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Women in Transition: Experiences of Asian Women International Students on U.S. College Campuses

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Women in Transition: Experiences of Asian Women International Students on U.S.
College Campuses.

by

Siva Jeyabalasingam

A Dissertation Presented to the
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2011

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by

Siva Jeyabalasingam


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Nova Southeastern University
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences


This dissertation was submitted by Siva Jeyabalasingam under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities & Social Sciences at Nova Southeastern University.

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Date of Final Approval

 
Douglas G. Flemons, Ph.D.
Chair

For all international sojourners

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Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Copyright Page.....	ii
Approval Page.....	iii
Dedications	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents	vii
Abstract	xii
Chapter I—Introduction	
Context of the Study	1
My Story	3
Purpose of the Study	7
Significance of the Study	9
Overview of Chapters	12
Chapter II—Review of the Literature	
Culture.....	14
American Culture.....	16
Asian Culture	17
University Culture.....	18
Alcohol Use	19
University Student Counseling Centers	23
In Loco Parentis	24
Acculturation.....	26

Acculturation Strategies.....	28
Assimilation	29
Marginalization	29
Separation	29
Integration	29
Psychological Acculturation	30
Acculturative Stress	32
Freshman Acculturation.....	32
International Students	35
International Students in the U. S	35
International Students' Acculturation in U.S. Universities	37
Asian International Students in the U. S	40
Asian Male & Asian Female International Students.....	42
Chapter III—Methodology	
Overview of Qualitative Methodology	45
Qualitative Orientation.....	47
Constructivist Paradigm.....	47
Method	49
Ethnography	49
Autoethnography.....	52
Data Sampling.....	56
Data Collection	57
Participant Observation.....	57

Interviews.....	59
Ericksonian Storytelling.....	61
Circular Questioning.....	62
Data Analysis	64
Trustworthiness.....	68
Credibility	68
Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation	68
Progressive Subjectivity.....	69
Member Checks	69
Transferability.....	71
Dependability and Confirmability	71
Fairness and Authenticity	72
Ethical Concerns	72
Chapter IV—Research Findings and Discussion	
The Women in this Study	73
Sanoh.....	73
Kayo.....	74
Ling.....	74
Hiroko	74
Eun-Mi	74
Amaya.....	75
Mali.....	75
Daiyu.....	75

Zhilan	75
Bian	76
Siva	76
International Student Struggles	77
Logistical Difficulties	77
Language Difficulties.....	79
Loneliness	80
International Student Struggles Specific to Asian Women.....	81
Bring Honor	82
Get Married	82
Put Family First.....	84
Study at Home.....	85
Study in America	85
Study What We Choose	87
Return Home	89
Stay Asian	92
Don't Change	93
Dress Asian	95
Control Emotions	96
Study!	97
Avoid Extracurricular Activities.....	98
Don't Socialize.....	98
Don't Date.....	101

Obey Us Or Else	103
Emotional Responses	103
Guilt	103
Fear	105
Cognitive Responses	106
Interpersonal Responses.....	108
Summary	109
 Chapter V—Implications for Research and Practice	
Reflections and Interpretations	111
Contributions of My Study	115
Limitations of My Study	117
Implications of My Study	120
For Academics	120
For Clinicians.....	122
Concluding Thoughts – A New Beginning.....	125
References	131
Appendices	169
Appendix A—Letter of Introduction	
Appendix B—Informed Consent Form	

Abstract

Often referred to as people in transition, international students usually arrive in the U.S. with a clear sense of their academic goals; however, they often have not considered what their lives will be like or how they may change in non-academic ways. In addition to the typical level of university-related stress, international students face additional problems and difficulties generated in part by the cultural differences between the U.S. and their own countries. This is particularly true for Asian students. Of several studies that have investigated the experiences of international students in the U.S., only a handful have examined Asian students' unique experiences of acculturation, and although the number of Asian women students in the U.S. is increasing, there are even fewer studies about them. This study served as a corrective to these tendencies by focusing specifically on the transformative experiences of Asian women international students (AWIS). Utilizing autoethnographic and ethnographic methodologies, the researcher conducted a qualitative study, exploring in depth the lived experiences of eleven Asian women in cultural transition. The findings bring to light rich and conflicting emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal experiences and strategies of AWIS, who attempt to balance the cultural and familial injunctions of their parents (e.g., *Bring Honor*, *Stay Asian*, and *Obey Us or Else*) with the freedom and opportunities of American culture and campus life. The findings of this research will be relevant to various stakeholders. University administrators and staff, particularly professionals in student affairs and, more specifically, those working with international students and/or in student counseling centers, will benefit from a nuanced understanding of the complexities of these students' lives. Both researchers and clinicians will gain an appreciation for how a systemic focus

can be maintained while interviewing individuals. Clinicians will also be better equipped to handle the cultural complexities encountered by these women and to provide culturally sensitive counseling.

Chapter I—Introduction

No one leaves his or her world without having been transfixed by its roots, or with a vacuum for a soul. We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self soaked in our history, our culture; a memory, sometimes scattered, sometimes sharp and clear, of the streets of our childhood.

— Paulo Freire (1994, p. 32)

Context of the Study

During my internship at Nova Southeastern University's Student Counseling Center (NSC), several of my clients were Asian women international students (AWIS) who sought therapy to help deal with the clashes between their Eastern upbringing and their Western environment. One woman that I worked with had had strict rules and curfews to follow when she was living back home. As a freshman in the U.S., she found the absence of parental authority refreshing. But due to the lack of boundaries, she was staying out late at night and engaging in dangerous activities, such as consuming excessive alcohol, smoking cigarettes and marijuana, and having unprotected sexual encounters with strangers in the back of trucks and in bars. Another student fell in love with an American man and was contemplating having a sexual relationship with him, but she was unable to overcome the tremendous amount of guilt she was experiencing just by entertaining such culturally inappropriate thoughts.

Given that I am an AWIS who lived through this transition process, the stories of these women resonated closely with my own, and yet there were instances when our narratives diverged, making me curious and wanting to learn more about those moments of similarities and distinctions. After some exploration, I was amazed to learn that the current literature was limited to a general understanding of the challenges facing all international students. But my Asian women clients at NSC brought to my attention that

we were all caught in a perplexing predicament of living in two opposing cultures at the same time and a study honoring the complexities of our lives was very much needed. These women's transformative stories at NSC became the inspiration for the birth of this document.

My intent was to conduct a qualitative descriptive study employing ethnographic techniques to explore in-depth the lived experiences of my research participants, but as a result of writing about a topic that I have extensive first-hand experience in, it only made sense for me to include my voice. Since this study is oriented by both autoethnographic and ethnographic paradigms, to capture the mixed nature of this work, I refer to it as an auto/ethnography. When the text refers to my autoethnographic account alone, the slash will be omitted, but when it talks about both my autoethnographic piece and also the research with my participants, the section will be referred to as auto/ethnography—with the slash.

In Chapter Four, along with the experiences of my participants, I include elements of my story as part of the analysis. However, below I provide an overview of my account to familiarize readers with my autoethnographic contribution to this study. Like myself, my participants are still in cultural transition, and personally I believe that this will always remain the case. Because of this, I have written this dissertation with much consideration about the possible repercussion for our families and friends in mind. There are details that are not included in the document so as to protect privacy and family relationships. Even though we have been tremendously influenced by American culture and we have lived American lifestyles during our days as sojourns, at heart we still remain essentially Asian.

My Story

A few months back, wanting a drastic makeover, I asked my hairdresser, who for the past six years had been given strict orders never to trim off more than two inches of my waist length hair, to chop it all off. First he looked at me in disbelief, and then, with a sarcastic grin, he says to me, “So you’re finally becoming American?” Bull’s eye, he was right on the money. I went in simply wanting a change in my appearance, but instead got an instantaneous analysis of my cultural transformation. But my metamorphosis did not begin a few months ago; it has actually been a decade long work in progress.

I came to the United States three months after my eighteenth birthday. I had just completed a year of undergraduate work at the American College of Higher Education (ACOHE) in Colombo, Sri Lanka and had to transfer to the U.S. to finish my degree. Up to that point I had led a sheltered and, from my point of view, over-protected life. My parents took great pride in deciding what was right and wrong for me, choosing my clothes and shoes, my hairstyle, and even my degree. I was to come to America, obtain my bachelor’s degree, and return to Sri Lanka.

When it came time to transfer to the U.S., I settled on Florida Atlantic University (FAU) in Boca Raton, Florida as my first choice, as they were certain to accept all my credits. This, at least, is what I told my parents; however, my wanting to go there had much to do with my boyfriend of three months, Dilan, whom my parents knew nothing about, because in Asian cultures, dating is often taboo. Therefore, I deliberately chose not to divulge any information to my parents about the relationship between Dilan and me.

Dilan had just found out that he had been accepted to FAU and was making arrangements to start attending in Fall, 2000. However, my parents’ choice for me was

California State University in Sacramento (CSUS). Why? Because my oldest sister, Priya, was already attending CSUS and my parents did not want me to be alone when in America. I desperately wanted my freedom; however, at that time, I had not found my voice yet, so I lost this round; my parents won. I soon found myself in California, boarding with Priya.

Soon after I began classes at CSUS, I was told that I would have to retake 21 of the credits that I had already taken at ACOHE. While my parents pondered whether I should stay and retake the classes at CSUS or transfer to FAU, I decided to take matters into my own hands. Priya was getting married soon and moving to Texas, and coming from the tropics, I hated the Sacramento winter, which was long and depressing, so I made my first major decision: I was moving to Florida.

Of course it was not as simple as my making the decision and my parents agreeing to it. As with any major decision in my family, whether I should move to Florida or Texas became a topic of family debate over a couple of months. During this time of family deliberation, I had several conversations with my parents about the possibility of having to retake credits after transferring to Texas, which would inevitably lead to yet another relocation; therefore, moving to Florida once and for all would be the best decision. Much to my amazement, they agreed.

Also, at this point I was ready to move. My other sister, Sri, who had graduated from FAU and was now back home in Sri Lanka, had told me a lot about Florida—the tropical weather, the beaches, the Boca Town Center Mall—and I was now eager to experience it for myself. Extremely excited, I longed to get on the plane for my first encounter with independence. I already had some friends at FAU who had transferred

from Sri Lanka, so I was not concerned about being lonely, and besides, Dilan (whom my family still knew nothing about) was there too. I could not wait!

In late December, Priya and I made our way to Sacramento International Airport. She was headed to catch a flight to Austin to visit her fiancé (now my brother-in-law), and I was headed to Fort Lauderdale to get ready for my first semester at FAU, and also of course to see Dilan. I hugged Priya before running off to catch my flight and then, without any warning, my excitement turned into anguish. I didn't want to let go of her, I didn't want to go anywhere, I wanted to stay with her. I tried reasoning with myself. I could not understand where this feeling had crept up from. After all, this was what I had wanted, right? So what was the matter with me? Up until that morning, I had been counting down the days, so why was I second-guessing my decision moments before I was about to board the plane to Florida? Before I could do anything drastic, Priya sent me on my way. I turned and fled before letting the tears roll down; the last thing I wanted was to upset her.

At that moment, I had no explanation for my sudden change in emotions, but looking back now, I believe it had to do with my fear of going into the unknown. From that point on, my life as I had always known it was going to change. I was transitioning from an over-protected teenager to an independent adult, and finally the reality of my decision was catching up with me. As I waited to board the plane, I found myself debating the choice I had made. At 18 years old did I really know what was best for me? Should I have just let my parents decide instead of taking things into my own hands? After all, they always had my best interest in mind. I could not figure out what led me to make such a drastic decision. Was it the need for independence? Was it because Dilan

was there? The debating continued even after the flight attendant announced, “Welcome to Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport, the local time is . . .” and as I continued to walk along the jet-way.

Once in Florida and with no familial presence around, the freedom I faced was extremely liberating *and* incredibly frightening. I could go wherever I wanted, do whatever I preferred, and live with whomever I desired; there was no one to stop me. I played pool with friends late into the night, wore dresses with spaghetti straps, and hung out with Dilan at every possible moment. I made decisions that young Asian women living back home never would have had the opportunity to do so.

With each passing day I was falling more in love with my new found lifestyle. At the same time I missed my dad’s humor, my mum’s cooking, my home, the familiar sights and sounds of my neighborhood, and my cultural environment. I could not understand why. Here I was in the United States of America doing whatever I wanted without dreading to ask permission from my parents, yet I was experiencing a lot of internal conflicts and feeling like my emotions were splitting and taking opposite routes.

Perhaps it was the guilt of having a boyfriend, or going out at night, or meeting friends for a game of pool, as these would not have been allowed or approved of by my parents if it had been back home. Or maybe it was the fear of getting caught and finding myself on the next plane back home because I was behaving “un-Asian.” It was exhilarating *and* terrifying all at the same time. Everywhere I went, my parents went. Thoughts about getting caught or about something bad happening became a regular preoccupation. What if I go out at night and meet with an accident? What if I get too carried away with my new found independence and lose interest in school? What if I am

placed on academic probation? What if this and what if that? There were so many what-ifs, and I was constantly looking over my shoulder to see if anyone I knew was around. While out at night, I always had an eye on the time in an attempt to avoid staying out too late.

Several months after I arrived in Florida, Dilan and I moved in together. Three years later, as we walked for our FAU graduation ceremony, plans of returning to Sri Lanka flew out the window. We decided to go for our master's and had our degrees conferred within months of each other. I started my Ph.D. while Dilan settled into his full-time job. We celebrated milestones and were excited about the future. We talked about marriage, children, and careers. We decided to live in America and buy our first home together. Our story was a fairytale—life was wonderful!

There was only one hitch: My parents had no idea that Dilan was anyone other than a friend from back home whom I saw occasionally. They believed that I was sharing an apartment with a female roommate, most of my spare time was spent studying in the library, and I was safely tucked in bed every night by 9:00 p.m. Had they found out what was really happening, I would have been on the next plane back to Sri Lanka, and my American life would have been over.

Purpose of the Study

Researchers have documented and I can personally attest that coming from a foreign country and entering a higher education program in the U.S. is a life altering experience (Hsieh, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Mathew, 2008; Ryan, 2005). This immense undertaking is not simply a journey from one continent to another, it is also a journey from one culture to another. Often referred to as people in transition, international

students usually arrive with a clear sense of their academic goals, but they often have not considered what their lives will be like or how they may change beyond this. In addition to the typical level of university-related stress, international students face additional problems and difficulties generated as a result of their unique circumstances and relocation to the U.S. (Lin & Yi, 1997; Sandhu, 1995; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Once in America, these new immigrants struggle to achieve academic aspirations in the “land of opportunity,” while protecting their emotional and physical wellbeing. To perform well, they must quickly adapt socially and academically to the college culture and workloads. They have to begin to create new friendships and professional networks while learning to manage the newfound autonomy in their personal lives. They also must get accustomed to new geographies, climates, social norms, lifestyles, languages, and personal choices. For me, the academic workload was fairly easy, but I had a difficult time adjusting and settling into my new social environment.

While all international students go through a period of acculturation upon arrival in the U.S., those coming from Asia tend to experience a more stressful process than others (Jorgensen, 1997; Lin & Yi, 1997; Pedersen, 1991; Yeh & Yang, 2003; Zhang, 2000). In addition, previous research on gender and international students found that female students may experience more difficulty in adjusting to a new culture than their male counterparts (Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1988). This suggests that Asian women students may thus have the most difficulty of all in adapting when in the U.S. for the first time.

Of several studies that have investigated the experiences of international students in the U.S. (Barrett & Huba 1994; Berry, Kim, Mindle, & Mok, 1987; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Zhang & Dixon, 2003), only a handful have examined Asian students' unique experiences of acculturation (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Rahman, & Rollock, 2004). And although the percentage of Asian women students in the U.S. is ever increasing (U.S. Department of Education, 2007), there are even fewer studies about them. The need is clear: The voices of Asian, women students in the U.S. need to be brought to the foreground, and this study was designed to meet this need. My overarching research question, that is, the grand tour question informing this study, was the following: How do Asian women international students (AWIS) juxtapose the cultural and familial injunctions of their parents with the freedom and opportunities of American culture and campus life?

Significance of the Study

The demographics of U.S. colleges and universities are rapidly changing, becoming diverse communities with a multitude of racially and culturally distinct groups (Lee, 2006; Smith, Bowman, & Hsu, 2007). Contributing to this population is the large and increasing number of international students studying in the U.S. (Thomas, 2006). Currently, Asia remains the largest sending region of international students, accounting for 67% of total U.S. international enrollments (Institute of International Education, 2009a).

As an Asian myself, I have noted that many Asian students speak English, dress in western outfits, and have traveled abroad previously, but behind this Western façade lies a way of life that remains essentially Eastern. Asians are taught to emphasize

modesty in life, maintain a strong devotion to education, and place family at the center of their social and economic relationships (Ng, 1998). They place high value on the family unit, rather than the individual; obligation to parents and family needs are given utmost priority; and emotional restraint is encouraged for the harmony of the family (Rastogi, 2007).

