits have changed after she lived in the

United States and that now, she is more open to other cuisines. Since all of these were related to food, I compiled them under the code FOOD. The same interviewee spoke about her academic experiences in India that were influenced by her gender and compared them to the academic experience in the United States. She also brought up gender while she was talking about her socialization in India as well as when she spoke about her family. So, I noticed gender and experiences influenced by the participant's gender came up several times during the same interview. I then coded these experiences broadly under the code GENDER. I repeated this process for all my individual interviews. I treated each interview transcript the same way and came up with multiple codes.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes. According to Braun and Clark (2008), researchers can move into phase three after all their data has been coded (p. 87). I first generated codes within each interview and then compared and identified similar codes across all my other interviews. I collected all the data related to the codes in a OneNote file with each code being in a separate folder. I then copied the information related to each code in the folder with the participant's pseudonym and time stamp included, so I can review it later. However, some of the data overlapped and could be included in other codes as well. For example, the data related to the code FOOD can also appear in other codes such as religion, challenges and impact. I also had to change the code GENDER where I collected all the data where the participants spoke about their experiences they attributed to their gender. However, soon I realized that GENDER was too broad and had several different discussions within in. For example, some participants spoke about how they were perceived in India as women and the kind of experiences they had because of that. They self-censored in the kind of clothing they chose to wear when they went out of their homes to study and work. Some related stories where their parents would insist on them wearing

a "dupatta[4]" or dressing in a manner that was "decent" every time they went out to protect themselves from attracting any unwarranted attention. I recorded this as GENDER-CLOTHING to make it more accurate. Gender was an ongoing code when the participants discussed marriage, dating, smoking, drinking alcohol, friendship, parents, independence, career, academics, and religion. This became very overwhelming and I struggled with trying to categorize them in an organized, logical manner. Finally, I decided to eliminate using the term GENDER in the codes as it was too broad. I recoded my data and instead labeled them, for example, as "Clothing", "Academic Experiences", and "Social Experiences (instead of gender-social). I also merged codes that were related, for example, "dating and marriage", "smoking and drinking", and "freedom and independence".

Some of the codes needed to be separated because I felt they belonged separately under the same umbrella. For example, instead of compiling all academic experiences under one umbrella, I divided them into "academic experiences in India" and "academic experiences in the United States". This was one of the first themes that emerged which gave me a better clarity in how I looked at my data. I started re-organizing the codes under the same umbrella, which led to the creation of my initial themes.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes. At the end of phase three, I had several "candidate themes", as Braun and Clark (2008) term them, however, I revisited the themes and reviewed them several times. Finally the themes that emerged were academic challenges, Food challenges, Career challenges, Practical/lifestyle challenges. I categorized them under Challenges. Under the larger umbrella term Support, themes such as Family and Friends, Professors and Mentors,

---

[4] A shawl- like scarf worn over the shoulders by women in India which is considered to be a symbol of modesty.

University programs emerged. The authors caution that not all candidate themes evolve into the final themes due to several reasons such as not having enough data to support them, or the data being too diverse, and two themes may merge together to form one theme, while others may need to be "broken down into separate themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 91). I checked for links and relationships between themes and rechecked the themes with my original data and re-examined them to check for uniformity and "how they fit together" (p. 92).

Braun and Clarke suggest that the researchers should ensure that the story that the codes portray was coherent, meaningful, clear and distinct as Braun and Clarke recommend (2008, p. 91). This stage was overwhelming for me as I felt pressured to do justice to the life stories of these women.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes. Braun and Clark recommend that during this stage, researchers developing a detailed analysis of each theme and caution not to try and get a theme to do too much. In this phase, I defined and refined the themes further to capture the stories of my participants within those themes accurately. This is the phase where I began ascertaining the relevance of the themes with my research question. This was a very important phase in my analysis. Once the research questions and themes were compared, the picture became clear and coherent.

Phase 6: Producing a Report. The final phase of thematic analysis is to produce a report that weaves together the "analytic narrative and data segments," and relate the analysis to existing literature and theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 93).

Theoretical concepts from the transition model, and the acculturation models, such as self, support, situation and strategies, were used to gain insights and develop a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Indian international female graduate students attending American universities. Also, continually questioning how one participant differs from others led to a more complex, dense, and thick analysis (Fischer, 2006). In essence, the content analysis in this study includes coding data, finding patterns, labeling themes, and finally, interpreting findings. Data collection and analysis is a recursive process. The circularity therefore involves collection and analysis of data simultaneously; while the comparisons, causes and relationships are drawn, data was collected. Finally, the interpretation was considered complete once no further themes or patterns could be drawn from the data.

Trustworthiness

To accomplish trustworthiness, I relied on peer examination. Peer examination means having a colleague or knowledgeable person review the data and assess whether the findings are consistent with the data (Merriam, 2009). To ensure further validity and trustworthiness of the data, I emailed transcribed interviews to respective responds before beginning any type of analysis and sought approval of accuracy from them. I also shared my interpretation of the participants' stories with each participant for feedback. There were no significant changes or corrections identified by any of the other participants. In addition, the feedback of my research committee helped me immensely in reviewing my themes and related data.

Researcher Role

This study was inspired by both my personal experience of being an international student and from my formal education in higher education management and research. For the last few years, as I went through my own adjustment process in the United States, I often wondered about how other international students dealt with the loss, change, and adjustment that comes as a result of immigration. Apart from my personal experiences as an international student, I also had the opportunity to talk to many international students whom I befriended along the way. Because of my cultural heritage and my experiences as an Indian international graduate student, I am naturally sensitive to the research participants' acculturation experiences. In addition, my position as an Indian International female graduate student gives me an opportunity to view research participants' experiences from a non-Euro-centric perspective. My hope is that the research participants felt comfortable enough with me to discuss issues that are otherwise challenging to talk about with a person of different cultural heritage.

The researcher is an instrument in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). As a primary investigator of this study, I brought a number of strengths to this project. While my position as an international student provides a common ground with the research participants, being Indian does not mean that I know exactly what other international students from India experience. Self-awareness or reflexivity helps the qualitative researcher to be mindful of one's own social, political, cultural and linguistic biases as well as those of the research participants. Despite several commonalities I shared with the participants, I also became aware of the differences in our experiences. My economic status, coming from a single-parent household, non-STEM discipline and studying a smaller, private catholic university compared to bigger, private research

universities that the participants were enrolled in, not having many other Indian international

students on campus, were some of the differences that I noted. This helped me acknowledge and

become aware of the fact that there could be several differences in each participant's experiences

despite being from the same cultural background. That is the essence of qualitative research to

me which allows for each individual story that is unique to still be relevant.

Ethics

Conducting research that ensures participants" safety and confidentiality is essential. The

development and implementation of an ethical research design is important to address the ethical

challenges that arise due to the nature of the reflective process of a qualitative interview. This

study protected research participants' rights in the following ways:

1.   IRB's Human Subjects Research procedures were followed.

Risks associated with participation in this study were limited; the recollection of past

experiences is often permeated with emotion and could cause affective states such as grief,

anger, or sorrow. Data was collected through individual interviews and participants were asked

to be reflective as they tried to answer the interview questions. It is unlikely that the interview

schedule elicited unexplored thoughts or feelings of participants. The purpose of this research

was not to explore emotional responses of the participants but to gather information on their

experiences of being international students and their meaning-making processes.

2. Research objectives were shared with participants.

Participants consented to participate in the study only after reviewing the document that detailed the purpose of the research. A verbal explanation of the forms also provided. Participants consented to participate in the study only after reviewing this document. A verbal explanation of the form was provided.

3. Participants signed informed consent forms before being interviewed.

The use of informed consent is one of the steps that help ensure the development of an ethical research design (Patton, 2002; Berg, 2007; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

4. Participants were notified of their right to withdraw from research at any time.

Participants received a document outlining the purpose of the research, issues related to confidentiality, benefits and risks of participation, means to obtain a summary of the results, and information regarding withdrawal from the study.

5. Participant anonymity was ensured when reporting the findings of the research.

The participants were informed that their participation would be kept confidential. In order to maintain participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all transcriptions. In addition, all identifying information, such as the name of the participant's academic institution and names of peers and/or colleagues, were deleted from the transcripts and the reports on the data. In addition, measures were taken to safeguard all data; taped recordings of interviews, field notes, and any other written material related to the participants was kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodology I used to conduct the present study. I conducted qualitative research and collected data through individual, in-depth interviews with twelve international female students from India, who had completed at least one academic year at an American college or university on a graduate level. I transcribed the interviews myself and manually coded and sorted the data. Standard ethical practices were employed throughout the research process to protect the rights of the participants. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of twelve Indian international female students enrolled in graduate programs at American universities. Twelve participants were interviewed from five different universities. The current chapter will discuss findings related to the research study. First, I will discuss the findings related to each research sub-questions: a) *What perceived challenges did Indian international female graduate students face during their transition?* Four themes that emerged under the main theme of challenges will be discussed first. Next, the themes that relate to the second research sub-question will be discussed: *What are Indian international female graduate students' perceptions of the factors that helped support their transition?* followed by the final sub-research: *How do Indian international female graduate students describe their personal experiences of transitioning to the United States?* Finally, I will relate the findings to the theoretical framework in previous chapters.

Challenges

My first research sub-question as mentioned above was related to the challenges that Indian international female students face during their transition. The participants cited several challenges that they encountered during their transition into American educational and cultural environment. Eight of the 12 participants asserted that they faced academic transition challenges, seven participants mentioned food-related challenges, six participants discussed career-related challenges. Participants also mentioned practical/lifestyle related challenges (Smith and

Khawaja, 2011) such as transportation, accommodation, navigating health insurance, and acclimating to the cold weather.

Academic Transition Challenges

Participants stated that they experienced several academic difficulties such as navigating the coursework and credit-based structure of the American system of education. They were not used to self-selection of courses unlike in India where the coursework is pre-assigned for each level and is the same for every student earning the same degree certificate. Sam revealed that it "was pretty hard for me to map the courses that I would take here to complete my degree." Sam also stated that it took the entire first semester for her to understand "these are the courses that I would like to do, and these are the courses that would help in my career." In addition, participants also admitted that they initially struggled transitioning to the American education system that emphasized practical application and weekly assignments.

All the participants agreed that the Indian system of education which relies heavily on theory-based written exams that are held statewide at the end of each academic year, forced them to use methods such as rote learning. Since they were successful in using this method most of their academic lives, they relied on their memory and reading books and struggled transitioning to a system that emphasized practical knowledge. Appu stated that in India, she would "just study before my exam and get by, because it's mostly written exams where if you study right before the exam, there is a possibility that you can pass. You can figure out the kind of questions and the kind of answers you're going to write." But in American education system, she added, "it is about application and it actually required me to do some hard work." Appu asserted that she enjoyed learning here because she could "really apply" the theoretical knowledge, however, she

added that "it was hard" for her because she "was overconfident and I took 17 or 18 credits" of demanding coursework. "It was hard because of the workload. I was working all the time. I had no time for my traumas. There was no time where I was not going to classes or not doing my assignments." (Appu).

Kashi also indicated that in India she would "study mostly during the examination and before the examination. But here because of the GPA system and regular assignments, it was hard." She expressed that "We have so much coursework…electives and we have major courses. Those are difficult." She explained that the coursework in India was more "theory based" and the "e-labs were not that advanced" while in America "it is more practical based like coding…so it's less theory, we really have no books here"… "so if you don't do it (study) every day, you will not be able to do it… because it's not something you can just memorize." Selecting the courses on your own rather than a prepackaged course curriculum for everyone, also made it a stressful for her to choose them, particularly because some of the classes were not offered every semester. "…some fundamental courses are not offered in every semester. So that becomes little bit difficult." She found that while most of her professors were "very good," some were not and would not follow the syllabus closely and announced midterms a week before…"because sometimes there'll be so many midterms in the same week….for computer science we are doing coding and many programming languages will have similar kind of syntaxes ,you will get too confused if the exams are on the same day."

Zune explained that in India, the emphasis was on "getting good marks" during the final exam and during periodic assessments. "The curriculum did not have too much weightage for assignments. Assignments were not even given in some courses in India." She believed that "no

66

matter how good somebody performed, that person would not get that recognition," hinting at the lack of avenues in Indian Higher Education curriculum, where individual talents can be manifested. Zune shared that she faced extreme academic stress during the first six months of her transition and would "freak out" about the little time she had to complete an assignment.

"I would be like, wow, I have only one week, which is only seven days. And how am I going to finish it? I would start working on the assignments, the very day I received the assignment because I would…I would freak out and I would be like, what if I don't make it on time?" (Zune).

Zune also reported to have some difficulty initially understanding the "professors mainly because of the American accent and that I was not used to it in my first year." She identified one of the biggest challenges that she faced in navigating one of her courses in the first semester. "The very first semester that I was here, one of our professors would not solve any of our doubts and asked us to look up in your textbook or look it up somewhere online. But because he was like that …all the students in his class joined together to do group studies. And that's how I made some of my friends who are still in touch with me because we would sit every day and study the concepts that we did not understand." I asked her if only Indian students were facing this issue and she reported that her study group consisted of international students from India, China and Nigeria along with some American students. When asked if she thought about approaching the program director or dean to report the professor, she said that it was "just first semester…we don't want trouble." She said that it was "*quite hard for me to cope with…to understand what he's telling in the first place and then cope with the portion that he's teaching us. And then the whole lot of assignments in a subject that I hardly understood, was very challenging.*" In

addition to this, being unfamiliar with the format of the assignments "where you have to think out of the box" added to the stress. She stated that she felt uncomfortable asking questions during the class: "What if my question is so stupid? What if my question is (not) even worth asking?" After the first year, she reported that the academic challenges did not seem as stressful. Zune stated that she "got a hang of what they're (professors) trying to say. And then in my second year I hardly faced any problem." She is still uncomfortable asking questions during class, but she said that she has "all my questions written now, and…. I ask them all together," during the professor's office hours. "I could understand everything that the professor would say… if I don't, I could easily ask questions or just go to their office hours and talk to them."

Ritu indicated that she enrolled in the United States right after her graduation in India and did not have any work experience. She compared this with some of her other Indian friends who had work experience particularly related to coding. She added that this posed a problem for her as it took her time to complete her assignments, although she understood the concepts that her professors taught in the class. As the assignments kept piling up, she revealed that it caused her a lot of anxiety and stress. She shared that she used to call her parents and "mainly cry about my courses."

> "I selected a course that was very high on coding. Everyone else had working experience of at least 2-3 years in India. For me it was hard because, I was a fresh graduate from India and I did not have the experience that the others had. I used to understand the material but when it was time to code it, that is when I was lagging a lot. I was not that fast at submitting an assignment that was supposed to take a week. Sometimes, it used to take me three weeks to complete the one-week assignment. So, I was running late a lot.

That is when it hit me that yes, India does have a theoretical way of teaching, they do not have practical way. In India, even for the code, they ask very common questions, that you can mug-it (Rote Learning) up and just write it. Here it was very different. Practical (application) has more importance here" (Ritu).

She said that she was in constant "fear" of failing. "*In my mind I was like, I might fail this. This was the biggest one (challenge).* She indicated that it "took me six months to understand how to structure my remaining courses," so she could get a "full practical exposure" as well as good grades.

Bhanu encountered the most difficulties academically compared to the other participants. She enrolled in Master's in Astrophysics program in a university in Oklahoma, because of the reputation of the university. In addition, she wanted to work with one particular professor in the department because of his research background. "I wanted to start the research right away too. So, I just went to the professor and he said, you can't start right away. You need these, these, these, (course requirements). I said, yeah, I can just prepare myself. And I just told him I can do it." So, in addition to focusing on her coursework, she was also trying to meet the requirements set by the professor. "…because it was my first semester, and I was just getting used to everything. It was so much on my plate and I didn't know how to proceed. I didn't know how to handle, so I was not able to." The coursework that she took was not what she expected. "Astrophysics was not what I thought… it was more a hands-on experience. I am not a programming person and physics was full of programming. Another course that she found "very demanding" was the electrodynamics course. In order to pass the course, she "managed to put it (focus) on my electrodynamics, but because I focused too much on electrodynamics, which was

the hardest, I did not focus too much on the easier ones (courses)". She also explained that she faced academic issues because she was not used to the new "methodology" of teaching in American.