Many have found that Asian students experience more adjustment difficulties than other international students (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2003), mainly due to basic divergences between the individualist values in America and the Asian collectivist cultural orientation (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Servaes, 2000, Swagler & Ellis, 2003). Having been brought up with an emphasis on interdependence (Diller, 1999), modesty, compliance, and respect for authority (Wong & Mock, 1997), Asian students are soon challenged by American values, which stress independence, assertiveness, open communication, and competition (Wong & Mock).

Asian women have been socialized to accept “domination by men, restricted roles for women, psychological reinforcement of gender stereotypes, and a subordinate position within the family and community” (Ng, 1998, p. 286). Ng (1998) found that Asian families are characterized by a hierarchy of authority based on sex, age, and generation, placing young women at the lowest level, subordinate to father, husband, brother, and son. These women, who were protected by their families as part of the benefits and obligations of filial piety and obedience, now find themselves in the U.S., exposed to freedom and opportunity that was not previously available to them. Trapped

in a culture war, they commonly fall prey to distress and confusion as they struggle to find a balance between traditional upbringing and their new contemporary environment.

It comes as no surprise that these women's strong ties to their family unit and culture complicates their acculturation process to the U.S.A. (Gudykunst, 2001); hence, it would be beneficial to study their experiences using a manner that honors their familial relationships and its systemic intricacy. Perhaps no model of understanding can justify a better appreciation of this complexity than one informed by the theories and language practices of family therapy, given the field's sensitivity to family relationships.

The field of family therapy utilizes systems theory as a way of understanding and conceptualizing individuals, families, relationships, and relationship systems (Nelson, Chenail, Alexander, Crane, & et al, 2007). In this approach, the family is considered as a whole living unit that is more than the sum of its individual members, and systems theory justifies examining family members in terms of their position or role within the system as a whole. "Homeostasis, and feedback-combined with structural concepts such as hierarchy, power, boundaries, rules, roles, alignment, and triangulation, provide an excellent framework for understanding the process of family functioning" (Shumway, Kimball, Korinek, & Arredondo, 2007, p. 136). Since this approach emphasizes the interdependency of family members rather than focusing on individuals in isolation from the family, it is an appropriate orientation to study the experiences of individuals in relation to their family.

For the purposes of this research, the language practice of the Milan Family Therapy Associates, more specifically, circular questioning, was employed as an interview technique. The Milan Associates view individuals in terms of their context or

relationship to others, rather than their individual makeup. Although they use this form of questioning therapeutically to elicit information regarding the experiences of the family's presenting concern, cycle of interactions related to the problem, and the changes in familial relationships over time, I utilized it as a tool for organizing the interviews and for eliciting relational information from the interviewees. By asking circular questions, the researcher encourages respondents to talk about relationships (Nelson, Fleuridas, & Rosenthal, 1986), and to provide contextualized information that is detailed and useful (McNamee, 1992).

In this study, I expected the participants to be forthcoming in their sharing of sensitive information on the cultural challenges and familial conflicts they had encountered after moving to America, and it would, of course, have been very helpful to hear also from the students' families. But, given the traditional nature of Asian families and the liberal life-style decisions that international students feel free to make after leaving their home countries, including families in this study could have undermined the very relationships I was interested in studying. Thus, as a culturally sensitive family therapist and researcher, I consciously chose to exclude family members in this study. Instead, I conducted systemic, circularity-informed conversations with the student participants, allowing my curiosity and their answers to reflect not only the experiences of the participants themselves, but also their understanding of the experience of their families.

Overview of Chapters

In the next chapter, I take a comprehensive look at the existing literature that contributes to an understanding of the experiences of AWIS in the U.S. I am taking the

perspective that the acculturation process that international students contend with is not only due to a clash between Asian and American cultures, but also involves the process of accommodating to the university. As will be discussed, I am treating the university setting itself as a cultural entity. Chapter Three focuses on the qualitative methodology I utilized in this study. I identify and discuss the methods of data sampling, gathering, analysis, and trustworthiness. In Chapter Four, I present the findings of my study. Finally, in Chapter Five, I reflect on the findings of this research and address the contributions, limitations, and implications of my study. I end the chapter with some concluding thoughts.

Chapter II—Review of the Literature

What would it be like to have not only color vision but culture vision, the ability to see the multiple worlds of others?

—Mary Catherine Bateson (1995, p. 53)

Culture

Culture. What is culture? Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) argued that the basic idea of culture—that different nations operate with different categories, assumptions, and moralities—is ancient and can be found in the Bible, Homer, Hippocrates, Herodotus, and Chinese scholars of the Han dynasty. Part way through the 20th century, Williams (1958) described the word *culture* as one of the most complicated words in the English language. Its complexity has certainly not decreased since then. Perhaps the most difficult problem to overcome is a definitional one, related in part to the word's etymology. Its origins are linked to the Latin word *cultura*, which stems from the verb *colere*, and can mean anything from tilling and cultivating to worshipping and protecting (Crabb, 1917).

The first clear and comprehensive definition of culture came from the British social anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor (1874), who defined it as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 1). This definition presents culture as a holistic entity encompassing all of humankind's social behaviors. Since then, definitions of culture have proliferated, and today they are numerous and varied.

In the United States, decades after Tylor, many anthropologists have credited Frank Boas (1940) as a major influence on their understanding and application of culture (Hegeman, 1999; Moore, 2008; Mullin, 2001; Stocking, 1966; Wolf, Kahn, Roseberry, & Wallerstein, 1994). Perhaps his most enduring legacy is being recognized as the first

anthropologist to think in terms not of culture but of many cultures (Janiewski & Banner, 2004). Boas emphasized the study of cultural traits within different cultural areas. He believed that there is not just one universal culture that human beings are in various stages of attaining, but, instead, that every different society has its own unique and coherent culture that cannot be judged against others. Following up various threads of his work, his students, such as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, were instrumental in establishing the culture and personality movement. Their work focused on the role that culture has in shaping human personality (Janiewski & Banner).

In 1952, North American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn surveyed and collected over a 100 different definitions of culture from popular and academic sources. The authors arrived at the conclusion that culture is a comprehensive concept that includes all aspects of customary human behavior, as well as material goods. At the end of the book, they proposed the following definition:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.

(Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 181)

In Clifford Geertz's (1973) words, "Culture . . . is not just an ornament of human existence but . . . an essential condition for it. . . . There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (p. 49). As human beings, we are all cultured. Culture is

the lens through which people view the world, and perhaps there is no greater cultural influence on the individual than their family (Mills, 1959). Some family therapists contend that family can be construed as both a culture and the primary medium by which culture is passed along (D. Flemons, personal communication, March 20, 2009; Goldner, 1989; Krause, 2002). Given that language and customs are learned within the family, it only makes sense that the family is seen as the vehicle for the transmission of culture. In fact, Tseng and Hsu (1991) found that “the family is the basic sociocultural unit” (p. xiii), and “the nest for the growth of an individual, the resource for social support, and the institution through which culture is transmitted from one generation to another” (p. xiii).

American Culture

As a nation of immigrants, the United States displays tremendous ethnic diversity, making it difficult to generalize about a distinct American culture. Perhaps this comes as no surprise, as many have come to believe that there is no American culture, or if there is one, it is a melting pot culture with diversity as its chief characteristic (Harper, 1980; Naylor, 1998; Sonnenschein, 1999). However, Naylor (1998) noted that “the culture of the United States is as rich and deep as any other, in some cases just as bizarre and irrational as other cultures may appear to many Americans (p vii).

Some Americans think of their culture in terms of tradition, heritage, history, religion, or nationality (Naylor, 1998); others, in terms of fine art, literature, music, and architecture (Datesman, Crandall, & Kearny, 2005). In the eyes of yet others, culture is synonymous with pop culture, shaped by hallmarks such as the O. J. Simpson trial (Natoli, 1998) or the Clinton affair (Williams, 2004). Despite difficulties in generalizing about American culture, social science researchers have found that the culture of the U.S.

is the most individualistic in the world (Hersen & Thomas, 2005; Lipset, 1996). In fact many agree that individuality is a hallmark of American culture (Derber, 2000; Fine, 1995; Naylor, 1998).

Slater (1990) found that Americans in general tend to see themselves first and primarily as individuals rather than as part of a collective or larger group. Their focus is on the development of the individual, or the individual unit—the nuclear family. According to Segal (2002), Americans tend to be goal oriented, so building strong social relationships between them does not take precedence. They believe that all people must be treated as equals, with each having the right to make his or her own future decisions (Naylor, 1998). American culture allows individuals to pursue their goals and achieve personal success, but in the process they must often branch out from the family and group and become less interdependent, which in turn reduces family cohesiveness and commitment (Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2001).

Asian Culture

The people of the Asian continent are ethnically diverse. However, they share many cultural commonalities in areas of family structure and harmony, filial piety, and a collectivist worldview (Rastogi, 2007). Their collectivist orientation gives precedence to the family unit, not the individual. The identity of Asians is inextricably bound up with the identity of the group, and individuals' actions are believed to reflect on the entire family (Larsen, Kim-Goh, & Nguyen, 2008). Therefore, one is expected to exhibit humility and respect towards elders and persons in positions of authority, and avoid engaging in any behavior that may cause shame to the family (Larsen, Kim-Goh, &

Nguyen). Problems arise when younger, less traditional, generations do not share these expectations.

Asians believe that strong social relationships are essential and expected to last a life time. They order their relationships hierarchically, circumscribed by well-defined roles, and they value the subordination of the self to the group (Rastogi, 2007). The collectivist Asian culture ensures strong family and group commitment and cohesiveness, shaping identity and minimizing conflict and confusion (Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2001). However, it often requires the individual to sacrifice any hopes, dreams, and wishes that are inconsistent with those of the group (Murphy-Berman & Berman). In addition, an individual's self-worth is not measured by what he or she personally achieves, but by the extent to which he or she lives up to the expectations of others, as defined by dominant cultural values and norms.

University Culture

Culture is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to a country or to a group of people. It can be talked of in terms of a university as well. Whether individuals are traveling from a different state or country, or just transitioning from high school to university, entering an institution of higher learning introduces individuals to a new culture, a new way of thinking, and a new way of life. Therefore, it is inevitable that individuals who attend university undergo a process of acculturation.

Research has increasingly demonstrated how campus climate plays a significant role in affecting student experiences and outcomes, and since the 1980s it has been recognized that first year students struggle on college campuses (e.g., Feldman, 2005; Tinto, 1987). The foundation for this recognition is based on the "increasing evidence

that success in the first year of college is crucial to college success and hence many colleges and universities have begun to front load the college experience for students offering more support in the first year” (Feldman, p. 56).

A study conducted by Parks & Fals-Stewart (2004) at the University at Buffalo’s Research Institute on Addictions found that the transition from high school through the first year of college can have dangerous physical, sexual, and psychological implications for young adults. Schulenberg et al. (2001) termed the challenges these young adults face as “developmental disturbances” (p. 474), which “reflects developmentally limited deviance that is statistically normative, culturally sanctioned, and time prescribed” (p. 474). It is during this late adolescence and early adulthood stage that heavy drinking, alcohol-related problems, and risky or illegal behaviors peak (Baer & Carney, 1993).

Although university officials deal with numerous problems and crises, because most campus incidents are alcohol related, it remains a major concern (Hoffman, Schuh, & Fenske, 1998). In fact college presidents agree that the most widespread problem on college and university campuses in the United States is high alcohol consumption (Haines, 1996; Isralowitz, 2004; Volkmann & Volkmann, 2006). Nationally, 80 to 90% of all underage college students drink (Haines & Spear, 1996). Fisher, Cullen, and Turner (2000) noted that the first year in college involves significant risk for sexual assaults, with over 50% of all sexual assaults of college students involving alcohol use (see review by Abbey, 2002).

Alcohol use. The College Alcohol Study (CAS) carried out by Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee (2000) found that the college environment is highly responsible for alcohol use and especially binge drinking. This study was conducted between 1993 and 2000 and

involved more than 50,000 students' in over 120 colleges. The research also found that colleges with a good party reputation had a greater enrollment rate when compared to those that forbid alcohol on campuses.

It comes as no surprise that individuals who engage in frequent binge drinking have a high likelihood of experiencing negative alcohol-related consequences (Wechsler & Nelson, 2001). At least five percent of all college students report encountering police or public safety officers due to misconduct, while 11% admit to vandalizing property after having been under the influence (Wechsler et al., 2002). Also, approximately 2.1 million students disclose driving under the influence of alcohol each year (Hingson, Heeren, & Levenson, 2002).

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA, 2002) estimated that each year drinking is involved in 70,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape, 500,000 nonfatal injuries, 400,000 unprotected sex events, and 600,000 assaults of other students. In addition, citing a variety of studies dating since the 1990s (Engs, Diebold, & Hanson, 1996; Wechsler et al., 2000; Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994), the NIAAA noted that one-quarter of all students report a negative impact on their academic work, including missed classes, poor work, and falling behind in course work, as a result of drinking. Furthermore, McGinnis & Foege (1993) found that alcohol related injury remains a leading cause of death in this population. Between 1998 to 2001, alcohol-related injury deaths increased from nearly 1600 to more than 1700, an increase of 6% per college population (Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005).

Although binge drinking increases the likelihood of individuals making dangerous personal choices (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1997; Meilman, Yanofsky, Gaylor, & Turco, 1989; Straus & Bacon, 1953), researchers at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine (Hutton, McCaul, Santora, & Erbelding, 2008) found that binge drinking is particularly more dangerous for women due to a variety of reasons. Others have noted that consuming the same amount of alcohol as men, women will have a higher blood alcohol concentration in their system and will experience substantially greater alcohol-caused impairment. (e.g., O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Seibring, Nelson, & Lee, 2002; Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & D'Arcy, 2005). Rates of frequent binge drinking among college women increased significantly between 1992 and 2002, with nearly 40% of college women reporting binge drinking and 20% reporting binge drinking three or more times in the previous 2 weeks (Wechsler et al., 2002). These statistics interact with physiological gender differences to put women at a greater risk than men at comparable levels of drinking. Overall, smaller quantities of alcohol are needed to produce an intoxicating effect in women than in men, placing women at greater risk for negative consequences, including alcohol poisoning (Wechsler et al.).

Although women often drink for similar reasons as men, such as relaxing, fitting in, and decreased inhibition, women also drink because of a desire for positive attention from male peers and to develop intimate relationships (Vince-Whitman & Cretella, 1999). This is the case despite the fact that heavy drinking places them at risk for negative sexual consequences (Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005), and increased vulnerability to sexual assault (Young et al., 2005). Parks and Fals-Stewart (2004) conducted their study on 870 incoming freshmen women to assess changes in the

probability of sexual and nonsexual victimization on days of any alcohol consumption compared with days of heavy and no alcohol consumption during this transition period. They found that 78% of them did not experience any victimization; however, among the 22% of women who were victimized, 13% experienced severe physical victimization and 38% experienced severe sexual victimization. In addition, the odds of first-year college sexual victimization significantly increased with each pre-college psychological symptom (e.g., anxiety, depression), and each pre-college sexual partner a woman reported. The study conducted by Hutton, McCaul, Santora, and Erbeling (2008) also revealed that female binge drinkers were more likely to have anal sex than male binge drinkers and these women were three times more likely to have anal sex than nondrinking women. They were also twice as likely to have multiple sex partners if they were binge drinkers.

To enable both male and female students to adjust to this new academic and living environment with minimum apprehension and without engaging in self destructive behaviors, universities nationwide have developed programs and initiatives intended to facilitate the transition to college. Researchers have found that programs designed to target first year students increase their likelihood of success during that year and also their chances of graduating with a degree (Bureau & Rromrey, 1994; Conner & Colton, 1999; Townsend & Twombly, 2001). Facilitating such programs is believed to be useful as they “foster integration into campus communities and help align personal goals with institutional ones (Noble, Flynn, Lee, Hilton, 2007, p. 39).

Given these observations, it is not surprising that almost all universities provide brief orientation sessions in the first few days of student attendance to help students acculturate to university life (Pratt, Bowers, Terzian, & Hunsberger, & et al., 2000).

Earlier efforts took the form of increased institutional resources such as libraries, writing centers, or computer labs (Miller & Pope, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Universities and colleges are now offering brief, informational sessions or seminars that deal with the development of academic skills and social skills (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Howard & Jones, 2000). They are also taking steps to identify and help troubled students and to teach all students how to cope emotionally and physically. Such formal interventions include extended, clinically based programs such as those conducted by student counseling centers. This transition to college of young adults has also attracted the attention of psychotherapists who have recognized for many decades now that the pressures of being in a new academic culture can be so great that it could not only drive students out of school but also undermine their mental health (Deutsch & Ellenberg, 1973; Kline, 2006).

University student counseling centers. Traditionally, university student counseling centers have placed emphasis on developmental and preventive counseling. However, during the last few decades, university and college counseling centers have reported a shift in the needs of the student population seeking counseling services, ranging from developmental and informational needs, to more severe psychological problems (Gallagher, Gill, & Sysko, 2000; Gallagher, Sysko, & Zhang, 2001; Pledge, Lapan, Heppner, & Roehlke, 1998; O'Malley, Wheeler, Murphey, O'Connell, & Waldo, 1990; Robbins, May, & Corazzini, 1985; Stone & Archer, 1990). Today there is also increasing diversity in the student population seeking counseling services.

The National Survey of Counseling Center Directors at 274 institutions (Gallagher, Sysko, & Zhang, 2001) found that 85% of student counseling center directors

reported an increase in severe psychological problems over the previous five years, including learning disabilities, alcohol problems, self-injury incidents, eating disorders, other illicit drug use, sexual assault concerns on campus, and problems related to past sexual abuse. They estimated that approximately 16% of counseling center clients had severe psychological problems (Gallagher, Gill, & Sysko, 2000), and concluded that 17% of counseling center clients were taking psychiatric medication, in comparison to 9% in 1994 (Gallagher, Gill, & Sysko). 89% of centers had to hospitalize a student for psychological reasons and 10% reported a student suicide. In another study, Levine and Cureton (1998) found that student affairs administrators were spending more time dealing with troubled students and had seen marked increases in serious mental health problems on campus, such as eating disorders, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, classroom disruption, gambling, and suicide attempts. Berger (2002) and Goetz (2002) reason that this increased demand for counseling on college campuses reflect the pressures and problems that are present in the American society as a whole, as well as the changing demographics of the college student population.

At the institutional level, university officials have to acknowledge that the culture and atmosphere that students now enter into has evolved into a much more stressful and complicated one over the past few decades. Therefore, for the well being of all in that setting, administrators have to continue to play a significant role in supporting the transition that these students make into this unfamiliar environment, while assisting them in achieving their educational and personal goals.

In loco parentis. The doctrine of *in loco parentis* can be traced to 18th century common law and beyond. With origins in a) ancient Rome, the law doctrine of *patria*

potestas signifies the total power and rights a Roman father has over his children by virtue of his paternity (De Colquhoun, 1849); and in b) the Code of Hammurabi, created in ancient Babylon, implies a similar kind of paternal power and control (King, 2004; Martin, 2005). The Latin phrase *in loco parentis* literally translates as “in place of a parent” (Bardeen, 1896, p. 211). By far the most common usage of this term relates to teachers and students. When viewed in a student affairs context, it is understood to mean that the institution stands in place of a student’s parent or guardian (Hoekema, 1994, p. 5). William Blackstone, an English Law scholar in the late 1770s, offered one of the earliest applications of this doctrine to education:

He [the father] may also delegate part of his parental authority . . . to the tutor or schoolmaster of his child; who is then in *in loco parentis*, and has such portion of the power of the parent committed to his charge, viz. that of restraint and correction, as may be necessary to answer the purpose for which he is employed. (Blackstone, 1770, p. 413)

The roots of *in loco parentis* run much deeper than the American educational system. It was originally borrowed from the British ideal of schools having not only educational but also moral responsibility for students. This focus on academics and character development was imitated by the newly created American universities, which intentionally modeled themselves after institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge (Nuss, 2003). In the U.S., the *in loco parentis* doctrine allowed institutions to oversee the behavior of their students and this governance was extensive in its care. It was a plenary power that “gave colleges virtually unfettered authority over students’ lives and affairs” (Olivas, 2005, p. 236).

Like their English counterparts, U.S. courts in the early nineteenth century were unwilling to interfere when students brought grievances, particularly in the area of rules, discipline, and expulsion, and this remained the case until the 1960s. As institutions began expelling students for political and social activism, a radical shift in responsibility began (Melear, 2003; Pollet, 2002). Legal scholars point to *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961) as the critical turning point (Hendrickson, 1991; Kaplin & Lee, 1995; Melear, 2003). In this case, the court rejected the notion of *in loco parentis* by institutions (Kaplin & Lee, 1997) and at a slower rate, courts adapted to this change, according greater rights to students than was previously recognized.

By the 1990s, and into the 2000s, the *in loco parentis* doctrine seemed to be in full force again as schools attempted to safeguard students (Komives & Woodard, 2003). From housing to fraternity policies, alcohol to sexual activity rules, academic to civil behavior standards, colleges and universities provide catalogs and handbooks to relate guidelines of appropriate behavior and to assist with governing it. Many institutions have enacted controversial rules governing dress codes and so-called hate speech, all in the name of protecting students (Wiegman, Lubiano, & Hardt, 2007). Cultural changes have also influenced the resurgence of the doctrine in the twenty-first century (Touraine & Kerr, 1997).

Acculturation

First studied by sociologists and anthropologists in regards to group-related phenomena (Graves, 1967; Sam & Berry, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), acculturation initially was a construct used by researchers to better understand the modernization and Westernization processes that various cultures and communities were

undergoing in the 19th century. Subsequently, acculturation has become important in understanding the experience of ethnic and cultural minorities as international migrations and political unrest support the creation of multicultural societies.

Simply said, acculturation covers all the changes that arise as a result of contact between individuals and groups of differing cultural backgrounds (Atri, Sharma, Cottrell, 2006; Mui & Kang, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) provided what is now regarded as the classic definition of the concept and is perhaps the most cited by acculturation researchers (Sam, & Berry, 2006, p. 11). Acculturation comprises “those phenomena 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 et al., 1936, p. 149). Berry (2005) noted that acculturation can take place for many reasons, including sojourning, migration, military invasion, and colonization.

More recently, acculturation has attracted the attention of mental health professionals (Berry, 1997; Lee, Blando, Mizelle, & Orozco, 2007; Ronen & Freeman, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) and the number of publications related to this phenomenon has surged. This raised interest is possibly due to the mounting evidence that suggests that acculturation is multidimensional. In particular, Berry’s (1980, 1997, 2003) conceptualization of acculturation as a multidirectional process has been an important contribution to the psychological understanding of acculturation.

Berry (1980) found that acculturation occurs when two fairly autonomous cultural groups come in contact with each other. He further noted that this is a conflictual and difficult process for many individuals and can result in a gradual change in a number of

areas that affect the individual (e.g., personality, language, cognitive style, attitude, etc.). Others have noted that this process could also lead to depression, anxiety, feelings of marginality and alienation, and identity confusion (Born, 1970; Mena, Padilla & Maldonado, 1987; Miranda & Matheny, 2000; Padilla, 1986; Padilla, Alvarez, & Lindholm, 1986; Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000). Research also suggests that while the process of acculturation affects a number of areas of an individual's life, multiple factors also affect the process of acculturation. These include reasons for immigrating, length of residence in the environment, age at immigration, contact with homeland (Marsella, Bornemann, Ekblad, & Orley, 1994), language preference, place of birth, generation level, socioeconomic status, and social supports (Ponterotto, 1987).

Acculturation Strategies

Within acculturation thinking, the framework provided by Berry and his colleagues (Berry, 1990; 1997; Berry, Kim, Power, Young & Bujaki, 1989; Berry, O'Connor, Weiss, & Gilbert, 2002) has received the most consideration. Following Redfield et al.'s statement in 1936, Berry noted that assimilation was not the only form of acculturation, challenging the assumption that everyone would assimilate and become a part of the dominant group (Gordon, 1964). Berry (1970) distinguished that the degree to which an individual simultaneously participates in the culture of the new society and in his or her own society will determine how the acculturation process proceeds. He then continued to delineate four ways in which ethnic group members acculturate. These include assimilation, marginalization, separation, and integration, now collectively referred to as "acculturation strategies."

Assimilation. This phenomenon occurs when individuals identify solely with the dominant culture and primarily seek social relationships with the dominant society. Immigrants sever ties with their own culture and do not continue to maintain their original cultural identity.

Marginalization. This strategy is demonstrated when individuals have little or no interest in their own cultural maintenance or of that of the host culture. This often leads to high levels of stress, depression, and or other mental health struggles.

Separation. In contrast to assimilation, separation happens when individuals place a high value on holding onto their original culture, and at the same time avoid interaction with and reject the host culture.

Integration. This strategy is achieved through identification with both the immigrants' own ethnic group and with the host culture, thereby maintaining some original traditions and simultaneously acquiring some characteristics of the host culture.

In a study conducted by Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) with 5000 immigrant youth from 13 countries, integration was found to be the most frequent acculturation strategy, followed by separation, assimilation, and marginalization in descending order. Relative to integration and separation, studies show that acculturation through assimilation leads to lower self-esteem, and marginalization has been associated with dysfunctional behavior such as delinquency and familial abuse (Berry, 1998). Researchers note that the optimal acculturation strategy for immigrants is integration, "as it appears to be a consistent predictor of more positive outcomes than the three alternatives" (Berry & Sam, 1997, p. 318). They further note that integration consequently culminating in biculturalism is the most adaptive way for individuals to

respond to the demands of psychological acculturation (Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1988; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989).

Psychological Acculturation

Graves (1967) made a distinction between acculturation as a collective or group-level phenomenon and as an individual-level phenomenon. Acculturation in the collective realm refers to changes in the culture of an entire group, while on an individual level, it involves a change in the psychology or identity of the individual, resulting in psychological acculturation (Graves). For groups, the general changes can be profound, but for individuals, changes can vary greatly, depending on how they involve themselves in the community.

One of the consequences of psychological acculturation is changes in ethnic identity, and Berry et al. (1987) identified five areas in which acculturation can be observed at the individual level, namely the physical, biological, cultural, relational, and psychological. While scholars of psychological acculturation are interested in all five realms, it is the effects of acculturation on the psychological well-being of the individual that has gained the most interest (Greenland & Brown, 2005; Noh & Avison, 1996).

Ward (2001) noted that psychological acculturation often involves the ABCs of acculturation: the affective, behavioral, and cognitive changes in an individual over time. While the main features of psychological acculturation has many names in acculturation literatures, there is broad agreement (e.g., Aldwin, 1994; Lazarus, 1990) that this process of dealing with life events begins with some fundamental agent that eventually places pressure on the individual. Not surprisingly, these pressures stem from having to deal with two cultures simultaneously and also having to participate in them to various

extents. Wolf, Silverman, and Yengoyan (2001) found that for some individuals, this process is a source of difficulty, depending on the extent of the stressors, whereas for others, the stressors are viewed as opportunities. Therefore, when acculturation is not judged by the individual to pose a problem, behavioral and other changes will follow smoothly. However, Sam and Berry (2006) noted that when greater levels of stressors are experienced, they tend to make intercultural exchange challenging, resulting in more of a long term problem. At the individual level, it is essential to identify the changes these individuals encounter, which may be in the form of rather easily accomplished behavioral shifts, such as ways of speaking, dressing, and eating. Alternatively, they can be more problematic, resulting in acculturative stress, manifested as anxiety, depression, and uncertainty.

Researchers acknowledge that virtually all aspects of a person's behavior have the potential to change. Berry (1980) referred to this behavioral component of acculturation as "behavioral shifts." This same stance has been referred to as "culture learning" by Brislin, Landis, and Brandt (1983) and "social skills" acquisition by Furnham and Bochner (1986). In this level, psychological adaptation to acculturation is considered a matter of learning a new behavioral repertoire that is in keeping with the traits of the new culture. Berry (1992) noted that this component consists of two sub components, namely "culture shedding" and "culture conflict." Culture shedding involves the unlearning of aspects of one's previous culture that are no longer appropriate, while culture conflict occurs when incompatible behaviors that create difficulties for the individual need to be sorted out.

Acculturative Stress

When psychological conflict continues to exist and individuals cannot easily change their repertoire, they experience what Oberg (1960) referred to as “culture shock.” Berry (1970; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987) less dramatically labeled this experience as “acculturative stress.” Acculturative stress rises from the stresses as a result of acculturation and is “mildly pathological and disruptive to the individual and the group” (Berry, 1980, p. 21). Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok (1987) noted that this stress is a “generalized physiological and psychological state . . . brought about by the experience of stressors in the environment, and which requires some reduction . . . through a process of coping until some satisfactory adaptation to the new situation is achieved” (p. 492).

Freshman Acculturation

Historically, the term acculturation has been used by researchers and social scientists in discussions revolving around immigration. It can be argued however that all life transitions requiring individuals to shift from their familiar culture to a new, less familiar one in some sense includes the process of acculturation. Adjusting to a new marriage, welcoming new members to a family, and dealing with death or other adversities all involve the process of acculturation. For this study, the term acculturation is used in this more general way, as a means of better appreciating the changes experienced by “individuals who transition from one living context to another, whether that involves a change in geography, social group, interpersonal relationships, and/or developmental stage” (D. Flemons, personal communication, March, 09, 2011).

Emerging adulthood is increasingly recognized as an important developmental stage (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Dornbusch, 2000; Sherrod, Haggerty, & Featherman, 1993), a

time when individuals leave home and learn to be adults in the context of their postsecondary education (Pratt, 2000). In 1970-71, 839,730 degrees were conferred in U.S. universities, whereas in 2005-06, the total was 1,485,242 (National Centre for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2008).

The increase in the student populations is not simply a reflection of the increase in the population. For example, between 1995 and 2005, the percentage increase of students outstripped the percentage increase in the population of the same age by eight percent over the same time frame (NCES). Also between 1995 and 2005, the overall increase in college enrollment rose by 33% for full time and 9% for part time. During the same time period, the number of males enrolled increased 18 percent, while the number of females enrolled increased 27 percent.

While many undergraduates do successfully manage to complete their education, it is estimated that 40% of college students leave higher education without getting a degree (Porter, 1990), with 75% percent of such students leaving within their first year (Tinto, 1987). Freshman class attrition rates are typically greater than any other academic year and are commonly as high as 20-30% (Cravatta, 1997; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987). Consolvo (2002) found that many of these students who leave never return to college to complete degrees.

The freshman year represents one of the most stressful occurrences that can take place during an individual's entire lifetime (Hersh & Hussong, 2006; Levitz & Noel, 1989; Lu, 1994; Pittman & Richmond, 2008). While this university transition presents learning experiences and opportunities for psychosocial development, entering college requires youths to face multiple transitions, including changes in their living

arrangements, academic environments, and friendship networks, while adapting to greater independence and responsibility in their personal and academic lives (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Feldman, 2005; Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000). Although most college students are able to adapt to this complex new life role (Pratt, Bowers, Terzian, & Hunsberger, & et al., 2000), some are not prepared for this new lifestyle (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000), resulting in long-term emotional maladjustment problems and depression (Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000; Hammen, 1980; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000).

Freshmen have shown a greater predisposition than sophomores, juniors, and seniors to demonstrating a lack of adequate coping skills and, subsequently, have exhibited the most susceptibility to engaging in detrimental, high risk health behaviors, such as substance abuse, unprotected sexual activities, sleep deprivation, physical inactivity, and unwholesome dietary habits (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Hersh, & Hussong, 2006; Klein, Geaghan, & MacDonald, 2007; Von, Ebert, Ngamvitroj, Park, & Kang, 2004). The literature also indicates that tasks such as balancing schedules, taking exams, dealing with relationships, and living up to parental expectations can cause freshmen to experience multiple debilitating setbacks, including academic failure, which in turn affects their ability to persist until degree completion (Dziegielewski, Turnage, & Roest-Marti, 2004; Garrett, 2001; Murff, 2005). Thus, gaining a better understanding of what factors may promote positive adjustment in the first year of college, both academically and psychologically, is warranted (Pratt, 2000).

For those who move away from home, and especially for international students, attending university tremendously reduces contact with and support from family and friends, becoming an additional source of strain and stress (Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000). Typically, university counseling services attempt to help students who are having difficulties in making a successful transition, after signs of distress manifest (McDonough, 1997; Sharkin, 2006). Unfortunately, for many students this is too late. They become discouraged, demoralized, and disenchanted, and fail to make up lost academic ground. Others may simply drop out rather than seek help.

International Students

The United States defines international or foreign students as those who are not U.S. citizens, immigrants, refugees, or permanent residents (American Council on Education, 2006). In the literature on acculturation, international students are also classified as sojourners, meaning that they are in the new society only temporarily and for a very specific purpose. As a result, sojourners are unlikely to become fully involved or begin to identify with the new culture, and they tend to avoid establishing close relationships, knowing that they will eventually return to where they came from or move to someplace else (Berry, 2006).

International Students in the U. S.

The size of the international student population in American universities and colleges has been growing steadily since the end of World War II (Tillman, 2008), from 48,486 in 1959-60 to 671, 616 in 2008-09 (Institute of International Education, [IIE], 2009b). In the U.S., there are over 3,000 institutions enrolling international students from more than 186 nationalities (IIE, 2009a). Currently, Asia is the largest sending region of

international students to the U.S., comprising over half (67%) of all international student enrollments, up from 57% the year before. India remains the leading sending place of origin for the seventh consecutive year (103,260), followed by China (98,235), South Korea (75,065), Canada (33,974), and Japan (29,051), with Canada being the only non-Asian country in the top five (IIE, 2009b).

The United States has increasingly attracted a large number of international students, particularly Asian students, for several reasons (Liu, 2001). One of the most important is that a “U.S education is considered a very important commodity for international students” (Liu, 2001, p. 1). They also come to obtain advanced education or training that is not available to them in their home country, and to gain the prestige that is attributed to achieving a U.S. education (Liu).