> "*In India, you just have an innovation, you have to know how to do the derivation. And then you just have to know how to solve it. But here it's like, they'll show you how to solve a problem. And then you are facing new challenges. They want you to apply your knowledge to some fields. And it was so hard. That methodology was very new to me. That approach was very different*" (Bhanu).

She added that she was also uncomfortable asking questions when she did not understand something. She was already shy and although the professors were welcoming, she "didn't know how to (ask questions). I mean I didn't know that was the way here." Another issue that she faced was not having other Indian students in her program to connect with. She stated that most of the students in her class were Chinese and three were from Nepal, who spoke their own language. "They were all from China and they all spoken Chinese …so there were no people who kind of like really spoke English. So, I was not able to, you know, talk to anyone…it was just so hard."

Enrolling in the spring semester meant that she did not have access to some introductory courses. In addition to facing difficulties in the coursework, she also did not have any friends from India or otherwise. The "first semester was the hardest. There was just so much on my plate and I didn't know how to proceed. I didn't know how to like, handle everything." Despite working hard and "living in the library" she said she failed in one of the courses and asserted that she did not receive any support from the university itself.

"I just asked them if I would get another chance, like my grades, weren't too bad. In most universities, you would just be on probation and it wasn't just me. We were only four of us. And two of us were in trouble. So, I was trying to ask them, if I could get another chance or something. They just kind of told me, that it's hard. No universities would be ready to accept you because you already failed in this one and for some weeks, I did believe them" (Bhanu).

Her self-esteem suffered immensely as she constantly thought about her family and how their respect would be damaged if her relatives came to know that she failed. "I did not want to give up on my education." So, I just thought maybe I should like take a break. I wanted to take a break from academics and I've always wanted to do Bible studies." She transferred to a bible study school in Oklahoma to maintain her F1 status as she figured out about the colleges and universities. She admitted that she felt that the university did not care about the success of international students and felt judged for not being able to handle the coursework.

Food Related Transition Challenges

Six of the participants were vegetarian either because of their religion or by personal choice. While all the participants mentioned missing Indian food, in general, some faced severe challenges because they followed strict vegetarian diet. Food was one of the first issues that participants encountered and was even a priority to find roommates and accommodation. For example, Ritu stated that before coming to the United States, she searched online among Facebook and Watsapp groups to look for roommates, who were specifically Indian, women and vegetarian. She posted on a group titled "Vegetarian Housing in USA" to find a roommate and accommodation in the vicinity of her university. She added that she rejected many potential

choices because they revealed that they "ate egg" because "then that is not a vegetarian, then you are not vegetarian," she stated emphatically. Finally, she ended up with a roommate who was a Punjabi[5] (from the state of Punjab), who ate meat. She said that the "only thing that I asked her is- are you going to cook it?" So, her roommate said that she does not know how to cook meat. However, she emphasized that if they go to a restaurant, "*she will eat chicken and even bring leftovers back home. And then we decided, okay then let's have different utensils and you will not use my utensils. And that was very big thing to figure out. I think of more than figuring out my masters (course) for me, this was a very big chang*e" (Ritu).

Zune, who is a Muslim, also stated that "food was a very big challenge" for her as she was used to eating halal[6] food which was hard to find in the United States. "*I definitely did miss Indian food when I came here. My mom would always only cook halal meat because of religious belief but here, it's super hard. I used to fast in India, like all throughout the month of Ramadan, but here I have not fasted even one single year*" (Zune).

She added that although it was "easy to find Indian stores and Indian food" where she lived, she was not very sure they used halal meat. In addition, she added that the cost of eating out daily was also another deterrent to eat at Indian restaurants. "I could not very easily afford delicacies in Indian food because it was expensive, they're all quite expensive. It was also very expensive to go to the Indian stores and get the ingredients and make it. So that was one challenge." She managed this challenge by learning how to cook basic food "just to survive, for example, dal (lentils) rice…or something just basic to get through your hunger." She also

---

[5] From the state of Punjab in northern India. Many restaurants in India, American, UK are run by Punjabi chefs who are famous for their meat dishes.
[6] Foods permitted as per Islamic law, particularly meat that is permitted (pork and shellfish are not permitted) and slaughtered as per regulations in the religion.

detailed that she teamed up with her roommate to cook together, source ingredients and shop for groceries. They stocked up on Indian spices and cooking related utensils whenever either one traveled back to India for vacation. "*Whatever I could, I cook at home with my roommates, just basics just to survive. I did end up bringing huge amount of masalas[7] that lasted almost a year. Now if we (she and her roommate) go back to India, both of us end up bringing so much of masala and spices, we set us all throughout the year. We also got three pressure cookers and a mixer-grinder from India"* (Zune).

Food is a very important aspect for Zune, not just because of her religion, but because of her health condition. She was diagnosed with a health condition at a young age and thus must closely watch what she eats to regulate her blood sugar and weight. She indicated that she was "stressed thinking" about managing her health condition and weight. After enrolling in the Ph.D. program, the stress has compounded as she "hardly got time to go exercise," with "just sitting in the lab, working all the time." She does not like the "version of me" now because of her food and exercise habits. For Zune, the issues surrounding around food are important enough to impact her mentally. "*…heating up frozen food, not eating fresh food, eating all food from outside and not taking care of health…. all of these things also affected me mentally"* (Zune).

Shubh also enrolled in the Ph.D. program after graduating with a master's degree at the same university. Despite living away from home for six years to pursue her undergraduate education and career in Mumbai, she stated that she did not find food to be a challenge in India. While studying in IIT Bombay, she said the "food was really good. I never had to think about cooking it." She was a vegetarian by choice and "after moving (to the United States), I saw that

---

[7] Indian spice mix

vegetarian options are really minimal. So, I had to eat meat." She added that "eating leftovers" was something she was "not used to" but something that she "still had to do a lot" because "cooking takes so much of time." She maintained that the changes in her food habits led to several health issues and doctor visits.

> *"My first two years was so many visits to the doctors. I was trying to adapt to this new environment and my health took a lot of toll because of that. Eating leftovers did not work well with my body and eating different kinds of food that I was not used to, like cheese and meat, definitely was not working for me. But I was not aware at that time that all these things were affecting my body. It took me a while to understand. My stomach issues showed up so promptly I had to visit doctors"* (Shubh).

Kashi also shared similar experience where she stated that food related issues presented a challenge when she came to the United States. Although she knew how to cook, getting the groceries was a challenge because of lack of reliable transportation. "So here that was very difficult, especially getting Indian groceries was so difficult because there is no bus stop in front of our grocery store." She added that not owning a car also made it a "big deal" to go grocery shopping. She maintained that she "used to cook a lot" during her first year here, but as the coursework became more challenging, she could not find time to do the cooking.

> *"...but the master's is so difficult. We have so much coursework. It was so difficult to manage cooking after a point*" (Kashi).

She also did not like to eat at the Indian restaurants near her university as she didn't "feel they are good" and were more suited for the American palate. Eventually, she stated that her

74

health was affected because "my body was not accepting the food. It messed up my digestive system after coming here…because everything was frozen and has so many preservatives." Although she was not a strict vegetarian and ate meat despite her religious restrictions, she revealed that she "never had so much meat back in India. Until my 15 years of age my meat intake was once in two weeks," while here she ate it almost every day, which she also believed contributed to her developing health issues. After developing complications that impacted her health severely, she started "going to a GI specialist since two years." She added that it has been "depressing" to deal with her health problems and acknowledged that it has "very, very bad impact on my mental health."

Sam, on the other hand, preferred vegetarian food although she did not have any religious restrictions. She is enrolled the master's program at a well-known university in New York and lived on campus and stated that she "haven't still gotten used to" the food in America. She complained that "every time I go to the cafeteria, there is always something that has beef and pork. I have not been happy about the food in general. I always have to go out and buy food." Although she had access to varied food options outside the campus, she was not happy that she had to constantly spend additional money even after purchasing a meal plan.

Maya, who is a strict vegetarian, came prepared after hearing about the food issues from her friend who went to college with her in India. Her friend came to the United States a year earlier and educated Maya about the living conditions here. Knowing how to cook also "helped me when I came to America because I cook most of the times and save money, because when you come as a student on student loans, it's too much." She shared that she was surprised when she went to Amsterdam for an internship, though. She presumed it would be "more difficult" to

find vegetarian food in Amsterdam but instead said that "surprisingly vegan culture is way ahead in Amsterdam than what it is in here America." She found several places that were "marked vegan and vegetarian food everywhere, so it was so easy to for me to find food over there."

Saving money was cited as an important reason to cook food at home for most participant. Participants learned how to cook to save money, so they did not have to eat at Indian restaurants. For example, Dhara explained that although "It was easy to find Indian stores and Indian food" in America, students "were not able to afford to eat there daily, because they're all quite expensive." She added that she "started cooking for myself" because of the "financial aspect." She believes that cooking her own food helps her "control what goes into your food, you know, there was no need to go out and spend money on outside food. You could just cook for yourself" (Dhara).

Joe shared that she didn't like to cook but she still developed "a lot of '*Jugad'* (food hacks) to save on time, energy and for saving money." Alka also disliked cooking but since she lived with her cousin, they shared the work together. Reema, Bhanu and Appu were all more open to different kinds of cuisine and food, including meat. Bhanu said she was excited to try different American foods in the cafeteria but her initial excitement wearied off after three months. Participants who knew how to cook before they came to America and those that were not strictly vegetarian, such as Reema, Bhanu and Appu seemed to experience less stress compared to those that did not. In addition, Reema and Appu lived in the city, where they can find Indian food very easily, which maybe an additional reason why the stress related to food was not prominent for them.

Career Related Challenges

Participants reported facing several challenges as they graduated from the university and transitioned into the work-related environment. Participants who were pursuing their Ph.D. did not report any career-related challenges. Dhara stated that she was "really really anxious" in her last semester as she was "looking for internships." She stated that the "entire process was very demoralizing…because it just felt for a very long time."

> *"Am I the only one who is not getting this, because among my social circle, I was the last one to get an internship. That was the time I was asking my brother, am I doing something wrong? Am I not capable enough for doing this?"* (Dhara).

She didn't want to share the struggle with her parents as she did not want to worry them. But she shared that she felt that "there was a lot of negativity that I think I was giving out" during that period.

Alka stated that she faced difficulties during the interviews, particularly related to behavioral questions. She maintained that "language fluency was the biggest challenge in getting an interview" for her. She said she was "very confident when it came to technical questions" but felt uncertain during the other part of the interview. "…they have behavioral questions that I was not even aware of until I came here. So that transition was a little difficult for me." She stated that she lacked in communicating skills, particularly good vocabulary. "I feel inferior, when I'm talking to him (the interviewer). They put it in such a beautiful way, which I cannot do." Alka added that even "getting an internship is really, really hard" for her. Here you will have to keep applying for so many companies and you will not even hear from them." She expressed concern

that she did not even "know how to network," and added that "if you have a referral, you will get an interview in two days."

Maya also shared similar experiences and said that "job hunting was difficult" for her because, in America, getting a job is all about networking. She added that "designing industry is completely networking. Half the jobs are not even published on platforms such as LinkedIn." She stated that it is hard for international students, particularly in the master's programs as they have two years to quickly build network, which can be very challenging. "*When you are in grad school, you have even less time, two years is not enough to network. I didn't have many friends and connections.*" She acknowledged that the career services at her university helped her with her resume. However, she believed that her professors, who were active in the field and have several connections, could have provided her with some references. "I think my university did something, but my professors could have done lot more." In addition to the networking issue, it was also hard to find companies that would sponsor an H1[8] visa. "And it was not all studios that will do H1, you still have to look for a company to do your H1. So that was a challenge." It took her two years to find a job with a company that agreed to sponsor her visa after several internships including one in Amsterdam. "So, I took two years, like extending my degree by doing internships."

Kashi completed her degree in 2018 but continued to do internships for two years after that. She said she did not even think about asking for H1 sponsorship, because she did not want to lose her internship positions as well. "you ask for sponsorship, your chances of getting internship opportunities will also be reduced, because not everybody will sponsor." Kashi was

---

[8] International students on F1 visa must convert their immigration status to H1 visa after finding a job.

also very self-conscious about her accent because … "sometimes I'll speak, and they will not understand. So, if it is once or twice, it is fine. But if it is like I have to repeat two or three times, it's sometimes embarrassing." Another challenge with language that she faced was with usage of idioms, which she said she often misunderstood. "*My current company, they use a lot of idioms. One day, I went to my supervisor for help, and she said, I would do this, this and this. I thought she said that she will do it and left it for her to solve*" (Kashi).

Bhanu expressed frustration that her immigration status has hindered her career prospects. She exclaimed that although her interview is promising, the company backs out of the job offer after they find out she is not a citizen. "They all tell me, I'm the right fit and everything. I speak to them about this particular job goals and they're like, you are the right person, but the moment that they know that I'm not a citizen, it is like a no." She added that it is difficult to even get interviews sometime as other companies refuse to even interview international students. "If I look for other jobs, they say, we don't take international students." She feels that the entire situation is "unfair" despite having an American degree. "*At least for those who study here, they should give us a chance.*" The current immigration policy requires international students to get a job within 60 of applying for OPT[9]. Bhanu applied for OPT and due to this COVID situation, was afraid of not getting any job offers. "*I was planning to graduate in May 2020, and I was looking for a job. You need a job offering, like within the date. I had a one on one interview with my advisor. I just told her what my problem is. She was very helpful and extended my thesis*" (Bhanu).

---

[9] Optional Practical Training that allows students to legally work for a period of 12 months in America.

Practical/Lifestyle Related Challenges

       Saving Money. Most of the participants took loans via their parents' jobs or by mortgaging property and were extremely responsible about spending money. They tried to save money by living in an apartment with multiple roommates to save costs, cook food instead of eating out, and thinking about money in every aspect of their student lives. Ritu stated that her loans covered her first semester tuition and living expenses. Her dad was able to pay the tuition for the second semester, but she had to take care of her living expenses. She found a job on campus at the bookstore to support herself and was difficult at first because she had to stand continuously for eight hours. However, she said that the job helped her because "I used to get all the extra hours there so that I could make money." In order to save money, she lived in an apartment three other Indian women students in a one-bedroom near her university.

       Joe was so determined to help her father pay the bank loans so that her house would not be under mortgage, that she took "enough internships to pay back the loans." After enrolling in the Ph.D. program, her tuition was sponsored by her advisor and her on-campus job as a research assistant helps her pay the bills. She stated that one semester, she took a job in addition to her research assistant position to help pay back the loans. This impacted her grades because one of the courses she took was "very demanding" in terms of time. She quit the job to bring her grades back up the next semester and was proud to let me know that she also paid back all the loans in 2019 after she got a 11-month long internship. She described herself as a "miser" and said she would do everything she could to bring down her living expenses. All the participants, except one, admitted that they shared their apartment with other students to save on rent and living expenses. Saving money was a recurring sub-theme in many aspects of the participants' lives,

including food related issues, health insurance, socializing with friends, and accessing university services such as counseling.

Health Insurance. Food related transition challenges resulted in health issues, which were sometimes severe for many of the participants (as discussed previously). Some participants utilized health insurance to visit doctors and attend to the arising medical conditions. Participants indicated difficulty understanding the health insurance system in America including process of submitting claims.

Sam shared that it was initially difficult to understand the process of applying for health insurance. "how to take care of paperwork, getting your own health insurance, which one will be the best for you. That was something that was difficult for me." Though her aunt and uncle's family were in the United States, and helped her as much as they can, this was something that she "had to do by myself."

Dhara stated that the "whole health insurance system it was a little complicated because it was a lot to understand about what was going with the health insurance plan." She added that she had difficulty understanding "what's covered? What's not covered? what is my option?" One of the Indian students that she knew had to be rushed to the hospital and she worried that if she might face similar situation, then how will she handle the health insurance formalities.

Kashi asserted that she does not "*understand anything about insurance. There is a co pay thing, deductible, and then there is out of network. Because when we were in India, we never had these things like medical insurance.*" In the first year, she enrolled in the university health insurance and "didn't even use my insurance, I never got sick." So, she decided to purchase

cheaper insurance offered by an Indian company on the advice of her parents as the American

insurance offered by her school "was more expensive." However, she contracted the flu soon

after and navigating between the Indian and American insurance companies became a nightmare.