International students are people in transition and their status as temporary sojourners in a foreign country for the duration of an academic program is a unique condition. These students have to sit for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam, gather financial documents, make travel arrangements, and obtain immigration authorization, all the while preparing to leave their family and friends. They begin the transition process well before arriving in their future destination and have invested a considerable effort and time into their cross-cultural experience.

Although international students usually arrive with a clear sense of their academic goals and with the intention of spending a few, if not several, years working towards their degree, they often have not considered how their lives might change upon arrival (Davis, 2003). Adjusting to a new college culture can be a challenging and stressful experience for international students (Hsieh, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Mathew, 2008; Ryan, 2005).

Rigorous academic demands along with the need to adjust to a new culture, often place these students at a greater risk than their domestic counterparts (Church, 1982; Lin & Yi, 1997; Rodriguez, Myers, Morris & Cardoza, 2000; Sandhu, 1995; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Zheng & Berry, 1991).

A longitudinal study conducted by Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Horn (2002) revealed that in addition to problems similar to what domestic students have, international students also experience difficulties that are elicited by the new cultural experiences. Further, their adjustment problems vary by country of origin, race and ethnicity, English language proficiency, and whether or not they come from collectivist or individualist cultures (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Tafarodi & Smith, 2001; Wilton & Constantine, 2003).

International students' acculturation in U.S. universities. In the U.S., the rapid increase in international students has resulted in research that has explored the various needs of these students. Previous studies have explored international students' perceived needs and perceptions (Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1988), academic and career needs (Leong, & Sedlacek, 1986), overall adjustment (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992), acculturation (Sodowsky, Lai, & Plake, 1991), emotional well-being (Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992), adjustment to stress (Poyrazli, Sümer, & Grahame, 2008), and counseling preferences (Yau, Sue, & Hayden, 1992).

Leong and Sedlacek (1989) explored the academic and career needs of international and U.S. college students. They found that when international students arrive, their tasks include finding a place to live, getting a social security number and a driver's license, and learning to use a transportation system. Study participants also

shared greater concerns about their academic plans and expressed need for help with selecting/scheduling courses, academic advising, and establishing their academic plan. Compared to their domestic counterparts, international students expressed greater academic and career counseling needs.

In a similar quantitative study conducted by Manese, Sedlacek, and Leong (1988), participants indicated a need for assistance in some areas of study skills and career development; females anticipated having a harder time and were more easily discouraged than their male counterparts. Finally, the researchers highlighted that although international students in general share some commonalities, there appeared to be differences among subgroups of these students. Thus, investigating international students more specifically, taking into account other variables such as sex and standing, is important for a more complete knowledge and understanding of these students. They also suggested that we need to know a great deal more about international students, particularly about subgroup differences. Acknowledging that subgroup differences does play a role in the acculturation process, Sodowsky, Lai, and Plake (1991), in response, conducted a quantitative study with 282 participants at a Midwestern university. Their findings indicated that there were differences between sub-groups and these differences were influenced by select sociocultural variables.

Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) investigated the level of stressors and stress symptoms in the lives of international students, as well as sources of social support that might be most useful in coping with stressors. The findings revealed that a majority of these students are deprived of their traditional sources of social support and familiar means of communication, and many experience stressful life changes and cultural

adjustments. These findings are consistent with the investigation conducted by Poyrazli, Sümer, & Grahame (2008), who also noted that for international students, adjustment to a new educational and social environment can be a stressful process. In essence, both studies suggest that higher levels of social support might enable international students to be more socially active and interact with people more often and, as a result, reduce the level of stressors experienced.

In a clinical study, Yau, Sue, and Hayden (1992) examined counseling preferences with a single-subject research design of 6 international clients and 1 White-American client within and across 4 counseling sessions. All clients first listened to a previously audio taped counseling session containing a problem-solving approach and a client-centered approach and rated both approaches. The clients then rated these 2 counseling styles in actual counseling sessions. In contrast to past research findings, no overall preference was found for either approach. Preferences for a particular counseling style also changed from session to session.

Surveys of international student adjustment in a new culture have indicated that they express apprehension in their language proficiency and academic performance during their sojourns (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Kagan & Cohen, 1990; Ying & Liese, 1994). International students have also reported feeling depressed, anxious, and lonely, due to the loss of their social support network (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Yang & Clum, 1995). Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) identified six major factors for the acculturative stress for international students: perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, stress due to culture shock, and guilt for leaving loved ones behind.

Although these studies clearly cover a spectrum of international student needs, many tend to treat international students as one large cultural group, rather than as components of specific cultural groups with distinct characteristics. Yoon and Portman (2004) have observed that one weakness in the literature on international students is the tendency to lump them into one category, thus, ignoring within-group differences. For example, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, international students with racial and cultural backgrounds different from the white-majority student population in most universities are likely to have greater adjustment problems compared to European or white international students (Church, 1982). In addition, the proportion of international students and the demographic diversity of the student population on a university campus are factors that might influence the experiences of international students. In view of these concerns, the present study will focus specifically on the AWIS population and the challenges they encounter.

Asian International Students in the U. S.

One of the fastest growing international student groups in the United States is from the Asian continent. Growing from 94,640 in 1980-81 to 327,785 in 2005-06 (IIE, 2007c), the population continues to rise with each passing year. Many researchers have noted that although most international students encounter difficulties during their acculturation period, these problems appear to be most acute among students from Asian countries (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Barratt & Huba, 1994; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Henderson, Milhouse, & Cao, 1993; Jorgensen, 1997; Lin & Yi, 1997; Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1988; Pedersen, 1991; Yeh & Yang, 2003; Zhang, 2000).

Surveys conducted with Asian international students indicate that they experience considerable difficulties in language, academic performance, and social interactions in their sojourns, mainly due to significant disparities in culture between Asians and Americans (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Servaes, 2000; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Yang, Teraoka, Eichenfield, & Audas, 1994). They often feel overwhelmed by the cultural differences and some even feel that the American culture is offensive (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Liu (2001) noted that “the strain of adjusting to American culture has a negative effect on their self-confidence and self-esteem” (p. 6).

It has been found that homesickness, loneliness, irritability, distrust, hostility towards members of the host culture, depression, and lowered work performance are common symptoms of the cultural shock that these students often experience (Brislin, 1981; Wehrly, 1988). They also feel the pressure to succeed academically, which stems from their culture as well as family influences (Liu, 2001; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). This form of pressure can be overwhelming for these students, particularly when they are dealing with adjusting to the new campus climate.

Researchers have been documenting since the mid-1970s that Asian international students, as compared with non-Asian students, under-utilize psychological counseling services (Sue & McKinney, 1975; Yamamoto, 1978), and there is also evidence that Asian international students may actually over-utilize educational and vocational counseling (Sue & Kirk, 1975; Tracey, Leong, & Glidden, 1986). One explanation for the under-utilization of counseling services by Asian international students is the shame and stigma that are associated with psychological problems in traditional Asian culture (Tsai,

Teng, & Sue, 1980). Seeking help from a professional counselor may be perceived as bringing shame and dishonor on an Asian international family. For most Asian students this would be their first time away from their homes and families for long periods of time. Once in the U.S., these students often ignore their emotional or social issues and become more concerned with their academic and career issues, as they are more salient to their traditions, beliefs, and cultural values (Kitano & Daniels, 1990).

Further, the experiences of Asian male and female international students differ due to different gender role experiences (Yokomizo, 2002). In fact, researchers (Fong & Peskin, 1969; Marville, 1981; Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1988) have found that sex differences have a role in the adaptation of foreign students, with female foreign students having a greater number of problems than males. They further reported that special problems may exist for women from more traditional cultures, where special gender roles are defined. Arthur (2004) stated that this can be a particular issue for women students, who experience more freedom in gender roles during their time as an international student than they were allowed to in their home country.

Asian male & Asian female international students. Due to familial pressure, many Asian students pursue fields of study that they believe to be stable, monetarily advantageous, and prestigious (Leong & Serafica, 1995; Schneider, Hieshima, Sehahn, & Plank, 1994; Wong & Mock, 1997). Family expectations for status and attainment also differ by gender. For instance, traditional Asian values, particularly those that stem from Confucianism and Hinduism, typically place the male higher in the family hierarchy and emphasize among men and women his position as economic provider (Das & Kemp, 1997; Lee & Saul, 1987; Sue, 1996). Asian male students are usually pressured to

succeed academically and through their career, while female students are urged to limit their academic and career attainments and to find suitable spouses (Wong & Mock).

Once in the U.S., AWISs are usually held to Asian stereotypes, such as obedience, quietness, and non-assertiveness (Lin & Yi, 1997) by their non-Asian counterparts. Because social stereotypes are linked to how individuals view themselves, it can lead individuals to “inevitably [see] the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46),

Despite their ties to Eastern values, AWIS find that their lives in the U.S. and the opportunity to escape the tight controls of tradition are both a blessing and a bane (Ahmed & Lemkau, 2000; Gudykunst, 2001). Once the feeling of independence begins to take effect, women become more open to dating, partying, and the more egalitarian models of marriages (Arthur, 2004). They are now exposed to freedom and opportunities that were not available to them in their home country, creating conflicts in sex roles and family expectations (Ahmed & Lemkau, 2000; Comas-Díaz, 1994).

The ability to decide for themselves without direction from family or society is highly liberating, but it also means the loss of a strong traditional network that can provide consistent, ongoing support and guidance. The freedom to be one's own person comes at an additional cost for these women, who must balance their collectivist culture with the American individualistic one. The new opportunities may cause both intrapsychic and interpersonal stress as these women attempt to integrate the norms of their home country and the expectations of their families with aspirations generated in

their new culture location (Ahmed & Lemkau, 2000). Liu (2001) noted that AIWS must often deal with the compound problems of being an Asian, a woman, and an international student.

As discussed in this chapter, there is clearly a spectrum of studies that cover international student needs. However, many tend to treat international students as one large cultural group, failing to pay attention to components of specific cultural groups with distinct characteristics. This tendency to lump international students into one category is a significant weakness, as it leads to researchers ignoring within-group differences. Another limitation concerns the lack of information regarding sex differences and the role they play in the adaptation of foreign students. As a corrective to these limitations, the present qualitative study focuses specifically on the transitional experiences of eleven AWIS. The following chapter provides in-depth details of its design and methodology.

Chapter III—Methodology

To study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behaviour and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realising the substance of their happiness—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man.

—Bronisław Malinowski (1922, p.19)

Overview of Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative inquiry “is a field of inquiry in its own right” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 2) that overarches many different ways of collecting and analyzing gathered data. Some examples include phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, and action research. Munhall (1989) noted that “the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research methods reflect beliefs, values, and assumptions about the nature of human beings, the nature of environments, and the interaction between the two” (p. 22). Those practicing qualitative research tend to place emphasis and value on the human, interpretative aspects of knowing about the social world and the significance of the researcher’s own interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

A number of researchers have described the merits of qualitative research methods (Atkinson, Heath, & Chenail, 1991; Cavell & Snyder, 1991; Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990) and in response to that, many family therapy researchers are showing an increased interest in using this mode of inquiry (Deacon & Piercy, 2000; Faulkner, Klock, & Gale, 2002; Gehart, Ratliff, & Lyle, 2001; Hardy & Keller, 1991; Hawley, Bailey, & Pennick, 2000; Piercy & Fontes, 2001, Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005). Other family therapists have noted that there is much compatibility between qualitative designs and systems theory (Gale, 1993; Gehart, Ratliff, & Lyle, 2001; Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990; Piercy & Fontes, 2001; Rafuls & Moon, 1996; Sprenkle & Bischoff, 1995). For

example, Sprenkle & Moon (1996) made the point that “qualitative designs seem congruent with systems theory, afford creative ways to investigate the actual process of therapy, and legitimize the kind of discovery-oriented research that has helped to make marital-family therapy a vibrant field” (p. 5).

In this study, I wanted to understand the experiences of Asian women international students (AWIS) who were in the U.S for the first time, and particularly the transitional challenges they faced upon and after arrival at the university where they enrolled. To achieve this, I selected a qualitative descriptive approach because it offers the opportunity to gather rich descriptions in the “everyday terms of those events” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336) by utilizing a “reasonable and well-considered combination of sampling, and data collection, analysis, and re-presentational techniques” (Sandelowski, p. 337). Qualitative descriptive studies are basic, naturalistic, and discovery oriented, and although they are different from other major qualitative designs, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, or ethnography, they do, nevertheless, have “hues, tones, and textures from these approaches” (Sandelowski, p. 336).

For this qualitative descriptive study, I adopted the theoretical framework of ethnography for gathering, examining, and analyzing the collected data. Ethnography is a research approach that developed in anthropology to study cultural groups and has more recently been used to study small-group culture (Boyle, 1994). This research method relies primarily on interviews and participant observation to access the emic or native perspective (Geertz, 1983; Spradley, 1979). The ethnographic paradigm was chosen to orient this study due to its emphasis on understanding human behavior within a given context or culture.

The review of the literature in Chapter Two revealed the absence of qualitative studies regarding the experiences of AWIS in the U.S and the acculturation challenges they face upon and after arrival. The chapter also justified the need to explore the participants' experiences so that helping professionals can remain sensitive to their Asian clients' cultural background and values. This qualitative descriptive study with ethnographic overtones contributes to the existing and emerging literature by bringing to light and analyzing the acculturation experiences of the research participants.

Qualitative Orientation

Constructivist Paradigm

My orientation to this research study was guided by the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In their earlier writing, Guba and Lincoln (1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) preferred using the term naturalistic to describe their research approach. However, in one of their later publications, they (1989) defined their research ideas from a constructivist paradigm. They noted that the term naturalistic implies a claim to legitimacy for their work and suggests a "realist ontology that they specifically reject" (p. 19). Guba and Lincoln wanted to study what they called natural settings but felt that the naturalistic approach entails generating solutions to paradigm dilemmas. They stated that "we have come to appreciate that the central feature of our paradigm is its ontological assumption that realities, certainly social/behavioral realities, are mental constructions" (p. 19). Thus they elected to use the terms constructivism and constructivist to label the paradigm and the person engaged in carrying it out.

The constructivist paradigm began as a countermovement to the positivist paradigm (Polit & Beck, 2005). Unlike the positivist perspective, where researchers attempt to uncover a “single, tangible, and fragmentable” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 37) reality, the constructivist considers realities as multiple, simultaneously shaped by both the researcher and the researched (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). Rossman and Rallis (2003) noted that constructivist researchers’ “respect for context draws them to look at social worlds holistically, as interactive, complex systems rather than as discrete variables that can be measured and manipulated statistically. They describe and interpret rather than measure and predict” (p. 10).

A central component of Guba and Lincoln's (1989) constructivist paradigm is that research results are not descriptions of the “way things really are” (p. 8), but instead “represent meaningful constructions that individual actors or groups of actors form to ‘make sense’ of the situation in which they find themselves” (p. 8). Researchers informed by the constructivist paradigm “attempt to understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions, and interactions in context, from the point of view of the participants involved” (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990, p. 358). Inclusion of the research participants as “partners rather than treating them as objects of research” (Rubin, 2005, p. vii) is an important notion when conducting a constructivist oriented study. The researcher and interviewee decide what issues to explore and the researcher elicits thick descriptions about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee (Rubin, 2005). It is the responsibility of the researcher, as the representative of the study, to direct the interviewee to the topics that matter to the study while the respondent provides the necessary information (Weiss, 1994). Since this interactive

process includes both the researcher and the researched, one or more constructions emerge from the research process.

For this research study, I employed an ethnographic methodology guided by the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm. As mentioned earlier, the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm include the acknowledgement of (a) multiple constructed realities; (b) the researchers' inherent bias or value position throughout the entire research process; and (c) the situatedness of human behavior within a context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The constructivist paradigm is arguably the predominant orientation to ethnographic fieldwork (Fetterman, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Padgett, 2008). It allows researchers, assuming that all behavior is situated in context, to present the multiple realities as shared by the participants and also the alternative interpretations as they emerge from the data (Fetterman, 1998).

Method

Ethnography

Ethnography, in many respects, is the most basic form of social research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This type of inquiry takes as its central and guiding assumption that any group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture, and hence "it is the art and science of describing a group or culture" (Fetterman, 1998, p. 1). Although its roots are in anthropology, researchers have conducted ethnographic studies in the areas of sociology (e.g., Lozano & Foltz, 1990; Montemurro, 2006; Wakin, 2006), education (e.g., Aikman, 1999; Harry, 1992; Spindler & Hammond, 2000; Thapan, 2006), family therapy (e.g., Allen & St. George, 2001; Gehart-Brooks, 1997; Metcalf, 1993), psychology (e.g., Berryhill & Linney, 2006;

Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Shoham, 2004), economics (e.g., Roberson, 1998; *Tarasuk & Maclean*, 1990), and cultural studies (e.g., Lee & Cho, 1990, Staiger, 2005). However, there is no single philosophical or theoretical orientation that is exclusive to true ethnographic research (Hinkel, 2005). This does not imply that the researcher should not be prepared for the field, but rather should “enter the field with an open mind, not an empty head” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 1). Fetterman (1998) noted that “before asking the first question in the field, the ethnographer “begins with a problem, a theory or mode, a research design, specific data collection techniques, tools for analysis, and a specific writing style” (p. 1).

Traditionally, ethnography was used by anthropologists to study exotic cultures and primitive societies in remote settings, but Spradley (1979) suggests that it is also a useful tool for “understanding how other people interpret their experience” (p. iv). Ethnography requires that the investigator learn from people as informants instead of regarding them as subjects (Spradley, 1979). The role of the ethnographer is to understand another person’s way of life from the point of view of the other (Malinowski, 1922, 1944) through immersion in the other’s culture and by “encounter[ing] it firsthand” (Packer, 1995, pp. 3-4).

As characterized by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the instrument in ethnographic qualitative research is a human instrument, the researcher. Because the researcher is in the midst of the culture being studied, and through his or her experience collects the data, a profound awareness and understanding of boundaries, one’s own identity, and personal experience is critical to be an effective human instrument. A central notion of what Guba and Lincoln (1989) advocate concerns the researchers’ awareness of him or herself

during the inquiry process. Wolcott (1994) noted that “in the very act of constructing data out of experience, the researcher singles out some things as worthy of note and relegates others to the background” (p. 13). Finding some stories and experiences as significant and others as insignificant is how qualitative researchers include their own voices and values in the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, the way I make sense of the world was an important factor and was considered throughout the entire process of this study, as my beliefs and experiences necessarily shaped and influenced the focus of the study and the research design, as well as data collection, analysis, and the final version of this document.

Steier (1991) suggested that “if we begin to examine how we as researchers are reflexively part of those systems we study, we can also develop an awareness of how reflexivity becomes a useful way for us to understand what others are doing (p. 3). Ryder (1987) also pointed out that it is difficult if not impossible for researchers to escape their value laden perspectives or completely decontextualize themselves from their research. Qualitative phenomenology researchers recognize the presence of this bias and recommend the concept of bracketing. Bracketing is “the process of identifying and holding in abeyance preconceived beliefs and opinions about the phenomenon under study” (Polit & Beck, 2005). Some even recommend recording their prior experience before data collection so that readers of the final report can evaluate the study more effectively (Madison, 2005; Patton, 2002; Sokolowski, 2000). Many qualitative researchers agree that making prior knowledge explicit helps increase the researcher’s awareness and avoid potential pitfalls later in the research process.

Glaser (1998) recommends that when the researcher has had prior experience with the phenomenon under investigation, this potential source of bias needs to be addressed. As mentioned earlier, Lincoln and Guba too advocated a similar openness on the role of the researcher, although they did not have a specific term for this position. My commitment to inclusion of self extended beyond the standard recognition that I as a researcher influenced those researched, given that I was also a member of the culture that I was studying. My background and research focus warranted a level of reflexivity (Steier, 1991) that other researchers exploring this population would not necessarily need to include. So not only did I bracket my biases, I in fact elaborated my experience as an AWIS by writing and including my autoethnography in the data analysis.

Autoethnography

Whereas ethnography first emerged as a method for studying and understanding the other (Patton, 2002) and by its simplest definition is the practice of attempting to discover the culture of others, autoethnography is the practice of “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays the multiple layers of consciousness. (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Goodall (2000) calls it the “new ethnography” (p. 9), involving “creative narratives shaped out of the writer’s personal experience within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences” (p. 9). Patton (2002) suggested that the “foundational question” (p. 84) of autoethnography asks, “how does my own experience of this culture connect with and offer insights about this culture, situation, event, and/or way of life?” (p. 84). As a “still emergent approach” (Patton, 2002, p. 84) to qualitative research, autoethnography is the writing of an “insider” anthropologist, where the researcher possesses prior knowledge of

the people, culture, and language under study and identifies with the participants (Hayano, 1979).

The practice of autoethnography is a social constructionist approach that enables critical reflection on taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. It becomes the “space in which an individual’s passion can bridge individual and collective experience to enable richness or representation, complexity of understanding, and inspiration for activism” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2007, p. 448). As a qualitative research method, autoethnography allows the personal to inform the professional and enables the researcher to draw upon his or her own experiences to help illuminate and gain a deeper understanding of various aspects of the social world under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ellis, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007; Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005; Wolcott, 2008). “Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto)” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739-740). Championed by Denzin (2006), this mode of inquiry focuses on the subjective emotional experiences of the autoethnographer; the stories and self-narratives are intimate, revealing the vulnerability and humanity of the researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

Anderson (2006) encourages autoethnographers to openly discuss changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork, thus vividly revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds. Ellis and Bochner (2000) stated that autoethnographies are personal narratives affected by history, social structure, and culture and therefore the focus is to give voice to marginalized or silenced individuals. Ellis (2004) further noted

that “good autoethnographic writing is truthful, vulnerable, evocative, and therapeutic” (p. 135).

Although autoethnography allows a tremendous amount of freedom and insight, it has been criticized for including or privileging the researcher’s perspectives in a study’s focus and findings (Holt, 2003). This method of inquiry can also be challenging, as the researcher is opening up his or her experiences to the public and perhaps also to the scrutiny that comes along with that exposure. Furthermore, within this approach, there is a marked reluctance to represent others in texts, to abstract and theorize beyond the individual experience. However, Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests that autoethnography is a “form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (p. 9), enabling it to reach beyond the narratives of the individual self. As a result, the approach can encompass elements of insider ethnography as well as autobiography, in that its referents are broader social and cultural processes (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

Goodall (2000) added that “if we are willing to study others, we ought to be equally willing to place ourselves, our lives, our families, under the same critical scrutiny” (p. 110). In this study, I incorporated in the data analysis elements of my autoethnographic account as an AWIS in the U.S., and particularly the transitional challenges I faced upon and after arrival. Since I did not keep notes as I was living through this experience, I do not have data that served as field notes from which I developed my autoethnographic account. As Ellis (1999) says, “writing notes at the time the experience occurred would have been helpful but not absolutely necessary” (p. 674). I relied heavily on recollection and memories of my lived experience when writing my narrative, which I then used in the analysis.

During the early stages of my study, prior to data collection and analysis, I wrote a memoir of my experiences, intending to include it only in Chapter One to help set the tone for my readers by providing them with the context behind my study. I began by creating a personal timeline and recording meaningful incidents as I recalled them. However, as the study evolved, my contextualizing account became detailed and richer and paved the way for me to ease into an autoethnography. For instance, the interviews I conducted with my participants stimulated my memory, helping me to recall experiences that hadn't surfaced when I was writing my initial contextualizing account. As a result, I began to record any thoughts or memories I had before, during, and after the interviews, which I then incorporated into my autoethnographic account. This process continued until the very last stages of data analysis. Thus, I did not limit my autoethnographic data gathering to only those memories that occurred to me by virtue of conducting the interviews. Casual conversations with Dilan helped me recall certain incidents that I had forgotten; looking through old photographs and emails had the same effect on me. Another source for data collection I could have turned to would have been my family, but because of the sensitive nature of the data being generated, I deliberately refrained from interviewing my family members for this study.

By presenting my story and incorporating it in the analysis, I wanted my participants and readers to be aware of how my personal experience influenced the direction of my study, my choice and phrasing of questions, my responses and reactions to those questions, and the final outcome of the study. Although I believe that my personal account is a significant contribution to this document, it is important for the outcome of the study that I differentiated my experience from those of my participants.

As a researcher, I did not presume to be more knowledgeable about my participants' experiences than they were, and so I faced the interviews with an open and curious mind.

Data Sampling

This study included both ethnographic and autoethnographic elements. Data sampling for the autoethnographic component was a non-issue. For the ethnographic portion, purposive sampling, a nonrandom method of choosing respondents, was employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). While conducting purposive sampling, the researcher "begins with the assumption that context is critical" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 200) and purposely seeks out settings where the processes being studied are most likely to occur. Patton (2002) noted that studying "information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (p. 230). Hence, "the object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201).

With this in mind, I recruited Asian women students who were in the U.S for the first time. They were recruited via postings in Nova Southeastern University's campus bulletins, our Office of International Students and Scholars Services, International Student Organizations, and online qualitative research forums. The recruitment flyer offered a brief description of the study, as well as contact information for the researcher.

Potential participants responded to the posting by telephone or e-mail and were screened for specific inclusion criteria, including: (a) willingness to volunteer and participate in one or more audio recorded interviews in person or via telephone; (b) residence in the U.S. for a minimum of six months; (c) dealing currently or in the past

with acculturation issues when at their university; (d) 18 years of age or older; and, (e) fluency in English. Women who met all of the inclusion criteria were provided with the informed consent form. Before asking them to read and sign the form, I explained their role in the research, the risks involved, how their privacy was to be protected, and how their confidentiality was to be assured.

Whenever possible, face-to-face interviews were conducted; however, if participants resided at a distance that made face to face interviews impossible, interviews were then conducted via the telephone. It was understood that there was no penalty should the participants decide to withdraw at anytime during the study, and I took responsibility for finding referrals for counseling if participants became distressed.

Data Collection

The traditional and primary method of data collection for ethnographers is participant observation and in-depth interviews with participants. Crabtree and Miller (1992) noted that ethnographic data gathering should involve a combination of both of these techniques. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also advocate that both participant observations and interviews should be employed as data collection sources.

Participant Observation

Participation observation is conceived as a combination of “participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 34). The researcher usually takes on the role of a participant-observer, interacting with informants over an extended period of time (Spradley, 1979; Strauss, 1987) and has to engage in extensive fieldwork in the day-to-day lives of the people under study. By adopting the perspective

of a participant while maintaining the perspective of an outsider, the ethnographer develops a comprehensive picture of the culture.

If I had conducted a traditional ethnographic study, I would have needed to become an ongoing part of the group that I was studying by say, joining a sorority of AWIS and, over long periods of time, observing my participants as they made their way through their university careers. I did not conduct my study in this way; however, I was once myself an AWIS who lived through this transition process, and although I did not live through it alongside my participants, I have much experience in the process by virtue of having lived it. This constituted the participant observation component of my study and was brought forth in my autoethnography. Because autoethnography embraces the researcher's subjectivity rather than backgrounding it, I made every attempt to ensure that my past personal experiences remained integral to my role as a researcher, and I was overt about this throughout the study. Data for the autoethnographic component was recorded prior to data collection with my participants, and I continued to revisit and build on my account throughout data collection and analysis.

Following the style of ethnographic study more popular in fields such as education, sociology, and anthropology, I relied very heavily on interviewing. In any interviewing project, there are many ways in which the interviews can be conducted. They can range from unstructured interviews, which follow a non-standardized format where the interviewee is the source of both the questions and the answers, to structured interviews, in which the researcher has very explicit goals and the questions tend to be very specific, formulated in advance by the researcher.

By far the most common form of interviews used in ethnographic research is the semi-structured approach. These interviews consist of a mixture of open-ended and specific questions designed to elicit both expected and unexpected information. This type of interview evolves in situ (Fetterman, 1998) and allows the respondents to project their own ways of defining the world, permitting flexibility and enabling participants to raise issues and matters that might have not been included in a pre-devised schedule (Denzin, 1970; Silverman, 1993). Semi-structured interviews take the form of a casual conversation with a specific but implicit research agenda. It is made explicit below why such an approach fitted well with this study, as I shared information from my own life with my research participants. This generated an informal atmosphere for a casual conversation with my participants. However, I did have particular goals in mind for what type of data needed to be gathered by the end of the interviews. Since my participants were from a culture that I was previously although not currently engaged in, there were variances in our perspectives. Therefore, by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, I was able to obtain a unique and comprehensive picture of each of their experiences.

Interviews

According to Kvale (1996), “the qualitative interview is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects’ everyday world” (p. 70). Patton (2002) noted that qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that “the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). The purpose of interviewing then is to “find out what is in and on

someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (Patton, p. 341), and "to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, p. 341).

The interviews took place only after I received the signed informed consent form from the participants, who were also given a copy. For telephone interviews, participants were e-mailed a consent form in PDF format, and their participation in the research began following receipt of a signed form. Participants were allowed to choose the interview location, and interviews lasted a minimum of one hour.

All interviews began after I introduced myself and reviewed with the participants the purpose of this study. As confidentiality and anonymity is a strong ethical concern throughout this study, pseudonyms were used in the transcriptions as well as in the final report. The interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, that is, when redundancy or no new information, categories, or relevant themes were generated (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Munhall & Chenail, 2007).

Following Spradley's (1979) advice, I conducted the interviews as a "series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants" (p. 58). Spradley suggests that the interviewer can achieve this research posture by asking a lot of questions, making requests for clarification as needed, and asking interviewees to provide elaborated responses. Ideas informing Spradley's ethnographic interviewing resonate very closely with the ideas that inform systemic family therapy interviewing. As clinicians, we are trained to elicit vital, detailed information from our clients, and this training can be very useful in non-clinical situations as well.

In general, family therapists recognize that offering empathy is integral to the interviewing process and thus use techniques such as Rogerian active listening as a means of letting clients know that they are being understood. I brought this type of expertise into my research interviews. On an ongoing basis my participants recognized that I had understood what they had said by my reflecting back elements of what they had recently told me. My process of interviewing was also influenced by the techniques of Ericksonian storytelling and circular questioning which were drawn from two separate family therapy sources.

Ericksonian storytelling. O'Hanlon and Wilk (1987) noted that this technique of telling a story is a valuable tool for collecting information. It is based on the work of the American psychiatrist Milton Erickson, who specialized in hypnotherapy, and who also tremendously influenced the field of family therapy. Erickson typically told stories as an important part of his therapy (Haley, 1973; Zeig, 1994) in order to elicit vital information from the client. The usefulness of Ericksonian storytelling is as follows: "In order to get a client thinking in a particular direction, a narrative can be used to channel the client's thoughts. In other words, the therapist gets the client started thinking along certain lines" (Erickson & Zeig, 1980, p. 171). So instead of asking directly, "tell me about your brother", Erickson suggests that all you need to do is tell a story about your own brother" (Erickson & Zeig, 1980, p. 11) as a way to initiate the conversation. This came into play in this study by virtue of my own experience as an AWIS. I shared elements of my background with my participants, provided it seemed appropriate, so my participants felt more comfortable when sharing sensitive information and also prompted more in-depth responses from them.

Circular questioning. My second source of influence was from the Milan Associates, who early on developed the technique of circular questioning. As a well-established systemic family therapy model, the Milan approach views individuals in terms of their context or relationships to others rather than their intrapsychic makeup (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987). Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata (1980) noted that circularity provides a way of asking questions to elicit relational information in therapy. In the case of my research interviews, circularity was used as a technique to elicit relational information from my participants.

This concept of circularity originated from the Milan team's studies of Bateson's (1972, 1979) work. A foundational principle of circular questioning and systemic family therapy is that differences define relationships (Bateson, 1979). From Bateson's (1972) perspective, all information depends on the perception of difference. Systemic family therapists recognize that any information about how families are operating and how they can perhaps solve problems can be best grasped by discerning and articulating relevant differences. The method of circular questioning aims at discovering differences of perception among family members and understanding the complexities of their interrelationships by virtue of those differences. As a research method, it can be used to contextually understand the communicational complexity of any particular behavior.

Tomm (1984) believes that the predominant thinking mode in our culture is linear rather than circular and provides a distinction between the two. A circular question "orients the observer to focus on recursiveness in the interaction between parts of the system and to hypothesize about holistic patterns" (Tomm, 1984, p. 118). A linear question "orients the observer to focus on discrete sequences and to hypothesize about

causal connections” (Tomm, 1984, p. 118). Tomm (1984) believed that the understanding of mental events as circular processes requires a deliberate attempt to synthesize behavioral connections into larger, holistic patterns and the context of systemic family therapy provides the opportunity to do so. For example, in a therapeutic setting involving a father, mother, sister, and brother who are all having trouble getting along with each other, the therapist, instead of addressing anyone of them directly, would ask the mother, “What do you think your daughter thinks of her father?” (Foerster & Poerksen, 2002).

Translated into the ethnographic research realm, this mode of inquiry entails asking participants questions such as, “How do you think your parents felt when your sister told them that you were dating a Latin American male?” or, “How did your father feel when your mother told him that you wanted to leave home and travel to the U.S to attend University?” In this research setting, circular questions were not used with a therapeutic intent, but only to encourage the respondents to talk about their experiences from a relational perspective. As the interviews were not therapeutic conversations, I allowed my therapeutic ideas to inform the research process only and avoided becoming a therapist to my participants. Since our contract was based on a researcher-participant relationship and not a therapist-client relationship, I used my position solely to gather information and not to provide any therapeutic assistance.

Once each interview was completed, I reviewed them thoroughly and transcribed them verbatim myself. This enabled me to develop a sense of closeness with the data collected throughout the research study and allowed me to continuously make “systematic comparisons” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 512). I engaged in “a constant process of categorization, sorting and resorting, and coding and recoding of the data for emergent

categories of meaning” (Rafuls & Moon, 1996, p. 70) after and between all interviews. This will be further discussed below.