She had to go to the emergency and the "bill for emergency for two days was $6,000" and later

the "claim process was hectic."

> *"I was very scared initially because I was not able to understand anything. They were*
>
> *telling me, giving me so many forms to get done with the doctors, and the doctors here,*
>
> *were not able to understand the forms."* (Kashi).

She revealed that she was under "so much stress because of this $6,000 bill. My (health)

condition was, instead of improving, it was worsening. She stated that she was more distressed

because of her medical bill than her actual health condition. "I was crying for the entire night,

not for my flu, not my congestion, but because of the bill, it's like the doctors here don't

understand anything." Her bill was sent to the collection agencies, who would constantly send

her emails and call her. Between communicating with the agency and the health insurance in

India (at different time zones) and the hospital, it took a year for the bills to be cleared. In that

time, she faced extreme duress because "I was scared if I am not doing it on time, they will give

me fine. I did not know how collect agencies work, I thought they will take me to court." She

shared that she felt like she was "dying. Nobody is there to help, and I am all alone. And I was

scared. That was the first time in my life when I was facing that kind of situation" (Kashi).

Some participants shared that despite purchasing health insurance, they rarely use it

mainly because they do not understand the process. For example, Bhanu indicated that she

"really don't know how to do anything with that (health insurance)." So, whenever she faces a

health issue, she calls her friend who is a doctor in the United States and asks for help. "I have a friend and she's a doctor, so she kind of helps me with them and she just sends them (medicines) to me." Zune and Joe stated that they wait until they go to India to get any major health check-ups done, for fear of being charged a lot of money here in America. "I would hesitate even for my own physical health, if I find out something cannot be reimbursed by the insurance." They stated that issues related particularly to dental and vision, which are not covered by university insurance, are ignored until they go to India during breaks. Zune said that she has been "ignoring my vision and dental problems" while in America, and waits until she goes "back to India, where I get my eyes, and everything checked." Some students stated that they would wait or ignore their health issues as much as they possibly can, rather than deal with the health insurance forms and claim process. "I would just not go out and check it" (Alka). Joe believed that the school can help by giving students "a better heads up" before they come to America, particularly about the health insurance formalities, in addition to having detailed sessions during orientation and a "summary chart on the website" (Joe).

Transportation. Lack of reliable transportation was another issue that participants listed as one of the challenges they faced in America. Joe stated that on the first day that she landed in the United States, she found out from fellow students who traveled with her on the plane that she cannot get a uber or a lyft from the airport to the hotel near her university. Coming from Mumbai, she stated that she was under the impression that every place in a developed country such as America will have easy access to transportation services. "I was under the impression that I can take a cab to the hotel as my lease was going to start after two days." She said she was "shocked" to hear that there was no cab service between the airport and the town where her university was located. Although the International Students Association and the International

Student Services provide a free shuttle, students are supposed to register for it in advance. After she got to the airport, she found a student representative and stated that she was relieved when he said, "don't worry, we will drop you off at the hotel."

Joe also discussed the lack of transportation around her university where students shop for groceries and essential items. Just like other international students, she did not have a car as buying a car can also be an issue without credit score and social security number for international students who just arrive. She chose to live close to the campus along with other Indian international students to avoid transportation issues. However, getting access to store for essential items such as groceries was hard sometimes.

> *"The sad part is that they aren't any government buses. There is only one bus that goes twice on the route. Indian grocery store was not on the bus route. Although it was like about 20-minute walk, it used to get very difficult to walk with all the groceries in the snow"* (Joe).

Kashi shared that she had similar experiences where she faced difficulties because of lack of transportation, particularly when they had to access Indian stores. "…especially getting Indian groceries was so difficult because there is no bus stop in front of our grocery store. I don't know why. I feel we should have bus stop near the grocery store" (Kashi). Shubh indicated that she did not face some of the transportation challenges because her husband was already here and owned a car. However, she said that it took her "longer than usual to get comfortable" driving on the other side of the road due to different rules in India. She stated that "for first six months just trying to get right and left figured out in my head. I used to sit in the passenger seat and felt very disoriented. It took me longer than usual to get comfortable" (Shubh).

84

Accommodation. Most participants arranged for their accommodation before they even arrived in the country. They connected with other international students, particularly Indian students, to find apartments to share. Reema stated that she could not find a place to rent and her university did not offer housing to master's students. Reema stated that she had a "lot of problem" trying to find an accommodation. "I did try finding accommodation here, but it's kind of like very weird." She found that the apartments that were offered were mostly had "many roommates" referring to multiple students sharing the same apartment. She indicated that the college housing was "not given to the masters. It is for PhD and MD students only." She stated that with the help of her program director, she was able to find accommodation at the university.

Weather. Participants stated that they were prepared for the cold weather because they either heard it from other students or researched it themselves. However, it still took some time to get used to. Alka stated that "winters are so depressing." She said that she was from South India where temperatures do not "go below 15 degrees Celsius. And here I started experiencing minus degrees," which she stated took her sometime to get accustomed to. "I used to wear a sweater on top of the blouse. Again, another jacket and another jacket." She was always thinking about "being prepared" before going out in the winter, because if she forgets something, then "you die."

Homesickness. All the participants stated that they missed their family and friends in India. For example, Joe recalled that her first Diwali[10] was on the day of Halloween and "*it depressing as hell because everybody around me was celebrating darkness and here I was habituated to celebrating light. It didn't feel like Diwali, although I was wearing new clothes,*

---

[10] An important Hindu festival celebrated across India where people light oil lamps, and fireworks.

deep cleaned my room and video-called my family and did the Diwali pooja virtually. I started

crying on the phone, my mom started crying, my brother started crying" (Joe). Shubh recalled

how much she missed her friends. "*In India when I used to hang out, we did different things.*

Jamming session, play instruments, making up songs. I missed my friends and family a lot during

that time" (Shubh). Zune also mentioned that she missed her family, particularly her

grandmother.

Gender-Related Experiences

Participants shared how gender socialization impacted their experiences here in America

but it was interesting to see that both the married women shared similar experiences. For

example, Appu mentioned that she "carried a lot of those gender roles" that she was used to in

India to America. While she studied in New York, her husband was enrolled in a college on the

west-coast. She stated that whenever she visited him, she would "always cook the food that his

mother used to cook at home. I thought anything that I wanted to eat as wrong." However, she

and her roommate, back in New York, "experimented like crazy with food" by cooking all kinds

of different things she like. Shubh also mentioned that she "never thought about cooking" before

she got married. "I had never thought about cooking. I had to think that, Oh, I have to feed my

husband. Not that that was my major responsibility. He was the main cook in the house, but still

I felt some responsibility towards it" (Shubh).

Zune brought up the issue of bullying in the lab by her "senior" which she did not

directly relate to gender-based discrimination. The "bullying" impacted her mentally and made

her question her capability. "*In my lab, there was a person who was a bully to me, my senior, in*

the labs. So I used to get very conscious that (long pause) somebody is not happy with my work

or somebody thinks I'm not fit for anything. And how am I going to prove my work? Am I fit for

something? I have had this doubt, like, can I even do the PhD or not?" (Zune). She spoke very

slowly as though she was trying not to reveal too much information. She added that the because

of this experience, she has "broken down mentally many times after starting PhD" and constantly

questioned herself if she was "even eligible to do this thing or not?" She stated that due to

"constant counseling" from her family and her roommate, she was able to calm down and

reassured herself to "just keep working and then you'll make it."

Joe also faced similar situation of bullying in her lab, although she related it to her

gender. She feels that anytime she identifies an issue, her lab mates who are all men, assume that

she is not smart enough. She observed that any time anytime she went with an issue to her senior

lab partner, he will start resolving the issue or "debugging" from scratch assuming she made a

mistake. However, when her male, Nepali lab mate goes to the senior lab partner (who is Indian),

he starts only from the last step where the Nepali lab mate stopped. *"Most other guys in tech that*

I work, particularly desis[11] for that matter, treat me as someone that doesn't know what I am

doing. But despite having a computer degree and several years of coding experience, still these

guys doubt my capability because I am a woman. It sucks!" (Joe).

Shubh shared that she was the "only woman" in her lab until very recently. She said tht

she only noticed it in American where "sarcasm is a way of humor" and that "men communicate

and operate very differently" in relation to that. "I did not understand sarcasm and earlier I used

to feel, that so mean to say, why is it a joke. It took a while for me to understand that-okay for

---

[11] Desi, pronounced as "They- See", is a loose term for the cultures and products of South Asia and their diaspora, derived from the Ancient Sanskrit word desh meaning Land or Country. "Desi" countries include Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

some men, sarcasm is a way of humor and they are just trying to make a joke and I should laugh right now." She added that the new female student in the lab also faced similar issues with the lab culture. "She also struggled initially" and Shubh reassured her that "these people just talk like this because that's how they are. We should not take it very personally." She said that she doesn't understand a lot of their humor and feels "left out" and observed that Indian men were able to understand; American men were able to understand; But women were not able to understand." She said that they would comment something about someone's age. They also complimented her clothes, and she tried to quickly defend herself by saying "I wear professional clothes" but due to the inappropriateness of the timing, she was not comfortable. She never confronted them or spoke to her advisor about it. She just assumed that is how men talk and that women express differently. She also related an incident in her lab where she was dropped off an email chain, and when she asked the senior lab partner, he responded by saying "no reason, just like that." She added that she "didn't know what to say—after I asked him to add me back, he nodded, but that never happened." This email was important for her to know about the maintenance of a machine she was working on to carry her experiments. She had to keep checking with other people about the update because she was not in the email chain. When I asked if she thought about talking to someone about it, Shubh indicated "I didn't think it was important to take it to the professors. If I call out, he will get insecure and it will escalate. I just wanted to leave it" (Shubh). She chose to ignore it despite the trouble she was facing, which can also exacerbate the stress she was already going through with her divorce.

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, students found ways to cope by accessing the resources that were available to them. The section below will discuss the various support systems that the participants utilized to help cope with challenges during transition. The coping factors

will be discussed below as a response to my second research sub-question: *What are Indian international female graduate students' perceptions of the factors that helped support their transition?*

Support Systems

Family

All the participants mentioned their parents as being their biggest support system. They speak to their parents daily. Joe mentioned that her "Mom has been my super-strength," while Zune shared that the "main support system for me is my mom and my grandma." Maya stated that she draws "courage from my parents. (They say) if anything happens, we are here for you. Just take a flight and come back." Shubh also revealed that her parents are "most supportive" and that she "learned the importance of this lifestyle (healthy/yogic) from my mom." Alka also stated that "whatever happens or whatever I do, they support me. I don't have to be scared of anything."

Dhara relied on her brother, in addition to her parents, for support. Referring to her transition into the United States, she said that she had a "very soft landing" because of her brother, who was already working in the United States. She said that she sometimes shared more with her brother about her issues than with her parents, particularly during the time she was stressed about internships and job prospects. "I think that I tell my brother something first, before my parents, because I don't want to worry my parents."

Bhanu also stated that her parents "support me in every possible way" and that she does not "get any pressure" from their side about marriage. When she moved from Oklahoma to the northeast, her father traveled to America just to help her move and drove across the country.

Appu expressed that her "mind-set, goals and ambition, desires and dreams" are all "shaped primarily" by her mother. Reema and Kashi also agree that their parents are their primary support system. Kashi added that her father "never leaves me by myself" and always flies to Delhi from Bihar every time she visits India to see her off.

Ritu mentioned her Aunt as a support system too. Her Aunt, who lives in Louisiana, convinced her parents to send her to the United States and traveled to California to pick her up at the airport and get her settled in. Zune also stated that her "parents were not ready to send me to Europe. They said that there was no one from our family there." However, they agreed to send her to the United States because of her Aunt, who traveled from San Francisco and met her at the airport and helped her during move in. Sam was also close to her uncle's family and stated that her cousins helped her to cope emotionally, not only during her transition, but also when her mother passed away due to cancer.

Friends/Roommates/Other Indian International Students

Participants reported checking online among international Indian student groups before coming to the United States to find accommodation and a roommate. Kashi stated that she connected with one of the women who was studying at her university, who provided her information about the conditions at the university. She also provided a phone card that can be activated once she lands in the United States. "I made her friend only through WhatsApp, because, before coming here, they have all these WhatsApp and Facebook groups where they connect. So, this girl helped me with the sim" (Kashi). Joe stated that she connected with other students who were flying to New York from Mumbai and they booked flights so they can be on the same flight to help each other out. "I actually flew in with 10 other students on the same

90

flight and four of them were from the same university" (Joe). Ritu said that it helps talking to her friends who are other international students from India and sharing any difficulties she may be facing. "I talk with my friends and it really helps because all of us are going through the same thing" (Ritu). Ritu shared a one-bedroom apartment with three other Indian women international students to save on rent. She stated that they were very close and helped each other out. Zune indicated that her roommate was "like my family" to her, who provided her emotional support, and she also did the same for her roommate.

Dhara expressed that she and her roommate make the 20-minute walk from the grocery store, fun by singing Indian songs. Kashi stated that she and her roommates made a schedule to keep track of cooking and other chores together. "we were four girls in four single rooms. So, every day one girl would cook. So, it was good."

Most participants except Reema, stated that they shared apartments with other Indian women, who were also studying at their university. They either connected with each other online before or after coming to the United States. They shared their chores and cooked together to save costs while helping each other emotionally during difficult times. Participants admitted that they were more comfortable forming relationships with other Indian female students than male students. One reason could be that they grew up in a society which segregated students by gender in their schools and colleges. This may have conditioned them to connect with and feel more comfortable with other Indian women. For example, Joe stated that she was the first student during orientation and as she waited, she saw only male students entering the room. She stated that as soon as she saw an Indian woman student entering the room, they instantly smiled and waved at each other. "I was so happy to see her and she was so happy to see me because she also

91

saw only guys and then she saw me. I waved at her and she waved at me as if we knew each other for so long. She sat next to me." She added that they sat next to each other for the rest of the year as they were in the same program.

Most of the participants stated that they were surrounded by only Indian students in their programs. Only three participants reported to have friends who were American Bhanu, Reema and Appu. Bhanu was enrolled in Oklahoma (where she did not find Indian students in her program) and lived in shared housing with American students. She stated that her American roommates, who were "younger" than her were shocked to hear that "I've never drank alcohol." Appu and Reema both live in the city and stated that they often go with their American and other friends to bars.

Appu stated that she primarily socializes with other Indian women, most of whom are also Bengali, but she also has other friends who are American, Japanese and Hungarian that she socializes with. She expressed that she has "so many females friends who are ambitious and career driven, and they want to do things with their life and just don't want to take **** from men. And that is amazing. Like, I have never had female friends like this" (Appu).

Reema stated that among her "batchmates," two of them are American and one is Chinese. One person (American male) does not go out with them and "usually stays alone." She added that the rest of them "mostly three of us, always hang out together. Sometimes after the assignment, we used to go chat and sit during happy hour and get a drink and chat. So we had a nice social life. We did go to few parties together" (Reema).

Socializing with American Students. Kashi said that when she stayed in the university housing, she was by herself and so she emailed the housing staff for Indian female roommates. The reasoned that she would be "more comfortable living with Indians because of the culture match and everything. And also because of the food habits." She felt that there would conflict related to food and cooking, if she had an American roommate. "…if there are Americans, they would cook everything. And then in the same vessel, we will have to share. So, I didn't know how I will feel if they are cooking a lot of beef." She added that she heard that "Americans are not able to tolerate the strong smell of the spices. So, I was concerned." However, she said that she now has an American roommate and does not have any problems. Kashi's concerns may be shared by other Indian students who assume that there will be a cultural conflict between them and an American roommate, if they lived together. This could discourage them to openly seek roommates other than Indians.

Dhara stated that she tried to "fit in" because "You just don't want to stand out, you want to blend it enough so that you do not draw attention." She said that she tries to blend in by mimicking the American accent. "sometimes if I am talking to a complete stranger and if I feel like they won't understand what I am saying I will switch my accent." Along with the awareness that the American students may not understand her, she felt that there is lack of "really deep conversations" with American students while the conversations are more fluid with Indian students. The factor of not knowing what to say to the American students also makes it difficult to have a conversation. Dhara also added that she is always thinking about "not crossing a boundary" with her American friends," which is not something that she is "mindful of when I am talking to someone from India" (Dhara).

Religion/Spirituality

Participants also cited their religion, culture and spiritual practices as a source of support. For example, when Kashi faced stress due to her experience with health insurance, where she was being contacted by collection agencies for nearly a year, she stated that she felt "all alone" and "depressed." This is when she found a Hindu religious club on her campus. "I am part of a spiritual club. So, when I was facing challenges, I went to that club and I liked it a lot. So, it's like a Hindu club and they read Bhagavad-Gita." She added that because of the club, she is able to go to Hindu temple together, where she stated, that she has met other Indian families.

> *"Because of course I do not have car, they will give us pick-ups, and we will go to temples together. We meet so many other people and families who have settled down here 30, 40 years ago. When I was not in that club, I did not know anyone. So that is why I felt so lonely. But now through the club, I knew so many Indian families. And now if anything like that happened, I have people to call"* (Kashi).

Bhanu came from a Pentecostal Christian family and her faith was very important to her. She stated that "the only thing" that her parents checked before sending her to the United States was if "I had a church" nearby. "In ****, it was a Malayali, Pentecostal church and we connected through that to other people." She expressed that she was "blessed" and that "every Sunday when I go to church, they always take me to their houses." She asserted that they helped her a lot during the stressful time she was facing in college. "They were very helpful. They were like a family."

94

Zune stated that she tries to do her best to follow her faith in America, which she believes keeps her sane. "*Namaz[12]*, I just do it every morning before I go to campus. I know someone is watching out for me…and that someone who is watching over me has got my back. So that's how I keep myself calm." (Zune).

Khusbu stated that her spirituality and yoga practice gives her strength to deal with the divorce and other pressures that she was experiencing. "My spirituality, my yoga practice –I practice yoga every day for two hours and I derive all my strength and clarity in thought from that."

Institutional Support

Career Services. All the participants utilized career services to mostly update their resume according to American professional standards. Zune reported utilizing career services and said that "I had my resume that was super long, so the staff member advised me. She said that I know it might be the trend in India, but in the United States a good resume is only a one page. So, she helped me to organize my resume." Alka also had a "one-one meeting with my career advisor. She said that if you want to get a job here, you really have to network." She stated that the advisor "helped through the whole process of networking." Sam maintained that her career services was very useful because they "gave me opportunities for interview with alumni members. They helped me navigate their portal to find jobs" (Sam).

Zune was also aware of academic support services. "I know few of my friends who have been tutors, and few of my friends who have taken that service." But she herself has not utilized

---

[12] Muslim prayer ritual, which is required to be done every day and five times on a Friday.

it. Kashi stated that the academic support services were only for undergraduate students and maintained that the university should provide such services to grad students as well. Academic support. One university on the west coast offered free basic courses and although Ritu was facing trouble in keeping with the coding assignments, she took those courses which helped her keep her grades up.

International Student Services (ISS). The ISS at one university provided a free shuttle to the university and participants who used the service deeply appreciated it. The shuttle was offered by the university on move-in day and ran loops between the airport and the dorms. However, the international student's club at this university, with the help of the ISS, operated the shuttle service the entire week of move-in for international students. The international students themselves volunteered to greet and direct the incoming students at the airport. They even dropped the students at their hotels or shared housing, wherever it was located. Joe, who was not aware of the transportation issue before she landed, said she was stressed knowing that she may not get a cab from the airport. But she stated that the student greeter at the airport assured her stating "don't worry we will drop you off" even though she was not signed up for the service. She said this had a very positive impact on her about the resources provided by the university. She signed up to be a PAL, which is the support service that teams incoming international students with international students who are already here and is very active in the international student's club. Students also believe that they benefited from clubs such as Global Union which organize events for intercultural programs for students from all the countries.

Mentors and Professors. Academic staff such as professors and mentors played a prominent role in helping international women students from India feel "at home" and help

significantly in their acculturation. Bhanu reported that professors and mentors at her new university took an active interest in the well-being of the students and communicated freely and were ready to answer questions. She stated that they are very friendly and approachable. Bhanu recounted the time she would stand up every time her professor walked in out of habit. "*So I was a TA with one of the professors. Every time he walked in, I would just stand up just like how you, how you would do in India. And I would just greet him and I would call him professor.*" She said the professor always told her to stop doing that and call him by his name. This was in stark contrast to her previous university experience.

Joe stated that one semester, she took "so many jobs" in addition to the RA position, because she wanted to help her father pay off the loans. She admitted that her advisor warned her against taking the extra job because of the kind of coursework she had that semester. She did not heed to his advice as she thought she could handle it and as a result, her grades suffered. "My advisor told me this one course would be very demanding, You shouldn't take a job." Finally, he told her that he can either pay her tuition or pay her the RA stipend. "He said I will either pay your tuition or pay your bills. I asked him to pay the tuition because I can be a miser with the bills."

Kashi believes that her advisor is "very good" and is like a "motherly figure" to her. Kashi added that she usually shares her problems with the advisor, who is "always very supportive." Kashi added that her advisor always "listens to me, she is very patient. She will always give me the solutions. And when I was sick, actually, I went to her and she helped me communicate with my employer as I was not able to do that."

Shubh stated that she was working so hard in the first year of her Ph.D. program and was facing a lot of health issues. When she needed time to "to look after myself, he was kind enough to give me that time" and added that her advisor was "very supportive."

Counseling Services. Despite facing challenges and mental stress, only three of the 12 participants accessed counseling services. One of them, Appu, was already going to therapy in India and continued it once she came to America. The second participant, Shubh, who availed the service went to couple's therapy with her husband, but they eventually decided to separate. The third participant, Maya, who went to counseling services did so because her Dominican friend encouraged her to. Among them only Appu believed that speaking to a therapist helped them. The other two felt that it did not particularly help them because they felt the counselors did not understand their cultural background. According to Anderson et. al., (2012), counselors need to be "sensitive to cultural variations in the meaning" of what they hear from clients whose culture is different from theirs (p. 178). Shubh admitted that the counselor was genuine in trying to understand and help her but she felt there was a "gap" in how she perceived the problem, particularly related to arranged marriage in India. Shubh reported that she did not feel encouraged to continue the sessions because she did not believe they were helping.

Zune stated that her university does a very good job of advertising counseling services and she is well-aware of them. However, she did not use them mainly because of lack of clarity and understanding related to the cost. Her understanding was that "they don't provide free counseling. You will have to pay. And what you pay will not be reimbursed by the insurance, is going to be maybe expensive." She commented that health insurance was by itself quite expensive and a cause of apprehension.

"*Every single dollar here, spending every single dollar hits a nerve in the brain. I would hesitate even for my own physical health; I think finding out something cannot be reimbursed by the insurance that I'm taking. For example, even vision and dental care is not supported by the insurance that I take. So, I have been ignoring my vision and dental problems while I am in the U.S. and only when I go back to India, I get my eyes, and everything done*" (Zune)

She added that cost was even more of a deterrent in accessing counseling services. "And then when you have to pay out of your pocket for your mental health, you would definitely hesitate," even though she and her friends "actually want to utilize their service, we figured out that, uh, it's gonna cost us too much." This sentiment seems to echo among her other Indian friends as the "we" she is referring to is her roommate. When asked if she approached the department to get clarity on the costs and coverage, Zune replied that she did not and only heard it from her friends who are also international students. This indicated that the students discussed among themselves about the services and costs but mostly rely on (mis)information or experiences of the other students.

They were also unclear about the cost of the services involved and relied on information from other students. There was a lack of efforts on the part of the students themselves, which they recognized to avail institutional support which was based on the conjecture that they may not be helpful. Cost or lack of clarity about the insurance coverage of mental health services was a major deterrent for participants who did not want to end up paying a lot of money for a service that they were not sure could help them. Hence, institutional support services may or may not be an asset depending on the utilization of the service by the student. It is also evident that merely

99

offering the services may not mean anything if the student does not utilize the service. It can only be considered an asset if the student benefits from it.

Participants' Perception of Transition Experiences

This section answers the third research sub-questions which is: How do Indian international female graduate students describe their personal experiences of transitioning to the United States? As discussed in detail in chapter 2, to successfully navigate through a transition, Anderson, et. al., (2012) envision three steps (discussed in detail in chapter 2): 1) Approaching Transitions, involving identifying the transition and how much it will change a person's life as well as where the individual is in the transition process. 2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System. 3) Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources. The resources that Anderson et. al., describe can be viewed as assets to a successful transition or liabilities, depending on how they are viewed by the participants and how they assist in her transition or make the transition more difficult. This section will review how the participants viewed their transition experiences, which will answer to the third research sub-questions (c).

According to Anderson et. al., (2012), individuals have "both assets and liabilities and, resources and deficits as they experience transitions" (p. 73). As Anderson et. al., describe, coping assets are any resources under the categories of situation, self, support, or strategies, which assist an individual in coping with, or successfully managing a transition (Anderson et. al., 2012). Coping liabilities are any resources as described by Schlossberg under the categories of situation, self, support, or strategies, which inhibit an individual's ability to cope with, or successfully manage, a transition. Below is a table of the study participants assets and liabilities.

Table 2

Assets or Liabilities: The Perception of Transition Experiences

4 S	Asset	Liability	Neutral
Situation	Trigger; Control; Previous experience with this type of transition; Perception of transition	Concurrent Stress	Timing; duration
Self	SES; ethnicity; Ego development; Optimism; Self-efficacy; Commitment and Values; Spirituality and resilience	Gender; health; ethnicity	Age
Support	Family units; Network of friends; Religious communities; Institutional support	Family; friends	Intimate relationships
Strategies	Self-reliance; Optimistic action; negotiation; information seeking; help seeking; adapting	Self-reliance vs advice seeking; selective ignoring	Self-assertion

Situation

An understanding of the situation includes an examination of elements such as the trigger

for the transition, the timing, the source or level of control over the situation, whether a role

change is involved, the duration of the transition, concurrent stress, and one's assessment of the

transition as positive or negative. For ten of the participants in this study, the trigger for the

transition was lack of opportunities in India and the pull factor associated with the higher quality

of American higher education, while for two of them it was associated with marriage. However,

this transition was anticipated and something that the participants prepared for.

In terms of role change, participants who were pursuing their higher education in India

did not necessarily have a major role change, although they were now expected to also take care

of their own responsibilities such as food, accommodation, adjust to the new academic structure,

while they had their parents take care of these things in India. For example, Kashi mentioned that

her father would take care of all her financial aspects and travel arrangements. "*When I was in

India, I never did any post office thing, any banking thing, any tickets, everything my father

would do* (Kashi). Zune also shared that she was not able to observe the month long fasting

during Ramadan because "there's no mom to wake you up early in the morning and give you all

the food that you want to survive through the day" (Zune).

Some participants, however, were working and already independent before their

transition to the United States, while two of the participants were married with one of them being

a homemaker after quitting her job. These participants experienced a shift in their roles from

working professionals, homemakers to students. One of the married participants also took on an

additional role of a wife as she came to the United States soon after her wedding. The authors

posited that role changes are an important aspect that could determine the "impact of a

transition". But because all the participants viewed this change as a "role gain" (p. 70), this

factor can also be considered an asset. However, this does not mean that they did not experience

stress as the authors reiterate that "some degree" of stress always accompanies transition

regardless of whether it involves a role gain or loss as the "actual event may carry with it feelings

of pain" (p. 70). As a result, I would generally view role change as a factor that could be positive or negative for some students depending on their situations. The participants were on a temporary student visa that is allocated only for the duration of their course. Although they wished to gain professional experience and work in America, they did not have any long-term plans to settle-down in America. Hence, the temporary nature of the transition did not seem to have any impact on the students as most of them did not speak about the duration of their course as either positive or negative.

Concurrent stress, which is defined as additional stress being experienced in other parts of the individual's life, was observed among two participants and both reacted differently. Appu was experiencing depression and expressed that she was extremely unhappy with her marital life living with her in-laws. "I was living in a hell before it is so like, I came to heaven" (Appu). For her, the transition provided an avenue to move away from the stressful part of her life and exemplified a unique opportunity to pursue her dream to be independent. Sam's mother was diagnosed with a terminal illness as soon as she arrived in the United States. For her, the transition presented additional stress as she has a hard time focusing on her academics as she was worried about her mother.

According to the authors, individuals who already experienced transition in their lives "will probably be successful at assimilating" a similar transition experience. This factor was significant among study participants as some women had moved away from their home to pursue their undergraduate education or for career prospects. These women were independent and lived away from home for more than a year and claimed that they did not experience as much stress. However, one participant said that she did not expect to miss her family as much as she did

because she had already lived by herself for four years before coming to the United States. She said that she was surprised she experienced "culture shock". The other participants, who moved to the United States straight from their parents' homes, claimed that their parents took care of many aspects of their lives such as cooking, managing financial aspects such as paying bills while they focused on their education. These women experienced more stress during initial transition in managing their adult life by themselves without the assistance or guidance of their parents. As such, food became the biggest challenge that was mentioned by the participants as almost none of the women cooked. Despite the stress, all the participants expressed a positive attitude about "living independently and managing their own life. Hence, the previous experience with similar transitions factor can be viewed as an asset.

I believe that one's assessment of the transition as positive or negative will vary from person to person. Before traveling to the United States, the participants planned for their accommodation, and spoke to other Indian international students who were enrolled in the university to look for roommates. They also made arrangements so that they can be picked up from the airport. They perceived the overall "situation" as something that was needed to improve their career prospects and thus improve their life. Hence, the perception of the situation factor can be described as positive for the participants and thus was seen as an asset by the participants.

Self

In the self-issues related to transition, Anderson et. al (2012) identified factors such as identity, autonomy, meaning-making and self-efficacy. An understanding of the self in terms of coping assets and liabilities includes an understanding of one's personal characteristics and psychological resources, including socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and

stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, ego development, outlook – optimism and

commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience. The authors explain ego development as

an assessment of maturity. "At a low level, the conformist will think in stereotypes, conform to

rules, and follow instructions without question. At a higher level, autonomous individuals are

more critical and better able to tolerate ambiguity" (p. 78). It depends on the degrees to which

they are optimistic or pessimistic in outlook, able to tolerate ambiguity, or inclined to act

autonomously (157).

Joe described herself as a "miser" in how she tackled the financial aspects such as her

tuition and living expenses. "I am a miser; a frugal minded person and I save a lot." As a

research assistant, she said that her tuition was paid for in the Ph.D. program and she received a

stipend for living expenses. However, she stated that since her father mortgaged the house to

fund her education, she wanted to pay the money back to the bank. In the course of that, her

grades suffered and her advisor gave her two options. "He told me, I will either pay your tuition

or pay your bills." She asked him to pay the tuition because she stated, "I can be a miser with the

bills" and that she can cut down her living expenses to bare minimum. She stated that she

worked hard and got her grades back up that semester and her tuition and living expenses were

restored.

Appu stated that she was "very popular" before getting married. "…in school and

college, I was so popular. So, I had a very inflated self-esteem." After getting married, she said

she felt "absolutely clueless" because "anything I did, they criticized everything about me. So, in

my head, everything I am is wrong." But she asserted that "I am more aware of myself now.

there is a lot of introspection that I did, and I knew that the person that I am now, and even though I get under confident, I also get over confidence, but I feel like I know myself" (Appu).

Anderson et. al., argue that a person's worldview must be considered when understanding sociocultural factors that may strongly influence a person identity development (p 74). For the participants who grew up in Indian culture, "collective identity supersedes the individual identity." Participants do not view themselves as separate from their families and friends. For example, Kashi described herself as "I'm not at all money minded" and stated that she liked taking care of her friends despite her own financial limitations. "I'm very caring and take care of a lot of my friends. You will not believe, in my house (the shared housing in America) every day I cooked for 8 to 10 people (other Indian international students), because they do not know cooking. They used to come to my place to eat because I used to feel so much pity. Because I used to feel, oh my God, they are missing the Indian food. So, I felt like a mother, that's why my friends everybody called me Mama, ****" (Kashi).

However, it is evident that some participants appreciated the value of individualism. For example, Sam stated that "I did not understand placing importance on yourself. But now I understand that taking care of yourself and having time for yourself is equally important" (Sam). Reema was the only participant who cited herself as her own support system while also mentioning "friends and family" as everybody else. "I actually, I'm more of an independent person, I am focused and goal oriented. So, I like doing things individually" (Reema).