Data Analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), data analysis “is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (p. 154) and begins from the very first day the researcher sets foot in the field. Dey (1993) noted that the “core of qualitative analysis lies in [the] related processes of describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how our concepts interconnect” (p. 30). In keeping with qualitative research, ethnographic data analysis also begins from the moment the ethnographer enters the field. Fetterman (1998) noted that ethnographers are constantly looking for patterns, comparing one against the other and analyzing many patterns simultaneously. Through the analysis of pattern, they acquire a deeper understanding and appreciation for the culture under study.

Having no preset hypotheses to prove or disprove, ethnographers “triangulate” data from numerous sources to develop an understanding of the culture they are researching (Patton, 1990). In this process, the ethnographer identifies thematic consistencies across various sources of information (e.g., Spradley, 1980). Theoretical concepts are generated directly from detailed interviews with and observations from the participants themselves within the setting of interest. According to ethnographic theory, truth is a socially determined construct (Wolf, 1992) and its criteria are a consensus of community members. The ethnographic conceptualization of truth also includes the potential for the coexistence of multiple and contradictory realities.

Spradley's (1979) method of analysis is often used in ethnographic studies and involves four levels, ranging from domain, taxonomic, componential, and theme. The first three levels largely talk about how to chart a culture, but since my goal is to exemplify the lived experience of my participants, I focused on the thematic component rather than the first three higher levels of analysis. Thematic analysis was done to compare and contrast similarities across themes with the final goal being that a holistic view of the culture under study emerged.

Understanding that data collection does not end before analysis begins, Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate the use of the constant comparative method (CCM). This method is based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in that theory is grounded in the data. Typically, this means that the data generate the categories that are then constructed into a theory. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that "the investigator must engage in continuous data analysis, so that every new act of investigation takes into account everything that has been learned so far" (p. 209).

To begin this process, data from interviews are coded inductively. Glaser and Strauss (1967) advise that "*while coding an incident for a category, compare it to the previous incidents in the same group and different groups coded in the same category*" (p. 106). The next stage involves memoing and further coding. Here the researcher moves from comparing one specific incident with another to comparing a new incident with properties of the category that resulted from the initial comparison of incidents (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this stage the researcher takes out nonrelevant properties, integrates categories, and discovers underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties. This discovering and formulating into broader concepts is called reduction and

is the most important part of the research analysis. Finally, once the researcher is convinced that “his analytic framework forms a systematic substantive theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, and that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use—then he can publish his results with confidence” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 113).

Dey (1993) noted that the “core of qualitative analysis lies in [the] related processes of describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how our concepts interconnect” (p. 30). The initial analysis stages involve “select[ing] a bit of data, and assign[ing] it to a category” (Dey, 1993, p. 57). To code and identify themes, the inductive search “typically requires multiple readings of transcribed material” (Gehart, Ratliff, & Lyle, 2001, p. 265). Kvale (1996) described the process of generating themes as the “condensation or a reconstruction of the many tales told by the different subjects into a richer, more condensed and coherent story than the scattered stories of separate interviewees” (p. 199). This is an “ongoing” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.65) and active process; the researcher has to make “a carefully considered judgment about what is really significant and meaningful in the data” (Patton, 1990, p. 406).

My approach to analysis was influenced by Spradley (1985), who advocates the search for themes during data analysis. He suggests identifying concepts from the data in the first stages of analysis and then giving a label or code that describes them. Concepts that are closely linked in meaning can then be formed into categories or themes. Themes that have similar meanings will be brought back together into more encompassing themes.

I was also influenced by Glaser and Strauss, who stress the constant comparison of categories with one another as a way of generating themes. In this study, I was not interested in constructing a single theory; instead, I was interested in generating themes or categories for analysis and comment. Lincoln and Guba (1985) support this distinction and believe that it is more important to comment on several well-analyzed categories than to generate one theory from the categories. Therefore I did not adopt the positivist assumptions of Glaser and Strauss's approach; rather, in keeping with Dey (1993), who talks about comparing data bits to inductively start developing categories, I stayed close to the data itself and was aware that categories do not merely emerge but take form as a result of the researcher's interaction with the data. This is the similarity between thematic analysis and the CCM, as both processes involve the inductive generation of themes through interpretation and the identification of associations and differences. Eventually, I discovered categories of relationships and identified associations between the experiences of AWIS and my own experience in the U.S., rather than generating one theory that explains the experiences of AWIS in the U.S.

The final step in data collection and analysis is recognizing when to end the process. Many qualitative researchers use the principle of data saturation as an indicator for the end of data analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe saturation as a time when themes and categories in the data become repetitive and redundant, such that no new information can be gleaned by further data collection. I planned on conducting a total of eight interviews; however, I did conduct two more interviews with participants who had signed up, and the interviews were transcribed and incorporated in the analysis to ensure thoroughness.

Excerpts and exemplars from the data collected and analyzed are included in Chapter Four to provide depth to the categories I present. At the end of each excerpt and exemplar, readers will note within parentheses the page number of the transcribed interview with that participant, followed by the line number(s) of the quote. When necessary for clarity, the pseudonym of the participant is also included.

Trustworthiness

All studies, whether qualitative or quantitative, necessarily need to address the issues of reliability and validity. In qualitative inquiry, researchers have come to rely on the trustworthiness criteria described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They purposefully generated terms and a way of thinking about them that parallel quantitative research concerns with reliability and validity but have a purely qualitative research focus. In constructivist inquiry, the researcher ensures trustworthiness by addressing four issues: the study's credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, and fairness and authenticity. In the next few pages, I describe how I addressed each.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) viewed credibility as a superseding goal of qualitative research. The task of ensuring credibility involves demonstrating confidence in the "truth" of the findings to the readers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested prolonged engagement, persistent observation, progressive subjectivity, and member checking as ways of ensuring credibility. My study satisfied the latter three criteria, as well as, in a unique way, the first two.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Prolonged engagement provides scope by rendering the inquirer open to the multiple influences that impinge

upon the phenomenon under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), whereas persistent observation allows the researcher to “identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 304). By virtue of my position as a participant observer, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, my personal experience as an AWIS fulfilled these two criteria.

Progressive subjectivity. Guba and Lincoln (1989) noted that “it is obvious that no inquirer engages in an inquiry with a blank mind, a tabula rasa” (p. 238). Thus, in an attempt to be overt about one’s intentions, and to avoid privileging the inquirer’s experience over anyone else’s, Guba and Lincoln (1989) recommend that the inquirer periodically “record his or her a priori constructions—what he or she expects to find once the study is underway—and archive that record” (p. 238). Since I am a member of the group of people I interviewed, it remained crucial that I was aware of my own beliefs about what it was like to be an AWIS in the U.S. I believe that my acculturation experience is to some extent idiosyncratic; this belief allowed me to remain curious and open to hearing about other, different experiences. Writing my autoethnography before the interviewing process allowed me to record my experience, but I reflected on and continued to add to my self-narrative as I went through the research process.

Member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) found that “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) is through member checks. This is a continuous process, providing the researcher the “opportunity to assess intentionality” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) by presenting the data, interpretations, and conclusions to “members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data was originally collected” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 314). The participants then have the opportunity to modify, delete, and

add to the researcher's findings about their experiences. Member checks therefore serve not only to ensure credibility but also to refine interpretations.

Once the interviews were completed, participants were asked how they preferred to be contacted in future. They indicated that emails would be the best method. In keeping with their request, once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, I emailed a copy of Chapter Four to all participants, welcoming their feedback, revisions, retractions, and additions to their statements. I provided them with my contact number and gave them the option of responding to me, either by telephone or email.

Of the 10 women who participated in my study, three responded to my email and the participants' responses were such that few modifications to the text were necessary. One (given that this participant wanted me to further obfuscate her identity, I am not naming her here) requested that I change the name of her home town and said that she thought the study was "very valuable" (personal communication, March 4, 2011). Bian explained that she was making arrangements to return to Asia and didn't have any suggested revisions, the implication being that she didn't have time to read the chapter in depth (personal communication, March 1, 2011). Kayo commented on how well I had "captured the essence" of her "family dynamics intertwined with the presentation of the results" and at that moment did not have any revisions or comments to make (personal communication, March 7, 2011).

As a clinician, researcher, and participant, I strongly believe that participants should have the last word on how much information from that which they have shared should be divulged to the public. Therefore, as a final step in the process of analysis, I gave my participants the opportunity to extend or modify their voice in my document or

to comment on the research findings and discussion (Chapter Four). I noted in my email that the women had three weeks to respond with any changes they wished me to make. None responded. This lack of feedback is a limitation of the study and will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree that findings can be transferred to other settings, contexts, or populations. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that “the major technique for establishing the degree of transferability is thick description” (p. 241). The most efficient way that a researcher can accomplish this is by providing “extensive and careful description of the time, the place, the context, the culture in which [the] hypotheses were found to be salient” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 241-242). As a researcher I cannot specify the transferability of my findings; however, I have provided sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to a new situation.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to the stability of the findings over time, and confirmability to the internal coherence of the data in relation to the findings, interpretations, and recommendations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1989) found that when a study is dependable and confirmable, the “data (constructions, assertions, facts, and so on) can be tracked to their sources, and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally coherent and corroborating wholes is both explicit and implicit” (p. 243). In my study, an audit trail was used to accomplish dependability and confirmability simultaneously (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998). All choices made during the data

gathering and analysis phase were accounted for in this document and will also made available to the reader upon request.

Fairness and Authenticity

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), fairness is “a quality of balance, that is, all stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices should be apparent in the text” (p. 208). “If researchers can show that they have represented a range of realities” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 173), authenticity is demonstrated. In order to ensure fairness and authenticity in this study, member checking was an ongoing process. Participants had access to transcripts, my autoethnography, the description of my study, and the final analysis and results. They were also given the opportunity to comment on or respond to all of the above.

Ethical Concerns

I protected participants’ confidentiality and anonymity throughout this study. All names were replaced with pseudonyms in the transcriptions as well as in the final report. Participants were also de-identified in an attempt to further preserve confidentiality and anonymity. I personally managed all the data collected and stored all interview transcriptions and disks in a locked cabinet in my home office space. All files were password protected, and in order to prevent any unauthorized access to them, the password was known only to myself.

Chapter IV—Research Findings and Discussion

The belief that one's own view of reality is the only reality is the most dangerous of all delusions.

—Paul Watzlawick (1978, p. xiii)

This research explores the struggles Asian women international students (AWIS) on U.S. college campuses contend with when making a cross-cultural transition. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with 10 females from all over Asia who have attended or are currently attending U.S. educational institutions. Data from my autoethnographic account is also included in the analysis. To protect the confidentiality of the research participants, extensive information about them is not included in the discussion, and identifying details, including their names, have been changed. However, brief profiles containing pertinent background information are offered below. Key aspects from the participants' lives will also be sprinkled throughout the analysis to provide the reader with an increased appreciation of the contexts surrounding their life experiences.

The Women in this Study

None of the women in this study was married or had children at the time the interviews were conducted. In terms of length of stay in America, the shortest was eight months and the longest was 10 years. Prior to coming to the U.S, we all lived at home with our parents. This was our first time living by ourselves and away from our families and friends for such extended periods of time. Here are the women in this study:

Sanoh. A native of Japan, Sanoh was the middle of three daughters. She completed her undergraduate studies at Kyoto University and was then employed in the banking industry. She came to the U.S. to pursue her master's and was working on her

doctorate. Her father was in the Japanese navy and her mother was a homemaker. She was brought up in a traditional middle class household that practiced Shintoism. Her parents were living in their hometown of Kyoto and they had never been to America. Sanoh was 29 years old.

Kayo. A 19-year-old from the Philippines, Kayo was born and brought up in the city of Manila. Her father was a lawyer and her mother was a pharmacist. She had one younger brother. Kayo was brought up as a strong Roman Catholic and continued to practice her faith. She came to the States immediately after graduating from high school to pursue her bachelor's degree; the rest of her family had never been to America.

Ling. Due to China's "one child policy," Ling was the only child in the family. Coming from Deyang, China, she was 21 years old and her traditional Buddhist family belonged to the lower-middle class. Ling was pursuing her undergraduate studies at Sichuan Normal University, when, as a result of an earthquake that occurred in her province, she was awarded a scholarship to continue her studies in the States. Both her parents were bookkeepers, and they had never been to the U.S.

Hiroko. From Osaka, Japan, Hiroko, a 30-year-old, came to the U.S. to pursue her bachelor's and had just completed her master's as well. The oldest child in her family, she had a sister and brother living back home. Her father was employed as an accountant and her mother was a homemaker. Neither had ever visited the U.S. Like many traditional Japanese middle class families, they practiced Buddhism. Hiroko was currently working as a career counselor and had no plans for returning to live in Japan.

Eun-Mi. As a native of South Korea, Eun-Mi came to the U.S. to study for her undergraduate degree and stayed on to pursue her master's. She was 26 years old and the

oldest child in her family. She had two brothers living back home in Seoul, and her parents were business owners. Eun-Mi was brought up as a Baptist and continued to be an active member of the Korean immigrant church here in the States. Her upper middle-class family visited the U.S. annually.

Amaya. Coming from a remote area near Kandhkot in Pakistan, Amaya, 25, came to the U.S. after receiving a scholarship for her undergraduate studies. She was the fourth child in a devout Muslim family of nine and was the most educated woman in her village. Her family belonged to the lower-middle class. Her father was a retired government clerk and her mother was a homemaker. Neither of her parents had been to the U.S.

Mali. A 27-year-old, Mali was from Rayong, Thailand. She obtained her undergraduate degree from Siam University and was working in a finance-related field prior to coming to the U.S. for a master's degree. She was the youngest child in her lower-middle class family and had two older siblings, a brother and a sister. Her father owned his own small business and her mother was a homemaker; neither of them had visited the States.

Daiyu. An only child in a lower-middle class family, Daiyu, 24, was from Taipei, Taiwan. She attended the National Taipei University for her undergraduate studies and came to the U.S. to pursue her master's. Her family practiced Falun Gong, a system of beliefs and practices founded in China. Her father was a government employee and her mother worked in a market; they had never visited the United States.

Zhilan. Coming from Kowloon, Hong Kong, Zhilan, 31, was the youngest child in a lower class family that practiced Taoism. She had three older brothers and one older sister living back home. She obtained both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from

the University of Hong Kong and left a well-paying teaching position at a university in order to pursue her doctorate in America. Her father was a retired teacher and her mother was once a garment factory employee.

Bian. Originally from Saigon, Vietnam, Bian was the youngest in a middle class Buddhist family. She was 27 years old and had two older brothers and one older sister. She came to work on her master's immediately after completing her undergraduate studies at Vietnam National University. Her father worked in telecommunications, and her mother was a homemaker. Her parents had never been to the U.S., but they planned on attending her graduation.

Siva (Myself). A 28-year-old Sri Lankan, I was born in Jaffna and grew up in Colombo. My father is a businessman and my mother is a homemaker. We are a traditional Hindu family. I came to the U.S. to pursue my undergraduate studies and stayed on to complete my master's and now my doctorate. My parents have been to the U.S. on several occasions. I have two older sisters who live here in America and another older sister who lives in the United Kingdom.

The findings of this study are divided into two major sections. The first discusses struggles that are pertinent to all international students, while the second, much larger, section explores struggles that are particularly relevant to this study's research population. Below, I present a discussion of my experience interwoven with those of the participants. I examined the complexities of our narratives and teased apart components of it in the hope of better understanding the cultural intricacy that we were all embedded in. By comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences in our experiences, I

hope to provide the reader with an encompassing picture of the struggles we faced, and are still facing, as international students and more specifically as AWIS.

International Student Struggles

Any international student coming to America has much new to encounter and learn. We have to learn a foreign language, study in a new academic setting, navigate accommodation and transportation issues, and negotiate day-to-day living problems. Having left our loved ones and social networks behind, we also have to contend with problems of loneliness, especially during the early days of our transition. Some of the struggles the women in this study experienced were no different from those faced by any international student, regardless of what culture they came from. These typical culture-shock challenges are explored in this category.

Logistical Difficulties

When I came to America for my undergraduate studies, my parents enrolled me at California State University in Sacramento (CSUS) because my oldest sister, Priya, was already attending CSUS. They did not want me to live alone when away from home for the first time. Priya taught me how to write a check and use an ATM machine, helped apply for my social security card and my first credit card, and helped me register for classes and find my way around campus. I never realized this at the time, but I believe that coming to the States with Priya and staying with her during my first semester helped cushion my transition experience in America; for that I have to thank my parents. But the rest of the women in this study were not so fortunate to have the immediate familial support that I did. Like many international students, they had to travel to the U.S. alone

and most of them lived in the dorms for a semester or two (or longer) before renting off-campus apartments.

Simple things I got help with learning were actually a source of stress for some of the research participants. Many of the women felt bombarded by their increased responsibilities. Having travelled a lot internationally prior to coming to the U.S., women like Bian and Sanoh believed they had enough foreign cultural exposure to transition smoothly into their new life here. They were both familiar with American food, clothing, and popular media, while still being appreciative of their Asian heritage. However, such awareness about what to expect from life in the U.S. did little to prepare them for the numerous acculturation challenges that became a difficult and necessary part of their transition to the U.S. Bian was excited about driving a car and making new friends: “I was expecting everything to be like a dream, but I was struggling” (2, 26), she said. Sanoh shared similar sentiments: “I kind of felt that I was prepared, but actually I was not (5, 42). . . . The first year, it was a constant struggle” (5, 44).

Hiroko experienced her first sense of confusion after landing at the Orlando International Airport. Having always relied on public transportation back home, she expected the same upon arrival: “I didn’t think you needed a car” (3, 43), “but everything is so huge, and big, and far away” (3, 44). She recalled seeing someone write a check at Publix and found it strange. “In Japan, we don’t write checks at all” (4, 45), she said; “that was very weird for me to see” (4, 49). Like me, she had to learn how to write a check and use an ATM machine, and she had to rely on a friend to teach her. “The first year was very hard because you had to learn all those kinds of things” (Hiroko, 5, 53).

Ling was forced to cook for herself for the first time: “I like more vegetables and rice, so initially that was the biggest challenge. I missed my mum’s food terribly” (3, 38). Eun-Mi turned to her friends at the Korean immigrant church for support: “I have difficulty in opening bank account, going to grocery, buying food; they really help a lot” (3, 44). Daiyu talked of her experience in terms of having no one to rely on: “It was very hard” (4, 44), she said; “back home people are very tied to relationships and here you need to rely on yourself and do everything yourself” (13, 106).

Zhilan, who barely arrived in time for the start of classes after failing to secure her parents’ full approval of her studying in America, experienced difficulty in finding an apartment, and she found having to deal with her professors and academic responsibilities immediately upon arrival very challenging. She did not know anybody here and “felt very helpless” (2, 30). Some of the women regretted several times their decision to move to the U.S.: “I thought many times, ‘Why I had come?’” (7, 88), said Hiroko, and “I felt that I had made a wrong choice, a wrong decision to study here” (3, 32), stated Zhilan.

Language Difficulties

Many of the women noted language barriers as one of the primary challenges they faced during the early days of their transition. Poor English was a major source of pressure for these women and created significant problems when trying to function and succeed in the U.S. For Mali, even going to the grocery store was a stressor: “If I go to Publix and I have to speak, I am nervous” (15, 215).

Five of the women had difficulty fitting into their academic environment because of their limited language proficiency. Two of them shared feelings of nervousness when having to speak up in class. As Mali described, “I cannot speak as fast as I want. . . . I

don't have enough confidence and I am nervous" (14, 209). Ling put it this way: "I talk differently so it makes me feel nervous. . . . I never talk, I am afraid" (4, 54). Daiyu worried about her academic performance: "I was worried about my studies as my English is not very good. . . . I could not understand my professors very well all the time" (16, 126).

Despite enrolling in ESL (English as a Second Language), Sanoh found the first year to be "a constant struggle academically" (5, 44). Having taken the English prerequisite, she barely got through the first couple of semesters because of poor English. Bian was concerned that her colleagues would consider her "crazy" (12, 180) if she said the wrong thing. Therefore she preferred not to voice her opinion: "I am struggling. . . . In class when we discuss I want to say something but I feel like maybe I say the wrong thing" (Bian, 12, 180).

Loneliness

In the early months, when the separation from family and friends is raw, many of the women reported a profound sense of loneliness. The experience of loneliness appeared to be more daunting for students who had left home to travel abroad for the first time. Daiyu, for instance, said, "It was very bad. . . . I was feeling like I was going crazy, all that loneliness" (6, 58). However, this intensity diminished in time as the women's expectations and patterns of life changed. They learned to cope, extending their social circles and making new friends.

Two of the women attributed their loneliness to the difficulty in developing new friendships and breaking into other peoples' lives. "I think that everyone has a busy life and I don't know when is their free time" (8, 13), Daiyu stated. She and Sanoh both

mentioned that back home they would not hesitate to call a friend to meet for coffee. But here in the U.S., according to Sanoh, “I have to make an appointment with my American friends to have a cup of coffee. . . . Americans are so busy; . . . they always open their planner” (14, 80).

Even participants like Mali and Eun-Mi, who were in regular contact with people from their culture, experienced loneliness. Mali immersed herself in the Thai culture after arrival and was surrounded by close family friends, but, she said, “I cannot talk everything with them because of our gap of age, because we are not close, so I am still lonely” (11, 170). Eun-Mi experienced her loneliness from the perspective of an outsider: “I felt really alone here. . . . I feel like I am the other from a different country” (6, 72). Both she and Sanoh talked about having more freedom after coming to the U.S., but along with this freedom came loneliness. Sanoh accepted the fact that she was lonely when she noticed that her telephone did not ring as often as when she was living back home: “I did not want to admit that I was lonely; I kind of took it as a failure” (7, 52). Sanoh started checking in with her Japanese classmates regularly just to make sure that she was not going “nuts” (8, 56).

International Student Struggles Specific to Asian Women

The challenges explored above are all occasions of typical culture shock that an individual coming from any part of the world encounters. However, women coming from Asia face additional struggles that are unique to their circumstances, generated as a result of the combination of being Asian, female, and an international student. These struggles, in true Asian fashion, are best organized around parental injunctions. In Asian cultures, strictly abiding to such parental injunctions is a prime consideration, mainly because one

is expected to preserve the family's positive image and refrain from bringing shame at any cost. The parental injunctions presented in this chapter are divided into three large categories—*Bring Honor*, *Stay Asian*, and *Obey Us Or Else*—with numerous subcategories.

Bring Honor

This is one of the most significant hallmarks of Asian parental injunctions. To bring honor to our families, even at the cost of personal sacrifices of freedom and pleasure, is an expectation that has been strongly ingrained in us from a very tender age. So any action on our part that does not conform to this expectation is by definition an act of defiance. Some parents, including mine, took the position that their daughter seeking a higher education, especially one in America, and then returning back home was a legitimate means of their bringing honor to their family. We were, of course, expected to pursue fields of study that the parents believed were illustrious and status-giving in their respective communities. However, in other families, parents expected their daughters to bring honor by getting married and taking care of their elders. This category explores the ways in which we brought honor or dishonor to our parents based on the decisions we made with regards to pursuing higher education in America.

Get Married

The participants often described how in Asian cultures, parents discouraged advancement in education for women, due to women's expected role in familial support. These young women were expected to bring honor to their families by marrying at a suitable age, starting a family, and caring for their elders. Zhilan quoted her mother's perspective on this issue: "[She would say to me,] 'As long as girls have some

knowledge, that's enough; you don't need to have a lot of knowledge, because your task in the future family is not to support the family'" (10, 91). So in coming to the U.S. to study, these women not only defied cultural stereotypes that put limited value on women's academic achievements and typically restrict the scope of these achievements. Some of them also defied the expectations of their parents, who tended to embrace these constricting stereotypes.

Bian recalled wanting to differentiate from the traditional lifestyle the rest of her friends back home had settled for: "Most of my friends, they got full-time job after undergrad and they got married and they'll probably have children by 30" (20, 298). But Bian was determined to follow her own path. She explained that "in the Asian culture it is still perceived as unique" (30, 298) for parents to send their daughters abroad to get an education and, in keeping with that understanding, her traditional parents could not make sense as to why Bian wanted to pursue a master's degree instead of opting for married life. "It was a hard discussion" (15, 226). . . . I had to persuade them [her parents]" (18, 228), she said. Once her parents agreed to let Bian come to the U.S., she was solely responsible for making all the arrangements, including finding a university and an apartment.

Some women received divided reactions from their parents for delaying marriage and wanting to focus on their higher education. For instance, Sanoh was 26 years old when she came to the States, "around the age that women are supposed to get married" (3, 36). Her mother could not comprehend why a woman needed so much education and was not enthusiastic about Sanoh's longing to come to the U.S.: "My mum expected me to get married and have kids and be the typical Japanese stereotypical wife" (11, 70).

Stubbornly, Sanoh decided that marriage and children were not an option for her and did not let her mother deter her: “I just took it as background noise” (4, 36), she said. Sanoh’s father was a whole different story; he was influenced a lot by World War II and “saw the West as something more progressive and more advanced” (3, 32). He encouraged her to experience different things and develop her knowledge. He was “just always being very supportive” (3, 34), and “I am very grateful of that” (3, 34), she said. Although her parents never reached an agreement about Sanoh’s leaving for the U.S, her father’s approval carried more weight than her mother’s disapproval.

Put Family First

In a parallel to Sanoh’s experience with her mother, Zhilan had to contend with both her parents’ concern about her age at the time she left to pursue her Ph.D. She also had to come to terms with deserting her elderly parents at a time when they needed her greatly. “I tried to persuade my parents that it was very good for me” (10, 91), she said, but “my parents told me that I was a little selfish” (9, 86). In Asian cultures, she said, the family takes precedence over the individual, and taking care of her elderly parents rather than focusing solely on her own development would have been the honorable path to take. She second-guessed her decision to come to the U.S. several times and seriously contemplated staying back in Hong Kong, arriving barely in time to begin classes: “It was very, very hard for me to make the decision; that’s why I came here very late” (9, 91). In a despondent tone she stated, “I should take care of them [her parents] because they are old now, and I didn’t; I chose to study here for my own future” (9, 86).

Study at Home

Unlike the scenarios explored above, several parents supported their daughter's desire to seek a higher education because they believed that this was a means of bringing honor to their family. But only some were willing to allow their daughter to go study in America. For the rest, the parents' support was conditional—they were only supportive provided their daughter enrolled at a university in their home country. The women who defied this injunction did so for their own benefit and had various personal reasons for wanting to seek a degree in America.

Hiroko, for instance, desired to study in an English academic environment and this need motivated her to come to the U.S.: "I wanted to study in English but they [her parents] wanted me to try to find a university in Japan. But it [the possibility of an English-speaking university in Japan] is very, very limited" (3, 31). Her infatuation with American culture and pop media was an added incentive. For others like Mali, it was her passion to travel and a desire to live and study abroad that motivated her to make this move: "I love traveling and always wanted to live somewhere else, but my parents wanted me to go to Thai university" (2, 24). Both their parents, like several others, were not enthusiastic about their decision and used the dangers of living in America as an attempt to change their minds. Hiroko "begged them [her parents] to [let her] come to the States; . . . they said, 'Oh it's dangerous, the guns and this and that'" (3, 33), but at her insistence, they finally relented.

Study in America

Participants like Ling and Daiyu, both only children, acknowledged that it was very hard for their parents to allow them to travel thousands of miles away from home by

themselves so that they could obtain a U.S. education. But they were determined to make the move. As Ling explained, “We talked a lot; . . . I told them, ‘I need to grow up and I need to leave you for better life’” (6, 72), and her parents understood and supported her decision. Similarly, Amaya’s parents and mine were also supportive and encouraged our academic pursuits. This was particularly true of our fathers, which was rather an unusual situation, given that in Asian cultures, as Amaya explained, sons are more commonly encouraged to further their academic and career goals, while daughters are expected to limit them and focus instead on marriage and family (12, 111). Amaya’s friends were stunned when they learnt about her plans to come to the U.S.: “My friends were like, ‘He does not let you go on picnics but he is letting you go study in America alone?’” (12, 111).

Amaya’s parents supported her in coming to the States at a time when girls in her part of her country were having acid thrown in their faces for learning to read. My parents made it their mission, very unique in my community, to ensure that all four of their daughters earned a foreign education. They always encouraged my sisters and me to continue our education elsewhere, as it was prestigious as well as honorable. Having their first three daughters in various stages of completing their undergraduate and graduate degrees from U.K. and U.S. institutions, my parents thought it only made sense for me to follow in their footsteps, and I agreed. Despite being very traditional, my father used to say, “I want all four of my daughters to earn a foreign education and be independent and be able to stand on their own feet. They should not have to depend on their husbands or someone else.” My father, and Amaya’s father in Pakistan, were similar—and quite unusual—in combining many traditional cultural attitudes with a feminist viewpoint in

regard to their daughters' education. Similar to Amaya's father, my father too was deprived of a college education; therefore, he ensured that the same fate did not befall his daughters.

Study What We Choose

Some participants described feeling pressured to bring honor to their families by pursuing fields of study their parents had chosen for them. As Kayo reiterated, "in Asian cultures, it is very common for parents to push their children to pursue fields of study that are prestigious and monetarily beneficial (21, 267). My parents were no different. I had wanted a career in child psychology, but my parents determined that one as a Doctor of Optometry (OD) was much more prestigious, so I found myself dutifully seeking a degree in biological sciences—the premedical/pre-professional track. Kayo experienced similar parental pressure. Just as my parents wanted me to pursue optometry, her parents wanted her to become a pharmacist. So out of familial obligation we both went along with our parents' wishes; however, Kayo was unsure about pharmacy, so she enrolled with an undeclared major—a decision that her parents were unaware of.

I believe I agreed to optometry when in Sri Lanka because I had always done what my parents wanted me to; this was just another one of those instances. But when I started preparing for the Optometry Admission Test sometime during my junior year, I realized I had no interest in the field my parents had chosen for me. I kept this to myself. Only after graduating with my bachelor's degree did I work up the courage to tell my parents that a career in optometry was not in my future. Since I did not have a plan for graduate school, I gave in when they stepped in and decided that I should pursue my master's in business administration (MBA). Much to my parents' disappointment, after

one semester in the program, I realized that I had no interest in the business field, either. Finance and economics failed to stoke my curiosity, which revolved around human beings, relationships, problems, and solutions.

For the second time, I had to inform my parents that the field of study they had chosen for me was not to my liking. But unlike the first time, I did not wait until after I finished the MBA to let them know. And thankfully, this time around I already had a back-up. I had started researching other suitable career options, and this led me to the master's program in Family Therapy (FT) at Nova Southeastern University (NSU). I fell in love with it; however, my parents had unfortunately never heard about FT and they were clearly not impressed with my choice. While they deliberated on what to do next, I was constantly plagued with thoughts of having to return to Sri Lanka if they decided that this was not a viable option for me. After much persuasion from me, my parents agreed to let me stay in Florida and continue with my studies.

I had some idea what field of study I wanted to pursue, but Kayo recognized that pharmacy was not her calling and hadn't yet found an alternative goal: "I feel the pressure that I have to know what I want to be and what I want to do" (21, 267). She elaborated, "They are also pressuring for a career that would have a lot of money involved; . . . like if I said that I want to be a maid, they would probably flip out" (21, 269), she said jokingly. After enrolling at NSU, Kayo planned on becoming a paramedic, but learning about the low wages in this occupation, she gave up on that idea, believing that it would not be prestigious enough for her parents, and began looking into the physician assistant (PA) program. Her parents were unaware of her earlier interest in

becoming a paramedic, and she had yet to inform them that her interest was now in the PA program.

Mali also talked about her parents, more specifically her mother, choosing her field of study: “I obey what my mum wants (3, 38), . . . what she wants me to study, what field of study” (3, 40). However, contrary to Kayo and myself, Mali did not find this to be problematic. She was willing to comply with her mother’s decision, as it was along the lines of study that she was already interested in. Mali added, “There is good scope for MBA in Thailand, you can make lots of money, so they [her parents] are happy about it” (19, 271).

Return Home

Sooner or later, we all recognized that our role as sojourners would come to an end, and we were aware of the parental injunction that once we completed our education, we were to bring honor to our parents by returning home with an American degree and resuming life as though we had never left. This expectation of our return to Asia was irrespective of whether we came to the U.S. as a means of honoring our parents or if we came as a sign of our defiance. In keeping with this injunction, some of us were looking forward to returning home upon completion of our studies. A few who had permissive parents were contemplating other avenues in the U.S. or even other countries before eventually returning home. Others were not thrilled at that prospect and were exploring alternatives that would allow them to continue living in America.

Some of us were fortunate to have supportive parents who encouraged us to study in the U.S. However, only Ling and Amaya had decided to return home immediately upon completion of their studies. Ling felt compelled to make a contribution to her home

country, and she was excited about sharing all the knowledge that she had gained after coming to the U.S. “I think many of my ideas and thoughts have changed, . . . and I feel that I could change a lot of things when I go back” (15, 132). Also, as the only child in her family, she felt that she had an obligation to her parents to go back and live with them, especially since they were supportive of her coming to America to pursue her degree. “I told them, ‘I will be back soon,’ and they are waiting for me” (6, 70), she said.

Amaya, however, did encounter a challenge: The plan was for her to return home after graduation, but her choice to complete her master’s before returning did not excite her family. “This is not something that my family, my dad wanted me to do” (10, 97), she said; instead, they wanted her to return immediately after she completed her undergraduate degree. Offered a scholarship for her master’s program, she tried justifying her advanced education to her family as a good opportunity for her that might not present itself in the future. Nevertheless, they were cold to the idea. Despite her parents’ disapproval, Amaya was in the process of completing her master’s and looked forward to working and having an active life upon her return. She planned to develop and implement projects that promoted literacy programs for women back home in Pakistan.