When Shubh was going through the divorce, she stated that the couple's friends chose to ignore her and socialized with him. In that context, she expressed that although it was "very hurtful," she later realized that "I have the power to make this pain not as a suffering. I felt that I

106

am divorced. I have not lost my power, a few friends dropping out were just a mere fact. I am fortunate that I can always see a compassionate angle. There was nothing to overcome after that for me" (Shubh). Spirituality is one of the support factors outlined by Anderson et. al., (2012) and was an asset to many of the study participants.

When Bhanu had to drop out of the Astrophysics program at the University in Oklahoma, she said that "it was not easy" and that she was very stressed particularly about "what am I going to tell everyone?" referring to her relatives in India and the Malayali community that she got close to in Oklahoma. But then she motivated herself: "I have to get back on the track (to get into the physics program and earn a degree)."

Ritu, who described herself as a workaholic, stated that she dated someone in America but later broke up with him. The break-up was emotionally hard on her "because you do start judging yourself." But she said she overcame that by keeping herself busy with extra coursework and internships, which "helped me a lot because I was doing extra courses. Even when I was free at home, I used to enroll myself into some courses and study."

Dhara stated that "because I'm more from such a protective and sheltered environment" she felt unsure of herself sometimes. But she later developed confidence to make her own decisions, particularly during her internship in Illinois. "In those 6 months I felt like I became a little more aware of my surroundings, a little more sure of my judgment of people, of places, of the environment in general, but I felt a little more grown up going back. My self-confidence improved" (Dhara). She added that she felt "in charge of my own life."

As demonstrated above, the Indian women in my study demonstrated an impressive ability and willingness to think critically about their experiences and the experiences of specific and hypothetical others as well as to think critically about their own journeys in order to develop a set of philosophical ideals that fit their own lives. I did not note many comments from participants that would indicate a low level of ego development, self-confidence or self-efficacy as described here. Although they mentioned that they doubted themselves when faced with particularly academic and job search related challenges, they demonstrated self-assessment skills and clarified their values and their assumptions about themselves independently and in relation to their culture. Hence, the self-factor has been viewed mostly positively by the participants, and hence considered an asset.

Support

Support in Schlossberg's Transition Model (1995) consists of external resources such as family, friends, or communities. For the purposes of this study, I viewed participants' institutions and other students (Indian/international) as their communities, in addition to their family. As outlined in the response to research sub-question (b), participant's families, particularly parents were their biggest support system. In addition, their friends, who were mostly other international Indian students were also seen as a good support system. Although these factors are perceived by the participants as positive and as an asset, they could also become a source of stress and thus a liability.

Parents and Family. Parents and family including brothers, cousin, aunts, and uncles were all a source of support and served as an asset for the participants. However, they could be a source of conflict and cause more stress for some and thus becoming a liability. For example,

108

Bhanu shared that her relationship with her parents was mostly very supportive but later in the interview she also revealed that although her father was "cool" guy, he can be difficult to reason with "when he's angry" and added "Yeah. Just don't make him angry." The source of conflict with parents was particularly evident when the participants discussed dating and marriage. Almost all the single women were registered on online matrimonial sites by their parents. Joe stated that she did not believe in the "institution of marriage" and revealed that she was upset about her mother signing her up on the matrimonial site. She expressed that she never has any conflict with her parents, but only has heated conversations with her mom on the "topic of my marriage." She stated that her mother also has certain restrictions on who she could or could not marry. "I am not against marrying a Muslim, black or white person, but I know my mom will."

Kashi also stated that she is facing conflict with her parents on the subject of marriage. She does not want to marry yet and wants to figure out her career first. However, she stated that her parents disagree and want her to get married because she is over 30. "I'm going to mad here, because they (parents) want me to get married NOW!" Maya stated that her parents are against dating, particularly her father. She revealed that she dated in India and when she told her parents after she broke up. He stated that her parents were really upset with her and her dad "he stopped talking to me like for six months." Because of that experience, she does not talk to her parents about dating and has hidden the fact that she currently has boyfriend (who is also Indian but from South India). "…So right now, I haven't told them about him. They don't know anything about that. They know him as a friend. They don't even know that I'm dating." She added that she is a little surprised that her parents have not been "pushing" her to get married. "They are not pushing me, even though I'm 28, they are not pushing me towards marriage" (Maya).

109

Ritu also dated someone in America but withheld it from her parents because she knew that her parents did not approve of dating. She eventually broke up with him which also impacted her emotionally. She stated that her parents have signed her up on a matrimonial site and want her to marry someone within her caste. "My parents, they do want me to get married in my caste." She added that caste is a priority for her parents, particularly her father. "It is a very important thing for my father." She revealed that she "had a very big fight on that" with her dad a few weeks before our interview. She tried to convince him. "I gave him some examples of her friends who I met," who married within different religions and caste and were still happy. She and her father finally "made a compromise" where her father would be "okay" if her potential husband belonged to any caste as long as he was a Hindu. Reema had stated at the beginning of the interview that her parents give her all the freedom and are very "progressive." But during the discussion about dating, she stated that her dating life is "mostly hush-hush thing" and she did not tell her parents because "ideologies of dating in our generation is different from the previous generation."

Not all the women faced this conflict with their parents, though. Dhara, for example, has had the opposite experience where she revealed that her parents do not discuss about her marriage. She stated that they always assert that she "be financially independent and take care of yourself" before getting married. She indicated that her parents insist on providing her with a degree than a "lavish wedding." Thus, parents albeit an asset for most participants, has the potential to become a source of stress which may impact their mental health.

Friends and Other Indian International Students. Friends and roommates of the participants who are other Indian international students are a strong support system for the

participants, as has been previously discussed. However, just like with the "family" support factor, friendships can be a source of conflict. For example, Kashi expressed that when she got the flu, her friends shunned her, and she felt all alone. "I'm their close friend in US. We are the only family for each other, and you don't have anyone else. And they are treating me like this" (Kashi). Shubh also mentioned that it was "hurtful" when her "so-called friends" chose to socialize with her husband and avoided her. Thus, friendships with other Indian international students is an asset for the participants as they describe it as a source of support. However, they can also become a liability during conflict and cause additional stress.

Institutional Support. Institutional support, when available was always an asset and helped the participants in their transition. The participants reported that they were aware of support services such as career fair, academic support, and counseling services provided by the university. They indicated that they received periodic emails and seeing flyers regularly informing students about the services. The service that most participants used was the career center to help them review their resume. None of the participants reported using the academic centers for help in their coursework. However, there were no dedicated academic support services for either masters or international students at her university. Kashi stated that the academic centers employed graduate students to help undergrads. She recommended "academic support for graduate students," and added "I think they assume that grad students don't need help, but actually grad students also need help" (Kashi). Hence, academic support services is a neutral factor in this case, but has the potential to be an important asset to mediate stress.

The advisors and professors, as described earlier, were a source of support and hence an immense asset for some students, who had positive interactions with them. This support factor is

111

very important because students who reported having academic trouble and who were not able to either understand the professor or approach them for help, reported higher academic transition stress. One university provided free basic courses or bridge courses for master's students, which helped the students, which was reported as an asset by the participants. Advisors, who understood the visa regulations of international students and helped students navigate university life were a solid asset and made a big difference in mitigating the transition stress of the participants.

With respect to counseling services, it could be an asset to some students who need help to deal with psychological stress. However, for the current participants, it was mostly neutral, because even when some students reported going through mental stress and depression, they presumed that that the counselors may not understand their problems based on their cultural background. Some participants relied on their religion and religious communities as a source of support which also proved to be asset in mitigating the stress. However, for Bhanu, who had initially appreciated the support from her Malayali Pentecostal church community and called her church members "family," later shared that she chose one of the universities in NY state to get away from them. She stated that there were "too many Indians in ******," and that "they were all in your business." When she dropped out of the program at the university and joined bible study, she said that she was tired of telling "everyone like what I'm going through." "If I just tell one, it's fine. But there is like 20 different families and you tell the husband, then you talk to the wife. It is like repeating the same thing. And I just was not ready to share." For Bhanu, the support system, which was an asset in the beginning, became a liability which was not helping her with her stress.

Strategies

Anderson et. al., (2012) list strategies that individuals use for successful transition, which can be viewed in three categories. Pearlin and Schooler describe the three types of coping: 1. "Responses that modify the situation" (such as negotiation in marriage, discipline in parenting, optimistic action in occupation, and seeking advice in marriage and parenting) 2. "Responses that . . . control the meaning of the problem" (such as responses that neutralize, positive comparisons, selective ignoring, substitution of rewards) 3. Responses that help to manage stress after it has occurred (such as "denial, passive acceptance, withdrawal, magical thinking, hopefulness, avoidance of worry, relaxation"). Specific mechanisms include "emotional discharge versus controlled reflectiveness; passive forbearance versus self-assertion; potency versus helpless resignation; optimistic faith" (as cited in Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg, p. 87-88) Strategies also involve questions such as whether an individual uses more than one coping strategy, can the individual creatively cope by changing the way he or she views the situation, can the individual manage his or her emotions/reactions to the stress of the transition, and is the person flexible?

Most of the participants utilized optimistic action, information seeking and help-seeking strategies. While all of the "responses that modify the situation" are not necessarily applicable, I did note the use of optimistic action and seeking advice. I could see optimistic action in things like getting their grades up after failing and forming study groups to handle course work. Advice seeking was visible when participants would discuss going to their parents with problems, gaining help from older students, and visiting offices of advisors and professors. When these strategies were used, they seemed to be assets.

However, they employed self-reliance and selective ignoring when they felt that their professor was not doing a good job in teaching them. Instead of seeking-help from the right source, which in this case was the professor, they chose to form study groups and solve the problem themselves. Information seeking is a good strategy; however, it is also important to go to the correct source for information. For example, students sought information about the counseling services and related costs from other international students, who gave them inaccurate information. Negotiation was also employed frequently when participants made schedules for cooking and cleaning with their roommates. Ritu used negotiation strategy when she attempted to "modify the situation" (p. 96), when having a discussion with her father about her marriage. Passive acceptance was employed when Shubh, Zune and Joe all faced bullying by their male peers. Instead of going to their advisors, they tried to ignore the problem hoping that it will be resolved by itself.

Berry (2008) consistently emphasized the individual variation in acculturation strategies and adaptation, and highlighted the need to understand nested contexts, that is, that individuals live in groups that exist in communities and countries with varying attitudes regarding gender roles. Juang and Syed (2019) argue that most studies on individual-level acculturative experiences are flawed if they ignore the "contextual complexity" of the strategies employed by the individuals in transition (pgs. 241-242). Passive acceptance and selective ignoring strategies that the participants employed are a result of their socialization in India. The participants were ready to seek information regarding anything that jeopardized their immigration status or educational goals. However, when it came to speaking to the professors expressing their dissatisfaction with the course, or letting the senior students use bullying tactics, the students

chose to "let it go." They are more focused on improving their skills for better career prospects and avoided any confrontation.

Participants' Perceptions of Lived Experiences in America

Despite the challenges that participants faced while living and studying in America, they perceived the experience as positive. Most of the participants were in STEM related programs and were surrounded by South Asian students. When asked if the participants felt that they were well-adjusted into the American society, Ritu shared that she did not feel that she experienced American society completely. "I was in America but all the students in Computer Science were from India. So, it just felt like you were in a clean India" (Ritu). This sentiment was shared by other participants such as Zune, Joe and Shubh. Ritu advises Indian students to expand their boundaries and work in another department. For example, she worked in the music school at her university and was surprised that the parents supported their kid's hobbies. In India, parents emphasize education and hobbies are considered a distraction. She acknowledged that the experience was "very refreshing" and added "You get to see parents who are least interested if their kids are engineers or doctors. They are happy if their kids are happy. It is just a flute. My father is not going to cry in that session. My father might sleep. They wanted to buy the CD which is $100. My father is never paying that" (Ritu).

Most of the participants agreed that they have "embraced my own culture a little more than before" and take pride and joy in dressing up in traditional clothing for Indian events, even though they did not do that in India. Dhara stated that she was "more religious" in India but now she explores more "spiritual" avenues to remain peaceful and connected with God. "…that's definitely something that I got to explore a lot more here about my equation with God."

115

However, they did not miss the sexism and sexual harassment in India and reveal that they feel "free" and "self-confident" in America. Christie said that she valued meeting people from other countries and cultures, "people here are from everywhere." She also valued that women are treated equally and are "more free and independent here than back in India" (Christie). Alka also shared that she appreciates the clean air, less traffic and feels it is overall "peaceful" and also values being able to "be yourself" here. Zune stated that she wore only traditional clothes in India, "but now my wardrobe is filled with western clothes."

Despite these facts, they also believe that they appreciate Indian family values more than America. For example, Kashi stated that "I have picked up a lot of good things from American culture, but my core Indian culture is still intact" and particularly mentioned "taking care of your parents in old age." Shubh indicated that she valued Indian culture's "holistic approach to life where food is medicine" and "emphasis on yoga and spirituality." Zune also mentioned family values and stated that "Indian parents are way better at raising children and taking care of the elderly parents," and added that "coming together for once a year is not what family is about." While Reema valued the "openness and acceptance irrespective of any orientation" in American culture, she also stated that Indian food is "way better" than American. Hence students were not completely integrated, assimilated or separated within the American culture. However, there were certain aspects of their thoughts, beliefs and behaviors that were impacted by their experience of living in America. The figure below illustrates the different aspects of participants' lives that have been impacted because of their close, and continuous contact with the American culture.

Figure 1

Indian International Female Students' Acculturative Experiences in Berry's Bidimensional Model
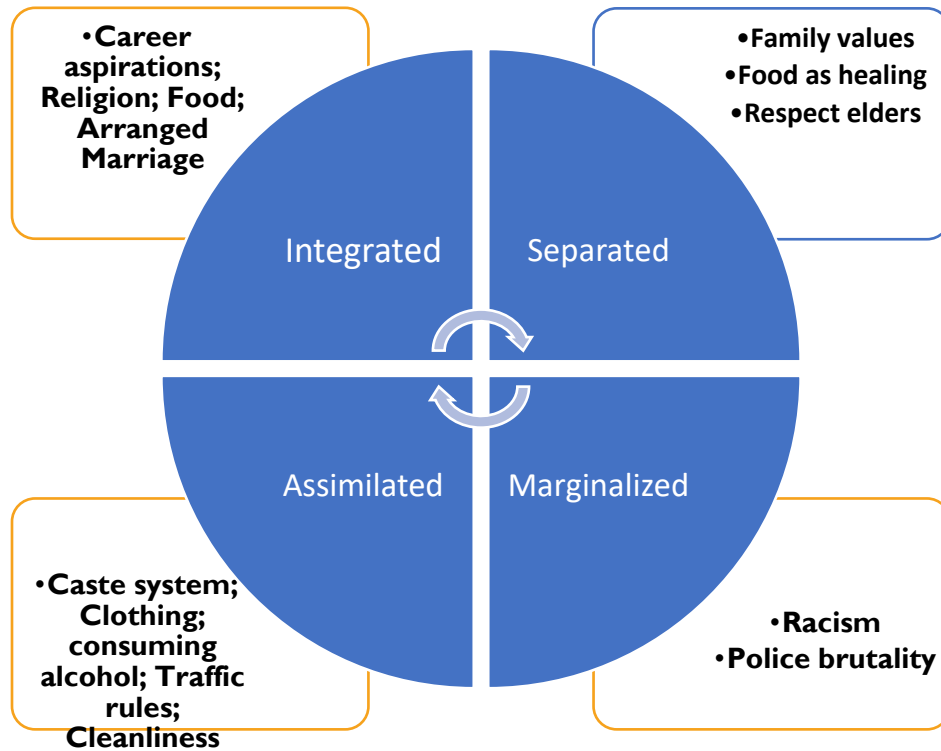
Note: This figure demonstrates the different aspects of the participants' lived experiences in America. Adapted from Berry (1997, 2003).

According to Berry (2003), acculturation is psychosocial and behavioral in nature and involves adoption of culturally acceptable norms, values, attitudes and activities or behaviors by the immigrants (Berry, 2003; Kim & Abreu, 2005). As discussed earlier, members of the ethnic minority groups may use four strategies to handle acculturative stress: integration, marginalization, assimilation, and separation. The question of what type of acculturation attitude

the ethnic minority individual will assume depends on two main issues: cultural maintenance-the extent to which the ethnic immigrant finds it valuable to maintain his/her own cultural identity; and contact and participation- the extent to which the immigrant wishes to have contact with the host culture and how much he/she values the said contact. As can be seen from the figure 1, participants wished to maintain some aspects of their own culture while also valuing contact with the American culture. For example, they adopted individualism and gender equality in American culture, reviewed their ideas on strict religious traditions, while they maintained their original ideas on family values, taking care of the elderly, Indian food, and vegetarian diet. They were completely assimilated with the American culture in their thoughts and ideas about the caste system while they did not value neither American nor Indian culture when it came to racism and police brutality.

Summary

Chapter four detailed findings related to Indian international graduate female students and their lived experiences in the United States. The findings were categorized as per the three research sub-questions and reviewed in detail the challenges that participants faced, the support systems they accessed and the coping strategies that they employed. The next chapter will discuss the practical implication of these findings for various stakeholders such as educators in both Indian and American Higher Education systems.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Study Overview

More than 200,000 Indian students immigrated to the United States for higher education in 2019 (Institute of International Education, 2020). Vast amount of scholarly work has examined the effects of immigration to be both psychological and physiological in nature (Berry, 1997; Choi, 1997; Hwang & Ting, 2008). Research has also found that navigating through contradictory value systems between native and host cultures could be a source of stress for international students (Mori, 2000; Wang et al., 2011), and that stress is accentuated by academic and developmental challenges that student face as they live and study in American universities (Saurez-Orozco & Saurez-Orozco, 2001; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

While previous studies have focused on the transition challenges and acculturative stress that international students face, in general, qualitative research specifically focused on Indian female international graduate students is scarce. In addition, a gap has existed in the academic research of the beliefs, values, and cultural differences among Asian groups. It is important to address the acculturative stress as researchers have argued that when acculturative stress is left unaddressed, it can impact the mental health and well-being of the students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In conducting this research, my principle purpose was to understand the lived experiences of Indian international female students who are enrolled in graduate programs in the United States. The findings of this research seek to add to the literature on international students, while contributing specific information on the experiences of Indian women, who immigrate to the

United States and study and live here. In addition, I hope the information presented in this study about the challenges that Indian international female students face and the strategies they use to successfully cope with those challenges, will help educators to understand and support their transition more efficiently.

In this research, the primary research question I was interested to explore was: W*hat are the unique lived experiences of Indian international female graduate students' studying at American universities?* The three research sub-questions were: a) What perceived challenges did Indian international female graduate students face during their transition? b) What are Indian international female graduate students' perceptions of the factors that helped support their transition? c) How do Indian international female graduate students describe their personal experiences of transitioning to the United States? Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) view a transition as "not so much a matter of change as of the individual's own perception of the change" (p. 28). As such, the research questions were framed to emphasize the perceived challenges and coping strategies that international graduate female students from India value and benefit from.

Four themes, that answered to the first research sub question, emerged under challenges that the participants faced during their transition into the new academic and cultural environment in the United States. These themes: Academic Transition Challenges, Food-related Challenges, Career-related Challenges, and Practical/lifestyle related Challenges, were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Consistent with previous literature (Rabia & Hazza, 2017), this study found that living away from family and friends in a foreign country made the participants feel homesick and lonely. The participants faced severe challenges adapting to the practice-oriented

coursework in America compared to the theory-focused Indian education system (Barron 2002; Li & Kaye, 1998; Ariza, 2010; Leder & Forgasz, 2004). They also experienced challenges related to transportation, navigating health insurance, and other practical lifestyle stressors and align with previous research (Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010; Sumer, Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Prominent findings include the difficulties that the participants faced in finding Indian food, Indian grocery stores, and particularly vegetarian menu options in restaurants as well as university cafeteria. They also faced career-related challenges in obtaining internships and job-interviews which were exacerbated by new visa regulations.

The second research sub-question explored the support systems that Indian international female graduate students access in order to cope with the challenges. The themes that emerged were: Family; Friends, Roommates, and other international students; Mentors and Professors; Religion and Spiritual avenues; and Institutional Support Services which included career services, international student services, and counseling services. Support from family and friends featured prominently across the data in terms of a support system as the study participants faced change and encountered challenges. Support from friends/roommates and involvement in student organizations aligned with Abe, Talbot and Gellhoed's (1998) study regarding factors that helped with international student adjustment and also with Sumer et al's (2008) conclusion that strong social support networks help students adjust better. In addition, mentors and professors were highly valued when support from these avenues was offered. Students did not use or rely on counseling support despite facing severe mental stress due to academic or personal life, which also aligned with previous research related to non-utilization of counseling services by Asian

121

international students (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004; Arthur, 1997; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

The focus of the third research sub-question was on the participants' perception of the transition experiences. Schlossberg's transition theory's 4s system was utilized to review the resources that were at the disposal of the participants and if they were perceived as assets or liabilities. Institutional support was the most prominent asset that impacted the overall transition of the participants. Overall, the participants perceived their lived experiences in America positively and described it as contributing to their growth, freedom, responsibility, and decision-making. Findings indicate that the study participants' mostly demonstrated a positive approach and their attitude towards the challenges were consistent with Schlossberg's (2005) theory of transition, particularly how persons determine their coping plan and the factors namely Situation, Self and Strategies, that could impact their coping skills.

Consistent with other studies (Rahman & Rollock, 2004; Ying & Liese, 1991), the initial arrival period following immigration appears to be the time when the greatest adjustments have to be made. Several participants referred to "first-six months" as being tough and mentioned it as the length of time it took them to adapt or learn. As reported by Zhou et al. (2017), participants in the present study also expressed difficulty fitting in. They experienced the difficulty of not being able to mingle with their American peers to cultivate new friendships. However, they formed strong bonds with other female Indian international students who they relied on for support. Although the current participants identified lack of English language proficiency and self-doubt, identified in Perry et al. (2017) research, it was not identified prominently.

Participants mentioned being more aware of their accents and vocabulary during job interviews and talking to professors and other American students.

Practical Implications of this Research

Drawing upon this study's findings and placing this information in the context of existing research, the following information is summarized to assist those who support, counsel, and advise Indian international female students in university settings. American universities actively recruit international students and thus have a responsibility to support their cultural transition in order to increase their probability of success. Apart from the financial contribution of international students to the university and the economy, international students are recruited to increase diversity on campus. However, the results indicated that the participants could not develop close friendships with domestic students with one participant sensing a "distance" in those relationships she shared with domestic students.

Participants expressed that the American students were friendly but did not seem to have an intention of nurturing friendships with Indian students. To some extent, the differences in personalities and culture explain Indian international students challenges in developing relationships with domestic students. Some students expressed that the American students socialized by consuming alcohol and partying and as most Indian women did not drink alcohol, they found it 'awkward' to fit in. It is not a coincidence the two of the three participants, Appu and Reema, who claimed to have American friends, socialized with them in bars and clubs. The third participant, Bhanu, had roommates who were American, maybe because there were no Indians at her university. She claimed that her roommates were shocked that she never consumed alcohol. Largely speaking, most participants chose to form close friendships with other Indian

female students as they felt comfortable because of mutually shared culture and lifestyle. They also shared their struggles and transition issues with each other and depended on each other for support. Encouraging relationships between international students and domestic students can help everyone involved to engage in a more authentic multicultural experience where all students will learn to understand and tolerate differences.

Research findings in the past have identified the need for counseling services programs targeting international students. With extensive data on challenges faced by Asian international students in general, counseling departments at various university have designed several outreach programs targeting this population. Despite that, Asian international students have generally found to underutilize mental health services while also exhibiting a "high rate of premature drop out" (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004). Research suggests that this may be due to stigma, mistrust, lower levels of acculturation, and cultural barriers within the counseling process (Han & Pong, 2015; Kim and Omizo, 2003; Zhang & Dixon, 2003). However, the current research found that the students are well-aware of the services, and still do not access these services. The lack of clarity on the cost associated with counseling and therapy service was the main reason for students not utilizing these services. They relied on information or mostly misinformation that they received from other Indian international students. However, culture also played a role in assuming that the counseling professionals may not be able to understand the several cultural contexts associated with students' experiences. This turned to be true for Shubh who stated that counselor did not understand the importance of family, even extended family in Indian culture, offered recommendations that she viewed as impractical, given the cultural context. The participants felt that they were already overwhelmed with comprehending and navigating the health insurance system, in addition to understanding the academic environment, coursework,

daily-to-day challenges of their new life in America. Hence, they pushed their mental health

needs to the lowest rung of their priority ladder. In addition to this, a lack of faith in the practical

benefits that counseling services can provide them has also served as a hindrance.

Despite several useful recommendations of previous research, the responsibility to reach

out to counselors is mostly placed on the students themselves, who may not see the need or

advantage in accessing these services to help with their successful cultural transition. Counseling

staff can resolve this issue by conducting mandatory group sessions before classes begin or

during the first few months when students arrive. This can help students understand the issues

such as cost and see the practical benefits of therapy. This program can also serve as an

educational tool for counseling staff themselves who will gain a better understanding of the

students' backgrounds. For example, they can understand the socialization of Indian women,

whose experiences of sexual harassment and gender discrimination were illuminated in the

current research. These women accept gender discrimination as part of their socialization in India

and do not fully comprehend the ramifications of those experiences on their mental health. To

encourage students to share freely, it would help to organize them as groups from the same

country such as women from India and later group them with women from other countries.

Grouping them with students who have already experienced the benefits of the services could

also help students facing particularly severe challenges to contact the counseling staff, who by

now are familiar to them.

Past research on transition issues of Asian international students have largely emphasized

the significance of counseling services in the successful acculturation of the students. However,

the current research found that the academic staff such as professors and mentors played a more

prominent role in helping international women students from India feel "at home" and help

significantly in their acculturation. The current research found that the study participants placed a

high value in their relationships with their professors and mentors and any advice from them was

taken very seriously. This maybe because of the high cultural value that is placed on the social

standing of a professor/educator referred to as "*guru*" in India. In addition, participants whose

professors/mentors/program directors frequently met them in informal settings, such as the

cafeteria, and engaged in conversation about their career and life aspects, experienced better

acculturation in the program. They also demonstrated a higher overall satisfaction with the

support received from the institution. Four of the participants referred to their mentor as their

"parent" and felt that they were able to depend on them for support and advice.

In addition, education itself is viewed with great respect which was emphasized as the

highest priority by their parents, particularly for Indian women, who view their education as a

unique resource to be independent. Any issues that hinder their academic progress is hence seen

as personal failure and greatly impacts their self-esteem. Students who faced academic stress also

worried about bringing shame to their families. Hence, any efforts by professors and staff to

offer support to the students will yield positive impact on their transition. Furthermore, the

literature on acculturative stress indicated that student populations encountering psychological

and sociological challenges tend to show negative academic results such as non-completion of

academic programs and in general, are at a high risk of attrition (O'Keeffe, 2013), while a more

optimistic finding of another study (Alsahafi & Shin, 2017) indicated that initial cultural stress

experienced by international students serves as a learning experience that enables them to devise

ideal coping strategies to adapt to the new culture in a short period. The current research

indicated the possibility of both outcomes as Bhanu dropped out of the university while the

others adapted and developed skills to cope with academic challenges. The difference in both cases seems to be the support factors, particularly related to institutional support.

As Zune mentioned, having a "cultural mentor" in their own department, can help students in their transition. This will also help in reducing the excessive burden on the counseling services department, which research has shown is already over-burdened. A recent report on mental health crisis in colleges across America found a high student to provider ratio in top colleges, as well as long wait times.

It is not just the counseling centers that need to change the way they reach out to international students, but also the various departments of which the international students are a part. It is evident from the current research that institutional support, particularly the understanding of the department on the immigration issues faced by the participants, resulted in the successful student experiences. As previously discussed, the participants chose to study in the United States to improve their career prospects. However, current immigration policies prevent international students from working while studying, which hinders them from gaining practical experience compared on par with their American peers. Knowledge about visa regulations and immigration policies demonstrated by the academic staff is highly appreciated by international students. For example, some of the participants who demonstrated higher satisfaction with their programs were able to speak to their department who helped them apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and optional practical training (OPT). This helped the participants gain valuable practical knowledge through internships. These students were able to extend their master's programs to four years instead of two, because their departments worked with them to help them gain the much-needed practical experience. The department also had a conference budget and

helped students attend conferences related to their field. This was in stark contrast to the experiences of some of the other participants who expressed frustration with their offices of international programs and departments for not understanding basic terms related to the international student policies.

Institutional programs such as U-Pal system were highly recommended by students. International students themselves volunteer for these services to help other in-coming students. The "Pal" system pairs an incoming student with a current student who is usually from the same country or department. Another student mentioned bridge courses to help close the knowledge gap and better advisement by mentors. Kashi recommended that the academic support should also be extended to master's students, particularly international students, and not just undergraduates. One university let international students, who were having trouble with the coursework, enroll in undergraduate courses free of cost to help close the learning gap. This helped the students brush up on their basic skills before enrolling in more demanding master's courses. If Bhanu enrolled in this university rather than the one that she dropped out of, it would have made a world of difference in imparting a positive self-esteem while saving her valuable time and money.

Professors can make an effort to identify an international student and encourage them to participate in class using simple prompts at first. This will build up their confidence as they become more engaged in class. In addition, advisors and mentors should be aware of possible bullying and sexism that women in general, and international women in particular, are subjected to their research labs. Creating strict zero-tolerance policies on gender discrimination as well as

providing frequent avenues to encourage women to share such experiences will create a healthy-work environment.

Career services can also play an important role by employing staff who are aware of visa and immigration regulations related to international students. The services should extend beyond helping students edit their resume. If international students can get access to interview practice tools and in-person interview prep, it may help boost the confidence and thus employability of international students. A better approach would be if the international student's office, the career center and the individual departments worked collectively to ensure that the students are prepared to successfully transition into the next stage of their lives.

Food was mentioned as a major stressor for the participants. Universities can make efforts to include menu items from other parts of the world in the cafeteria. As one student mentioned, having more vegetarian/vegan options, even if they are not Indian cultural food, such as rice and beans, can have a huge impact on the experiences of international students. In addition, having cultural activities representing the cultures of the world will create avenues for both domestic and international students to socialize and form friendships. Current study is in agreement with previous research recommendations about stress-reduction workshops and wellness programs for international students to help them learn techniques to reduce tension. In addition, education of international students on discriminatory behaviors might empower them to not only recognize but also to take a stance against racism (Zhang & Dixon, 2003). Of course, there is a world of difference that the native country, in this case, India could do such as educating female students traveling internationally about acculturative stress.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research highlighted the lived experiences of Indian international female graduate students studying at American universities located in rural and urban areas. Although the findings suggest a difference in their acculturative stress related to finding vegetarian food and better transport facilities in the city, a more thorough investigation on the impact of acculturative stress between international students from rural and urban locations can shed more light on the possible differences between their experiences. This study focused on the experiences of female Indian international students. A broader study focusing on acculturative experiences of both Indian men and women may shed light on the impact of gender on their acculturative stress. Most of the participants in this study belonged to STEM field. Further research is needed to understand the experiences of men and women who are not in the STEM fields as they may be experiencing more or less acculturative stress compared to the other international students.

Limitations

The present study has a small sample size that might be considered to limit the significance of the data analysis. However, the sample size falls within the prescribed limits of 5-25 participants for qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). Despite that, it may not be representative of the experiences of all Indian international female graduate student experiences. This study focused only on the lived experiences of female students from India and the findings may not apply to all international students from India or all international students in general.

References

Adams, T. E. (2008) A review of narrative ethics. Qualitative Inquiry. 14:175–94.

Adams, T. E. (2008) A review of narrative ethics. Qualitative Inquiry. 14:175–94.

Adler, P. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *15*(4), 13–23.

Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K. (2012). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

Belkin, D., & Jordan, M. (2016). Heavy recruitment of Chinese students sows discord on U.S. campuses. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.wsj.com/articles/heavy-recruitment-of-chinese-students-sows-discord-on-u-s-campuses-1458224413

Belkin, D., & Jordan, M. (2016). Heavy recruitment of Chinese students sows discord on U.S. campuses. The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from http://www.wsj.com/articles/heavy-recruitment-of-chinese-students-sows-discord-on-u-s-campuses-1458224413

Belkin, D., & Jordan, M. (2016). Heavy recruitment of Chinese students sows discord on U.S. campuses. The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from http://www.wsj.com/articles/heavy-recruitment-of-chinese-students-sows-discord-on-u-s-campuses-1458224413

Bell, N.E., Di Fabio, N. M., & Frehill, L. M. (2006). *Professional women and minorities: a total human resources data compendium (16th Ed.)* Washington DC: Commission on professionals in Science and Technology.

Berry, J. W. (1980). Acculturation as varieties of adaptation. In: Padilla AM, editor. Acculturation: Theory, models, and some new findings. Boulder, CO: Westview, pp. 9–25.

Berry, J. W., Kim, U., Minde, T., & Mok, D. (1987). Comparative studies of acculturative stress. *International Migration Review*, *21*(3), 491–511.

Bhandari, R. & Choudaha, R. (2010). U.S.-India mobility at a turning point: Background and trends. In Rajika Bhandari (Ed), *International India: A turning point in educational exchange with the U.S*. New York: Institute of International Education, pp.1-20.

Biswal, B., P. (1999), Private Tutoring and Public Corruption: A Cost-Effective Education System for Developing Countries. The Developing Economies. 37: 222-240. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1049.1999.tb00232.x

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods (5th ed.).* Boston, Mass.: Pearson A & B.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." Qualitative Research in Psychology 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2012). "Thematic Analysis." In APA Handbook of Research Methods
in Psychology, edited by H. Cooper, Vol. 2: Research Designs, 57–71. Washington, DC:
APA books.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2013) Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for
Beginners. London: Sage.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2016. "(Mis) Conceptualising Themes, Thematic Analysis, and Other
Problems with Fugard and Potts' (2015) Sample-Size Tool for Thematic Analysis."
International Journal of Social Research Methodology 19 (6): 739–743.
doi:10.1080/13645579.2016.1195588.

Braun, V., Clarke, V & Rance, N. (2014). "How to Use Thematic Analysis with Interview Data."
In the Counselling & Psychotherapy Research Handbook, edited by A. Vossler and N.
Moller, 183–197. London: Sage.

Braun, V., V. Clarke, and P. Weate. 2016. "Using Thematic Analysis in Sport and Exercise
Research." In International Handbook on Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise,
edited by B. Smith and A. Sparkes, 191–205. London: Routledge.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2017). Using Thematic Analysis in Sport and Exercise
Research. "In Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, edited
by B. Smith and A. C. Sparkes, 191-205. London: Routledge

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Terry, G., & Hayfield, N. (2018). "Thematic Analysis." In Handbook of

    Research Methods in Health and Social Sciences, edited by P. Liamputtong, 843–860.

    Singapore: Springer.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. Qualitative Research

    in Sport, Exercise and Health. 11. 1-9. 10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806.

Brown, L. (2009). The transformative power of the international sojourn: An ethnographic study

    of the international student experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *36*(3), 502–521.

Bruner, J. S. A Tribute to Roman jdkdbson. Berlin: Walter de Grujrter, 1983. Actual Minds,

    Possible Worlds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Center for Academic Mobility Research. (2012). *Project Atlas: Trends and Global Data 2012*.

    Institute of International Education.

Chang, C. Y., & O'Hara, C. (2013). The initial interview with Asian American clients. *Journal*

    of Contemporary Psychotherapy, *43*(1), 33–42.

Chennamsetti, P. (2020). Challenges Faced by Indian International Students in the US. *Journal*

    of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education, *9*(2), 259-273.

    https://doi.org/10.32674/jise.v9i2.2345

Chapdelaine, R. F., & Alexitch, L. R. (2004). Social Skills Difficulty: Model of Culture Shock

    for International Graduate Students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(2), 167-

    184.

Choi, G. (1997). Acculturative stress, social support, and depression in Korean American
    families. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 2(1), 81-97.

Clandinin D. J., Connelly F. M. (2000). Narrative inquiry: experience and story in qualitative
    research. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Clandinin D.J. (Ed) (2006). *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology. Thousand
    Oaks.* CA: Sage Publications.

Clandinin, D. J. (2007). *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* Thousand
    Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781452226552

Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (2010). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P. P. Peterson
    (Eds.), International encyclopedia of education (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Elsevier.

Clandinin D. J., Huber, J., & Murphy, M., S. (2011). *Places of Curriculum Making: Narrative
    Inquiries into Children's Lives in Motion*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Clandinin, D.J., & Caine, V. (2008). Narrative Inquiry. In L. Givens (Ed.), *The SAGE
    encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. CA: Sage Publications.

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (2000). Narrative Inquiry. Experience and Story in Qualitative
    Research. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.

Conle, C., (2000). Narrative Inquiry: Research Tool and Medium for Professional Development:
    European Journal of Teacher Education. Vol. 23.

Connelly, M. F., & Clandinin, J. D., (1990). Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.
    Educational Researcher Vol. 19, Issue. 5.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. Green, G. Camilli,

    & P. Elmore (eds.) Handbook of complementary methods in education research

Constantine, M. G., Okazaki, S., & Utsey, S. O. (2004). Self-concealment, social self-efficacy,

    acculturative stress, and depression in African, Asian, and Latin American international

    college students. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 74(3), 230-241.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.74.3.230

Cooper, C., & Yarbrough, S. (2016). Asian-Indian female international students: A photovoice

    study of health and adaptation to the immigration experience. The Qualitative Report,

    21(6), 1035-1051. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss6/3

Craig CJ. Research on the boundaries: Narrative inquiry in the midst of organized school reform.

    The Journal of Educational Research. 2009; 103: 123-36.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/002206709033 23883

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*

    approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research

    designs: Selection and implementation. The counseling psychologist, 35(2), 236-264.

Dao, T. K., Lee, D. Chang, H. L. (2007). Acculturation level, perceived English fluency,

    perceived social support level, and depression among Taiwanese international students.

    College Student Journal, 41, 287–295.

Davis, T. M (2002). *Open Doors: Report On International Educational Exchange,* Institute of

    International Education: New York.

Deardorff, D. (2006). The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student

    outcome of internationalization at institutions of higher education in the United States.

    Journal of Studies in International Education, Fall 2006, 241-266.

Deardorff, D. (2010). Intercultural competence: An outcome of student exchange. In Rajika

    Bhandari (Ed), *International India: A turning point in educational exchange with the U.S*.

    New York: Institute of International Education, p.77-96.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research.

    In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories*

    and issues (pp. 1-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dewit, H. (2002). Internationalization of Higher Education in the United States of America and

    Europe: A Historical, Comparative, and Conceptual Analysis. Greenwood Publishers:

    Westport, Connecticut.

Eckhart, B. (2014). *Dozing off*. Online article from website INSIDE HIGHER ED. Retrieved

    from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/12/11/american-universities-should-

    do-more-help-chinese-students-adapt-essay

Erichsen, E. A., & Bolliger, D. U. (2011). Towards understanding international graduate student

    isolation in traditional and online environments. *Educational Technology Research and*

    Development, *59*(3), 309–326.

Fatima, N. (2001). International Female Graduate Students' Perceptions of their adjustment

    experiences and coping strategies at an urban research university (paper presented at the

annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, in Seattle, WA, April 10-14.)

Freeman, M. (2008). Autobiography. In L. Givens (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Fry, R. E., (2002). Appreciative Inquiry and Organizational Transformation: Reports from the Field. Westport: CN.

Gill, S. (2007) Overseas students' intercultural adaptation as intercultural learning: a transformative framework. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *37*:2, 167-183.

Given, L. M. (Ed.) (2008). *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412963909

Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J. A. (2009) Analyzing Narrative Reality, London: Sage Publications.

Gullahorn, J., & Gullahorn, J. (1960). The role of the academic man as a cross-cultural mediator. *American Sociological Review*, *25*(3), 414–417.

Gupta, N. (2007). Indian women in doctoral education in science and engineering: a study of informal milieu at the reputed Indian Institutes of technology. *Science, technology and Human Values*, 32(5), 507-533

Hahn, Z. L. (2010). *Coping with acculturative stress and depression among international students: A cultural perspective* (doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3447492

Han, M., & Pong, H. (2015). Mental health help-seeking behaviors among Asian American

    community college students: the effect of stigma, cultural barriers, and

    acculturation. Journal of College Student Development, 56, 1–14.

Hayward, F. M., & Siaya L. M., (2001). Public Experience, Attitudes, and Knowledge: A Report

    on Two National Surveys About International Education. American Council on

    Education: Washington, D.C.

Hayward, F. M., (2000). Preliminary Status Report 2000: Internationalization of U.S. Higher

    Education. American Council on Education: Washington, D. C.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and*

    organizations across nations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hofstede, G. (2004). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw-

    Hill.

Hune, S. (1998). Asian Pacific American women in higher education: Claiming visibility and

    voice. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Hwang, W & Ting, J.Y. (2008). Disaggregating the effects of acculturation and acculturative

    stress on the mental health of Asian Americans. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority

    Psychology, 14(2), 147-154.

Inman, A. G., Constantine, M.G., & Ladany, N. (1999). Cultural value conflict: An examination

    of Asian Indian women's bicultural experience. In D. S. Sandhu (Ed.), *Asian and Pacific*

Islander Americans: Issues and concerns for counseling and psychotherapy (pp. 31-41). Commack, NY: Nova Science.

Inman, A. G., Ladany, N., Constantine, M. G., & Morano, C. K. (2001). Development and preliminary validation of the Cultural Values Conflict Scale for South Asian Women. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48, 17-27.

Institute of International Education (IIE). (2019). *Open doors 2015: International students in the U.S. up ten percent to nearly one million; study abroad by American students picks up momentum*. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2015/2015-11-16-Open-Doors-Data

Institute of International Education. (2019). "International Student Enrollment Trends, 1948/49-2018/19." Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from http://www.opendoorsdata.org

Jayakar, K. (1994). Women of the Indian subcontinent. In L. Comas-Díaz & B. Greene (Eds.), *Women of color: Integrating ethnic and gender identities in psychotherapy* (p. 161–181). Guilford Press.

Johnson, J.M., & Regets, M. (1998). "International Mobility of Scientists and Engineers To the US – Brain Drain or Brain Circulation?" *NSF Issue Brief*. 98-316.

Johnson, R. & Christensen, L. (2014). Educational Research Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches Fifth Edition.

Jones, R. & Kim, Y. S. (2013). Communication experiences of international students in the US: A comparison study of cross-cultural adaptation between European and Asian Students. *Communication Experience of International Students*, *3*, 83–104.

Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (eds) (1993). The Narrative Study of Lives. New bury Park. CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Kaczmarek, P. G., Matlock, G., Merta, R., Ames, M. H., & Ross, M. (1994). An assessment of international college student adjustment. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, *17*(4), 241–247.

Kalimili, S. (2014), Private tuition in India: trends and issues, Revue internationale d'éducation de Sèvres [Online], Education in Asia in 2014: what global issues? URL: http://journals.openedition.org/ries/3913

Kim, B. S., & Omizo, M. M. (2003). Asian cultural values, attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, and willingness to see a counselor. The Counseling Psychologist, 31, 343–361.

Kim, J., & Kim, H. (2013). The experience of acculturative stress-related growth from immigrants' perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative studies on Health and Well-being*, *8*: 21355.

Kim, Jeong-Hee. (2015). *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research*. CA: Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

Kolanad, G. (2005). Culture shock! India. Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing.

Kung, H. C. (2007). *Dancing on the edge: International students' transformative journeys in the United States of America* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://shareok.org/bitstream/handle/11244/1239/3271223.PDF?sequence=1

Kuwahara, N. (2010). Mental health, quality of life and gendered experiences of japanese sojourner graduate students in the U.S (Order No. 3446298). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection. (859272732). Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/859272732?accountid=13793

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lee, J. J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America: International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, *53*(3), 381–409.

Lee, Seungcheol & Park, Hee Kim, Sunny. (2009). Gender differences in international students' adjustment. College Student Journal. 43. 1217-1227.

Lewthwaite, M. (1996). A study of international students' perspectives on cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, 19, 167-185.

Li, P., Wong, J., & Toth, P. (2013). Asian international students' willingness to seek counseling: A mixed-methods study. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 25*, 1–15. doi: 10.1007/s10447-012-9163-7

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

142

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Liu, M. (2009). Addressing the mental health problems of Chinese international college students in the United States. *Advances in Social Work*, *10*(1), 69–86.

Lowinger, R. M., He, Z. Lin, M., & Chang, M. (2014). The impact of academic self-efficacy, acculturation difficulties, and language abilities on procrastination behavior in Chinese international students. College Student Journal, 48(1), 141– 152.

Ma, Y. (2012). *Preparing for study abroad: Not just test scores*. Retrieved from http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2012-06/25/content_25732428.htm

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., Macqueen, KM., Guest, G., & Namey, E., (2005). Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International.

Marginson, S., Nyland, C., Sawir, E., & Forbes-Mewett, H. (2010). *International student security*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Maringe, F., & Carter, S. (2007). International students' motivations for studying in UK HE: Insights into the choice and decision making of African students. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 21(6), 459-475.

Marion, P. B. (1986). Research on foreign students at colleges and universities. *New Directions for Student Services*, *36*, 65–82.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion,

and motivation. *Psychological Review*, *98*(2), 224–253.

Marsh. H.W. & Martin, A.J. (2011). Academic self-concept and academic achievement: Relation

and causal ordering. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81. 59-77

Mathison, S. (2005). Trustworthiness. In Encyclopedia of evaluation (pp. 424-425). Thousand

Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412950558.n557

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

McClure, J. W. (2007). International graduates' cross-cultural adjustment: Experiences, coping

strategies, and suggested programmatic responses. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *12*(2),

199–217.

Mestenhauser, J. F. & Ellingboe, B. J., (eds) (1998). Reforming the Higher Education

Curriculum: Internationalizing The Campus. American Council on Education/Oryx Press:

Phoenix, AZ.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded*

sourcebook (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Misra, R., Crist, M., & Burant, C. J. (2003). Relationships among life stress, social support,

    academic stressors, and reactions to stressors of international students in the United

    States. International Journal of Stress Management, 10, 137-157. doi:10.1037/1072-

    5245.10.2.137

Mohamed, O. (1997). Counselling for excellence: Adjustment development of Southeast Asian

    students. In D. McNamara & R. Harris (Eds.), *Overseas students in HE: Issues in*

    teaching and learning (pp. 156–172). London: Routledge.

Moores, L., & Popadiuk, N. (2011). Positive aspects of international student transitions: A

    qualitative inquiry. *Journal of College Student Development*, *52*(3), 291-306.

Mori, S. (2000). Addressing the mental health concerns of international students. *Journal of*

    Counseling & Development, *78*(2), 137–144.

Mortenson, S. T. (2008). Interpersonal trust and social skill in seeking social support among

    Chinese and Americans. *Communication Research*, *36*(1), 32–53.

Munshi, S. (2012). Education and Dowry: An Economic Exploration. IIM Kozhikode Society &

    Management Review, 1(2), 111–120. https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975213477269

National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data

    System (IPEDS), Spring 2001 through Spring 2015. Washington DC: U.S. Department of

    Education.

Nilsson, J. E., Berkel, L. A., Flores, L. Y., & Lucas, M. S. (2004). Utilization rate and presenting

concerns of international students at a university counseling center: implications for

outreach programming. Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 19, 49–59.

OECD (2019), Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris,

https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en.

Olaniran, B. A. (1993). International students' network patterns and cultural stress: What really

counts. Communication Research Reports, 10, 69-83. doi:10.1080/08824099309359919

Pan, J.-Y., Fu Keung Wong, D., & Ye, S. (2013). Post-migration Growth Scale for Chinese

international students: Development and validation. Journal of Happiness Studies: An

Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being, 14(6), 1639–1655.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-012-9401-z

Patton. M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks,

CA Sage Publications.

Pedersen, P. B. (1991). Counseling international students. Counseling Psychologist, 19(1), 10–

58.

Perkins, Carolyn S.; Perkins, Mark L.; Guglielmino, Lucy M. & Reiff, Ricard F. (1977). A

comparison of the adjustment problems of three international groups. Journal of College

Student Personnel, 18(7), 382-388.

Perrucci, R., & Hu, H. (1995). Satisfaction with social and educational experiences among

international   graduate students. *Research in Higher Education*, 36(4), 491-508.

Piff, P. K., Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., Cheng, B. H., & Keltner, D. (2010). Having less, giving more: The influence of social class on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99*(5), 771–784.

Polkinghorn, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52, 137-145.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis. Qualitative Studies in Education, Vol. 8, Issue 2.

Preckel, F., & Brull, M. (2010). The benefits of being a big fish in a big pond: Contrast and assimilation effects on academic self-concept. *Learning and Individual* Differences, 20 (5). 522-531.

Punch, K. F. (2009). Introduction to research methods in education. London: Sage Publications.

Radnitzky, G. (1970). *Contemporary schools of metascience* (2nd ed.). Gothenburg, Sweden: Akademiforlaget.

Räsänen, M., & Diamond, C. P. (2002). The Postmodern Educator. Arts-Based Inquiries and Teacher Development by Patrick Diamond; Carol Mullen. Studies in Art Education. 43. 175-181.

Riley, T., & Hawe, P. (2005). Researching practice: The methodological case for narrative inquiry. Health education research. 20. 226-36. 10.1093/her/cyg122.

Russell, J., Rosenthal, D., & Thomson, G. (2010). The international student experience: Three styles of adaptation. *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, *60*(2), 235–249.

Sam, D. L., & Eide, R. (1991). Survey of mental health of foreign students. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, *32*(1), 22–30.

Sample size. (2013). In Emmel, N. *Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research: A realist approach* (pp. 137-156). London: SAGE Publications Ltd doi: 10.4135/9781473913882

Sandhu, D. S. (1994). An examination of psychological needs of the international students: Implications for counseling and psychotherapy. *International Journal of the Advancement of Counselling*, *17*(4), 229–239.

Sandhu, D.S., & Asrabadi, B.R. (1994). Development of an Acculturative Stress Scale for international students: Preliminary findings. *Psychological Report*, 75, 435-448.

Sandhu, D. S. (1997). Psychological profiles of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans: Implications for counseling and psychotherapy. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 25, 7-22.

Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *12*(2), 148–180.

Scott, P. (ed) (1998). The Globalization of Higher Education: Open University Press and the

    Society for Research into Higher Education: Buckingham, UK.

Sherman, R., & Webb, R (eds) (1988). *Qualitative Research in Education: Forms and Methods.*

    London: Falmer Press.

Shin, YJ., Lee, E.S. & Seo, Y. Sex Roles (2019) 81: 74. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-

    0976-7

Sjogren, G., & Shearer, B. L. (1973). Is your institution really ready to admit foreign students?

    Are you? *College and University*, *48*, 601–619.

Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of

    international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*(6), 699–713.

Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2014). A group psychological intervention to enhance the

    coping and acculturation of international students. *Advances in Mental Health, 12*, 110–

    124. doi: 10.1080/18374905.2014.11081889

Solberg, V. S., Ritsma, S., Davis, B. J., Tata, S. P., & Jolly, A. (1994). Asian-American students'

    severity of problems and willingness to seek help from university counseling centers:

    Role of previous counseling experience, gender, and ethnicity. *Journal of Counseling*

    Psychology, 41, 275-279.

Storti, C. (2007). *Speaking of India: Bridging the communication gap when working with*

    Indians. Boston: International Press.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2003). *Counseling the culturally diverse* (4th ed.). New York: Wiley.

Sullivan, J. R. (2012) 'Skype: An Appropriate Method of Data Collection for Qualitative Interviews?', The Hilltop Review, 6(1), 54–60.

Sullivan, C., & Kashubeck-West, S. (2015). The Interplay of International Students' Acculturative Stress, Social Support, and Acculturation Modes. *Journal of International Students*. 5. 1-11.

Szelenyi, K. (2006). Students without borders? Migratory decision-making among international graduate students in the US. *Knowledge in Society*, 19(3), 64-86.

Takeuchi, D. T., Zane, N., Hong, S., Chae, D., Gong, F., Gee G. C., Walton, W., Sue, S., & Alegría, M. (2007): Immigration-Related Factors and Mental Disorders Among Asian Americans. *American Journal of Public Health,* 97(1), 84- 90.

The Council for International Education, (2000). Student Mobility on the Map: Tertiary Education Interchange in the Commonwealth on the Threshold of the 21st Century: London, UK.

Tochkov, K., Levine, L., & Sanaka, A. (2011). Variation in the prediction of cross-cultural adjustment by Asian-Indian students in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 44(3), 677-689.

Trahar, S. (2013). *Contextualising narrative inquiry: Developing methodological approaches for local contexts*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Trautwein, U., Ludtke, O., Nagy, G., Marsh, H.W. (2009). Within-School Social Comparisons: How students perceive the standing of their class predicts academic self-concept. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101 (4). 853-866.

Trice, A.G. (2004). Mixing it up: International graduate students' social interactions with American students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(6), 671-687.

Program (SEVP) 2018 SEVIS by the Numbers Report. Washington, DC : U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2020). Sevis by the Numbers: Biannual Report on International Student Trends. Retrieved from https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/byTheNumbersApr2018.pdf

Wang, K. T., Heppner, P. P., Fu, C-C., Zhao, R., Li, F., & Chuang, C-C. (2012). Profiles of acculturative adjustment patterns among Chinese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *59*(3), 424–436.

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007) Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An Introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research on Learning and Teaching, London: Routledge

Wei, M., Heppner, P. P., Mallen, M. J., Ku, T. Y., Liao, K. Y. H., & Wu, T. F. (2007). Acculturative stress, perfectionism, years in the United States, and depression among Chinese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*(4), 385–394. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.54.4.385

Wolcott, H. (1973). *The man in the principal's office: An ethnography*. New York: Hold,

  Rinehart and Winston.

Wolcott, H. (1999). Ethnography: A way of seeing. Walnut Creek: AtlaMira Press.

Wright, C., & Schartner, A. (2013). 'I can't… I won't?' International students at the threshold of

  social interaction. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *12*(2), 113–128.

Wu, H., Garza, E., & Guzman, N. (2015). International student's challenge and adjustment to

  college. *Education Research International*, *2015*, Article ID 202753. doi:

  10.1155/2015/202753

Wu, I. (2011). *Acculturation, coping, and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological*

  help among Chinese international college students (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved

  from http://search.proquest.com/docview/902727480?accountid=4488

Xu S, Connelly FM. Narrative inquiry for teacher education and development: Focus on English

  as a foreign language in China. Teaching and Teacher Education. 2009; 25: 219-27.

  https://doi. org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.10.006

Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2009). Chinese international students' academic stressors in the

  United States. *College Student Journal, 43*(4), 939–960.

Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2011). An examination of individual level factors in stress and

  coping processes: Perspectives of Chinese international students in the United States.

  Journal of College Student Development, 52(5), 523–542. doi: 10.1353/csd.2011.0060

Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 16(1), 15–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951507031000114058

Yi, J. K., Lin, J-C. G, & Kishimoto, Y. (2003). Utilization of counseling services by international students. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *30*(4), 333–342.

Yue, X. (2001). Culturally constructed coping among university students in Beijing. Journal of Psychology in Chinese Societies, 2, 119-137.

Yun-Jeong, S., Eun, S. L., & Seo, Y. (2018). Does traditional stereotyping of career as male affect college Women's, but not college Men's, career decision self-efficacy and ultimately their career adaptability? Sex Roles. 1-13. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0976-7

Zhang, J., & Goodson, P. (2011). Acculturation and psychosocial adjustment of Chinese international students: Examining mediation and moderation effects. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*(5), 614–627. doi: 10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.004

Zhang, N., & Dixon, D. N. (2001). Multiculturally responsive counseling: effects on Asian students' ratings of counselors. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 29, 253–262.

Zhang, N., & Dixon, D. N. (2003). Acculturation and attitudes of Asian international students toward seeking psychological help. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 31, 205–222.

Zhang, Y. (2016). International students in transition: Voices of Chinese doctoral students in a U.S. research university. *Journal of International Students*, *6*(1), 175-194.

Zhang, Y., & Mi, Y. (2010). Another look at the language difficulties of international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *14*(4), 371–388.

Zhou, Y. (2000). The fall of 'the other half of the sky'? Chinese immigrant women in the New York area. Women's Studies International Forum 23(4), 445-459.

Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J., (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 33:1, 63-75, DOI: 10.1080/03075070701794833

APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Indian International Students,

My name is Sarita Revulagadda and I am a doctoral student at Seton Hall University located in South Orange, New Jersey. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research project. I am conducting this research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. The title of the research study is: The Lived Experiences of Indian International Female Graduate Students in American Higher Education. The purpose of the study is to understand the unique lived experiences of international female graduate students from India, who immigrated to the United States to attend an institution of higher education.

Ideal participants of this study would be international students who are currently on an F1 visa with India as their country of origin. They should self-identify as female and must have been studying and living in the United States for at least one semester. As a valuable contributor to this research, you will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90-minute interview (depending on your schedule) which will be conducted at a location of your choice, any day and time of your convenience between April 2020 to July 2020. You may also choose to be interviewed via Skype or Zoom if you prefer to not meet in person.

Before the interview process, you will be asked to sign a consent form. During the interview, you will be asked about why you chose to study in the United States, your perception of American academic and social culture before your arrival to the United States, your experiences immediately after you arrived and how have they changed over the course of the year. The interview will be audio-recorded and the researcher may take notes as well. Interview will be conducted in English and will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. Your role in this research is vital, so your contribution will be greatly appreciated! You will receive a $15 Amazon gift card as a token of my appreciation for your time. If you would like to participate, please contact me at ███████████████ at your earliest convenience.

Thank you in advance for your interest and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sarita Revulagadda

Doctoral Candidate, Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, Management & Policy

Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey 07079

APPENDIX B

Participant Interview Guide

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study, I think it's important to highlight that your story will help staff and university community better understand your unique experiences and thus be better prepared to better serve Indian international students. As you know I am trying to get a better understanding of how international women students from India live and study at universities in the United States. If it is ok with you, I would like to start off by asking you some questions about your educational background and immigrating to the United States.

1. Can you describe in detail about how you came upon the decision to come to the United States and choose this university?

2. How would you describe the socio-cultural environment that you grew up back home in India?

3. What are your thoughts on patriarchy and gender roles in India? What are your thoughts on the American culture?

4. How would you describe your expectations and perceptions of living and studying in America before you came to the United States? How would you describe your experience after arrived?

5. Looking back at your experiences after you arrived, what would you do differently, knowing what you know now?

6. Can you tell me about the differences in socio-cultural and academic environment that you experienced between India and America?

7. What did you perceive were/are the challenges that you experienced and how did you cope? Can you think of anything or anybody that particularly helped you cope?

8. Describe your thoughts on dating, marriage and career aspirations? Have you noticed any differences in how Indian women and American women perceive dating, marriage and career?

9. Finally, looking back over your study experience so far, how do you think it has affected your life? Have you noticed any changes in your thoughts or behavior after being exposed to the American culture? How do you feel about these changes?

10. What advice would you give to other International students in general and Indian women international students in particular?

APPENDIX C

Research Participant Consent Form

Study Title: The Lived Experiences of Indian International Female Graduate Students in American Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Sarita Revulagadda   **Dissertation Advisor**: Dr. Martin Finkelstein

Committee Member: Dr. Katie N Smith

Committee Member: Dr. David Reid

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Researcher Affiliation: The researcher of this study is Sarita Revulagadda. She is conducting this research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University located in South Orange, New Jersey.

Purpose of the Study/Research: The purpose of the study is to understand the unique lived experiences of Indian female graduate students, who immigrate to the United States to attend an institution of higher education.

Eligibility: You are welcome to participate in this study if you are:
- an international student on an F1 Visa
- from India
- Female
- enrolled in a graduate program at your university for at least one semester.

Research Procedure & Interview Protocol: If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. The researcher will review the procedure and explain the consent terms before beginning the interview. Once the consent document is signed, the interview process will begin. The interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and you will be asked about your academic, social and cultural experiences while living and studying in America. The interview will be audio-recorded, and the researcher may take notes as well. The recorded interviews will then be transcribed verbatim using the pseudonyms of your choice.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop participation at any time without penalty. You may also have the option to reschedule the interview for another time or skip any questions you are not comfortable answering during the interview without any negative consequences. You may also withdraw from the interview at any time if you do not feel comfortable and ask that the information collected thus far be destroyed.

Anonymity & **Confidentiality**: Anonymity is not possible for this study because the researcher will be conducting interviews with the participants. However, confidentiality will be ensured by using the pseudonym for the institution and for the participants by not providing any identifying information in the transcripts as well as the final report. To protect the privacy of the participants, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms of the participants' choice. During the study, only the dissertation mentor and committee members will have access to the coded information.

Storage of data: The data file will be stored on a password protected USB flash drive in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. The researcher will personally transcribe all the interviews and will not identify the participants by name; only by assigned pseudonyms. The electronic copies of the interview transcript material will be stored along with the audio file on a password protected USB memory device. Names and identification numbers will be redacted from all print materials accessed during the study. This data will also be categorized under the assigned pseudonym and stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home where only the researcher will have exclusive access to the files. After the research is completed, the audio files, transcripts, and print materials will be destroyed.

Access to Record: Only the researcher will have access to the records associated with this study. The dissertation mentor and committee members will also have the right to view the records of the study. You (the participants) will also be given access to their respective data upon request.

Anticipated Risks: There are no anticipated risks involved with taking part in this research, including potential physical or emotional stress or discomfort. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you can skip answering the question or withdraw from the interview entirely at any time during the process.

Benefits: Your participation in the study will help to further the understanding about the unique experiences of Indian international female students and help institutions serve this population more efficiently.

Participation Compensation: You will receive $15 Amazon gift card as an appreciation for your time.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns regarding the participation in this study, you may contact Sarita M Revulagadda, the researcher for this study at ███████████████████ or by phone ██████████. Results of the study may be presented at conferences or published at the discretion of the researcher. Again, actual names will not be used in any presentation or publication. If you would like a copy of the results, you may contact the researcher, Sarita M Revulagadda, to receive a copy after the completion of the study.

Copy of Consent form: You are asked to sign two copies on this form. The researcher will keep one on file, stored in a locked file to which only the researcher has access. The form will be held separately from audio files and records to protect participants' privacy. One of the signed copies will be for participants to keep in case they have any questions about the study. Participants will be provided with a copy of the Informed Consent Forms prior to beginning the interview process.

Permission to Audiotape: I agree to have the interview digitally recorded for transcription. I understand that these audio files will not be presented. I also, understand that I have the right to review all or any portion of the audio file and request that it be destroyed.

Please circle one:

Yes

No

I have read the above material, and any questions that I had asked, have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study realizing that I may withdraw without penalty at any time. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded.

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please sign and date both copies of this Informed Consent Form and return one to the researcher. The other is for your records.

_____

Participant's Name (Please print)

_____

Participant's signature   Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol Script

Thank you again for participating in this interview. I am conducting a research study to understand the unique lived experiences of Indian female graduate students, who immigrate to the United States to attend an institution of higher education. You have been invited to participate in this study because you meet the criteria. The findings of this study will be published, as they may provide the educational community with further insight regarding serving international female students from India in an academic capacity. This interview should last no more than an hour and a half. You will be asked ten in-depth questions about your experience with a focus on academic, social and cultural experiences while living and studying in America. With your permission, I will be audio-recording the interview and I will transcribe these later. Once I have completed the transcriptions, I will forward them to you so you can check them for accuracy. As a reminder, your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. Do you have any questions you would like to ask before the interview begins?

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter for Human Research

![Seton Hall University logo 1856]

June 5, 2020

Sarita Revulagadda

Re: Study ID# 2020-077

Dear Ms. Revulagadda,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled "The Lived Experiences of Indian International Female Graduate Students in American Higher Education" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form and recruitment flyer. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mara Podvey

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Office of the Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall · 400 South Orange Avenue · South Orange, New Jersey 07079 · Tel: 973.275.4654 · Fax 973.275.2978 ·
www.shu.edu
WHAT GREAT MINDS CAN DO