Women like Daiyu were in a state of confusion about their plans immediately after graduation, although they eventually intended to return home at some point in the future. “My experiences here, when I go back to Taiwan will be helpful in some way” (4, 48), she said. But before doing so, she contemplated enrolling in a Ph.D. program, finding a job in the U.S., or perhaps going to an entirely different country. Her parents told her, “If you are happy, we will be happy” (9, 82), and hearing this gave her the liberty to explore other avenues. Since Daiyu’s intentions to return home would not be

realized for a few if not several years, she had not given much thought to what the homecoming would look or feel like.

The other participants in this study had chosen not to return, despite parental pressures for them to do so. Some completed their degrees and went on to seek suitable employment. Hiroko, for example, was working as a career counselor. In the past, her parents attempted to convince her to return home, but with a mischievous grin she said, “they still try to talk to me about coming home (11, 134), but “I won’t go back” (11, 132). Bian was six months away from graduation when she said, “They [her parents] want me to come back home after graduation but my hope is to stay in U.S. and work here. . . . So we haven’t really agreed anything yet (19, 280). Her financial dependence on her parents compelled her to return home, but she was determined to find a job and become financially independent.

Sanoh wanted to break away from the “patriarchic, male-dominated [Asian] culture” (3, 28) in which women were supposed to get married, have children, and limit their professional achievements. “Without me realizing, I was socialized to be a woman. . . . I knew I wanted to get out” (3, 33), she recalled. Like Hiroko, she desired to learn in an English-speaking environment. She also wanted to challenge herself by living in a different country and culture. At the time of the interview, she was working on her Ph.D. and had no plans of returning to live in Japan. Zhilan, the student who had the hardest time coming to America, also planned to find a job after graduation, so she could continue to live in the U.S. A commonality in the experience of both Sanoh and Zhilan was their defiance of traditional parents, who believed that “in our culture we can’t be

alone as females” (Zhilan, 10, 91), and whose “idea of happiness for a woman is to get married” (Sanoh, 4, 36).

My parents too hoped that I would return to live in Sri Lanka once I finished my master’s, but while in the process of completing that degree I decided that I wanted to continue my education and pursue a Ph.D. Political and civil unrest in Sri Lanka was another reason that returning to stay in my home country was no longer an option for me, as I informed my parents. Zhilan contemplated at great length whether or not to come to the U.S. to study because of her parents; I also wavered several times on whether or not I would go back to Sri Lanka after I completed my master’s. At that time my parents had all their children living abroad on various continents, so I was very conscious that they were experiencing “empty nest syndrome.” But, like Zhilan, I too opted to forsake my collectivist roots based on a conviction that following a more individualist course would be personally beneficial.

Stay Asian

Regardless of the differing circumstances in which we made our way to the U.S., each one of us brought several parental injunctions with us when we came. Although these injunctions related to various, differing aspects of our lives, in essence they all conveyed one message to us: Stay Asian. This category describes the ways in which we partook of American culture after coming to the U.S., despite parental injunctions forbidding us to do so.

Many of the research participants shared the opinion that while still in Asia, we had all been exposed to quite a bit of American culture through media such as television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet. However, several factors prevented or sheltered

us from being overly influenced or overtly changed by this culture, living with our parents being the most crucial. This protective shielding of our experience is particularly important because it may have created an increased obsession with American culture while we were still living back home, although we controlled our behavior and did not act “un-Asian.” But once we were living in America, we found that such self-control was not necessary.

After coming to the U.S., the freedom we experienced was both alarming and alluring. As a result, each one of us continued to defy parental injunctions in some way or other, depending on the choices we made. These choices, among many, included no longer feeling obligated to dress Asian, to study all the time, to limit our social lives, or to refrain from dating and being in relationships. However, this freedom appeared to be a double-edged sword. Without the comforts of home and life as we once knew it, the lifestyle change was laced with conflicting emotions. As Eun-Mi described it, “Sometimes it’s scary, and sometimes it feels good” (5, 62).

Don’t Change

All of the women in this study felt that as a result of our stay in America, we had transformed in some way or the other, despite the parental injunction, Don’t Change. In my case, I came to the U.S. as a girl strongly instilled with Asian cultural values, but what most strikingly influenced me during my stay in the U.S., without doubt, was the American culture. During this time, I’ve exchanged immaturity, innocence, and ignorance for wisdom, sophistication, and experience. I have changed in so many ways that would never have been possible if I had stayed in Sri Lanka or not advanced to my present level of education, but this was not a welcome change for my parents.

I was not alone in this; several of the other women described developmental transformations to their personal and/or cultural identities. Amaya and Mali recognized a disconnect between their new way of thinking and their old one and worried that their parents might not be appreciative of their new selves: “They [her parents] want me to be the same person who I was when I left, and it will be difficult because I have changed so much (8, 91), said Amaya. On a similar note, Mali stated, “It’s kind of sad but I feel distance with them [her parents]; . . . I understand them but they don’t understand me” (12, 176).

Kayo talked about her change in terms of maturity: “When I go back, they [her parents] always say that I seem really different and that I have changed” (4, 51), but, I had to really mature after coming here. . . . If I was back home, I’d still be a kid like they [her parents] want me to be, I’m sure of it (6, 73). Some of the participants, including Eun-Mi noticed their transformation from a cultural perspective. She elaborated: “In Asian cultures, we respect elders and at first I was really uncomfortable to treat the professor as a colleague rather than someone with authority” (2, 38); however, “I think that I have changed in that way because now I just call them by their first name and it’s no big deal” (3, 40).

Bian became aware of her transformation only after her mother pointed it out to her when she was vacationing back home: “My mum noticed and she’d say, ‘Hey Bian, you shouldn’t talk so frankly like this to people, you’ve changed, . . . you’ve become American’” (6, 73). During the course of her stay in Vietnam, her mother repeatedly let Bian know that “it [her transformation] was not cool” (6, 73) with her parents.

In essence, Don't Change was the overriding injunction we faced with regards to traveling to and living in America. But as elaborated above, we did change, although not always in the same exact ways. Contrary to their parent's expectations, some no longer felt the need to dress Asian, control emotions, or study all the time. These, along with other instances of our defiance to the Stay Asian parental injunction, are explored below.

Dress Asian

Daiyu, like other participants, talked about her changing sense of style after arriving in the U.S. When living back home, she had to dress in a way that was "conservative" (9, 90), and her parents expected her to "not show off skin" (9, 90). But once in America, she began to dress more like her American friends, and her wardrobe transformed to include revealing and sexy outfits. In my case, I came from a traditional Hindu family; I had never been allowed to wear a sleeveless shirt or a skirt above my knee when living in Sri Lanka. But a few days after I arrived in Fort Lauderdale, I exercised my freedom of style at the Boca Town Centre Mall, where I bought my first dress with spaghetti straps and some shorts. My parents, had they been around, would have been appalled.

However, unlike Daiyu and me, Amaya, the student from Pakistan, struggled with her changing sense of style after arriving in the U.S. In keeping with Muslim custom, Amaya wore the traditional burka when living back home. But once in America, she exchanged it for t-shirts, jeans, and skirts, and gradually the skirts "got shorter and shorter" (5, 61), she said with a giggle. Initially, dressing in Western clothing was a negative experience, because it altered her paradigm of thinking, but little by little she got used to it. At first, she kept this to herself, but eventually she opened up to her family

about her new Western sense of attire. Although she was still modest in her sense of style, she said her friends back home would beg to differ.

Control Emotions

Many of the women agreed that repressing emotions, which was a norm in Asia, was pointless in America. “Hugging someone, like telling someone ‘I love you,’ it’s not common in our culture, and I guess, in a way, it’s like we have to hold it within ourselves” (8, 93), Kayo explained. After coming to the U.S., she found herself doing just the opposite: openly hugging someone in public and expressing emotions and feelings. Cheerfully she said, “I’m not fearful as I was back home to express how I feel. . . . After coming here, I can’t help but let it out” (8, 99).

Amaya’s sentiments were similar to Kayo’s but she herself was cautious about expressing emotions in public: “I hug my guy friends all the time, but that is something you don’t do back home” (7, 77). Concerned that her family’s opinion of her might change if they found out, she would ensure that no one took a photograph if she were to hug a male colleague in public. She feared that such a photo might make its way to social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace, where someone in her family could come across it.

Talking to Amaya and Kayo reminded me of my perspective on expressing emotions. After landing at the Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport and being reunited at the baggage claim with Dilan, my boyfriend from Sri Lanka whom I’d been longing to see for many months, I couldn’t help but throw myself into his arms. But that’s when I realized we were in an airport, a public place with people all around us, and

here we were hugging! This would never have happened in Sri Lanka, but right then, I didn't care. This was America!

Study!

As was discussed in Chapter Two, Asian cultures demand high academic achievement, and children are overwhelmingly pressured to excel academically, allowing no room for extracurricular activities or social lives. Being a good student is not enough: "They want me to be the highest student in class and stuff, and I am doing my best, but I can't say that I am up there; I am just somewhere in the middle; I am not the top student" (17, 148), elaborated Ling. "I am pressured all the time to study" (21, 263), Kayo said, and "that's a cultural thing; . . . they [Asian parents] expect us to focus all of our mind only on studying" (16, 140). Bian's parents were the same: "They really, really, really, really value education" (6, 68), and "every time I talk to them they never forget to ask, 'Are you studying hard?'" (7, 94).

Because of the parental injunction that once in America we should focus all of our attention on studies and not get lost in American distractions, anything we did when we should have been studying was a form of defiance. Hiroko provided a rationale for her defiance: "I used to work hard and studied a lot, but I can't study all the time, so sometimes I was just not studying like they [her parents] thought I was . . . I was doing other stuff" (14, 180). All of us, in fact, engaged in "other stuff." Some got involved in various kinds of organized extracurricular activities, most socialized with Asian and/or American friends, some dated, and some established long-term intimate relationships.

Avoid Extracurricular Activities

Several of the women were involved in sororities and on-campus student organizations, although such activities were discouraged by their parents. Few even went to the extent of taking up time-consuming organizational responsibilities, such as Bian, who was the treasurer for her university's International Students Association. She explained, "The purpose I am here is to study and advance (25, 372). . . . I know my parents want me to focus only on studies" (25, 376). Therefore, anticipating their disapproval, she decided to keep them in the dark with regards to her campus-wide recreational involvements.

In a similar way, women like Kayo were extremely passionate about playing sports, but such extracurricular activities were considered a distraction from education: "They [her parents] want me to focus strictly on studies and not have extracurricular activities" (18, 225), Kayo explained. After coming to America, she played intramural volleyball in her spare time, but deliberately kept this to herself. "It was a conflict for me internally, . . . but I can't help myself. I love the sport" (18, 225), she said with a shrug of her shoulders.

Don't Socialize

Back in Asia, we were all not allowed the freedom to hang out with friends or stay out at night. Our parents considered socializing a distraction from studying. Women like Sanoh and Kayo described feeling "controlled" (Sanoh, 11, 70) and "confined" (Kayo, 5, 64) when living with their parents, but once in America they enjoyed the freedom to make their own decisions and do what they pleased. Back in Japan, Sanoh explained, it is customary for children, both sons and daughters, to live with their parents

until they got married. She found this restrictive. She particularly enjoyed the freedom from her mum, who in Japan would always be hovering around saying, “Go to bed, wake up early tomorrow, don’t stay out late” (15, 50).

Some, like Eun-Mi, talked about their experience in terms of obedience: “My parents have a really strong authority, . . . so I obeyed what my parents said. I had no freedom [in South Korea]” (4, 52). In America, the opposite was true: “I have more freedom, especially since my parents are not around to tell me what to do, so I can do anything I want, go anywhere I want” (5, 60). “They always knew what I was doing” (20, 251), complained Kayo. If school was to finish at 6:00 p.m., her parents expected her to be home by 6:30 p.m., she explained, and if for some reason she was late, it would inevitably result in a conflict. Back home, she always watched television, and her parents knew what she was doing at all times, but now after coming to America, she began to go to the movies or hang out with her friends and boyfriend on many occasions. However, when Kayo went out at night, she tried to return home at a reasonable time just to be fair to her parents.

There were a few exceptions, however. For instance, Kayo stayed out with her friends until 2:00 a.m. on the night of her 18th birthday. She had friends flying in from out of town and wanted to spend some extra time with them. Although her parents were aware that she would be out, they did not know how late she would return. When she told them the next day what time she came home, “They [her parents] started freaking out” (10, 123), and Kayo got the silent treatment from them for almost three weeks, as a sign of their disapproval. Since Kayo never had a “debut” for her 18th birthday—a Filipino

analog of the Latin American celebration of La Quinceañera—she expected them to understand, but her honesty backfired.

Similarly, like others in this study, going out to dinner or happy hour with friends, spending time with male colleagues, or watching a movie at the cinema were activities that Bian and Amaya were both not accustomed to when living back home. Once in America, they realized that such activities were a way of socializing, but they deliberately chose not to share this information with their parents, as they certainly would not understand. “I didn’t think they [her parents] would be too happy about [my] going out to drink, or staying out too late” (9, 140), said Bian. Having lived with her parents all her life, she now found it refreshing that whatever time she went to her apartment, there was nobody around to say anything. Like Kayo, Bian noted that she went out more frequently but tried to return at a reasonable time, although this was not always the case.

I too experienced a lot of what the other participants were expressing in terms of a more active social life after coming to America, but mine began after the first semester, when I moved from Sacramento to Boca Raton. Prior to that, while attending CSUS, I was rooming with my sister, Priya, who was very caring and protective of me. Except for attending lectures during the day, we rarely went out. She sheltered me and limited my exposure to American culture, so although I was miles away from Sri Lanka, in a way I still felt like I was attending classes there and living back home with my parents. But once I transferred to Florida Atlantic University (FAU) in Boca Raton, the lack of familial presence allowed me to do so many things that I would never have dreamt of; I was going to the beach, hanging out with Dilan, and going out at night to play pool.

Weekends were spent relaxing with friends, going to the movies or to barbecues, doing our grocery shopping, or drinking coffee at Mizner Park.

Don't Date

Many of the women shared that we were not allowed the freedom to date when we were living back home, as it was not customary in our culture. Once in America, the lack of parental presence allowed us the choice to date and be in relationships, but we purposely chose not to disclose this part of our lives to our parents. Some of our parents, like Ling and Mali's, knew their daughters had a close friendship with a male colleague, but they did not know the full extent of these relationships. "My parents know about him as a friend but not as a boyfriend" (17, 148), noted Ling, and Mali, the student from Thailand, stated, "They think he is close friend" (9, 144).

These women exhibited partial defiance by dating men from their own religion and cultures, but some of us took our defiance further, getting involved in interracial, inter-ethnic, or inter-religious relationships—something our parents strongly frowned upon and would find unacceptable. Kayo, who was dating an African American man stated, "they [her parents] would not approve me dating a black guy" (12, 145). Bian's parents posed a similar dilemma for her: "They[her parents] want me to marry a Japanese guy" (22, 322), but she previously dated a man from Germany and later dated a man from Mexico for several months.

In my case, Dilan and I started dating three months before we left for America, but because dating is taboo in Asia and those who date risk being characterized as having "loose morals," I deliberately chose not to divulge any information to my parents about our relationship. To make matters worse, although Dilan and I were both Asians and Sri

Lankans, we belonged to two different religions and ethnicities. He was a Roman Catholic belonging to the Sinhalese ethnic group and I was a Hindu belonging to the Tamil ethnic group. Therefore our relationship was still unacceptable. My situation was similar to the ones Ling and Mali were in: My parents knew about Dilan and had in fact had met him several times, but I maintained that we were just close friends.

Amaya didn't date at all, and she wasn't pursuing a relationship. At the age of seven, she was engaged to her cousin, whom she regarded as a brother, and she refused to fulfill this engagement. She had reached this decision well before she left home, but did not have the confidence to verbalize it to her father. "I should marry someone that we [Amaya and her father] both can choose" (9, 97), she said. After coming to the U.S., she talked to her father about her refusal to marry her cousin, mainly because the physical distance made it easier, and also because she was better able to articulate her reasoning. Although her father felt that breaking the arranged engagement was a betrayal, she noted that her cousin was very traditional; this would make them an incompatible match.

Unlike Amaya, who refused to date, and the other participants who were dating and in relationships, my relationship with Dilan did not end with just dating. Seven months after I arrived in Florida, we decided to move in together. Even though it was a huge step, it seemed logical because we were spending almost all our time together at one or the other of our apartments. As exciting as this move was for me, I was overcome with intense, conflicting emotions for doing something so drastic without my parents' knowledge. Dating alone was forbidden in our culture and living together before marriage was completely unthinkable.

Obey Us Or Else

In the previous categories, I explored the various parental injunctions we had to contend with as AWIS studying in America, and I elaborated on the ways in which we defied those injunctions. Because of our defiant acts, all of us envisioned a range of possible “Or Else” threats if our parents found out about our American lifestyle. Very recently, in my case, the threat was, If you don’t finish your dissertation by a specific date, you will be forced to come home. For Amaya it was the prospect of being forced to marry her cousin. In other cases, it was the possibility of having their tuition money taken away or otherwise being financially cut off. Because of the tangible nature of these threats, we experienced and/or engaged in an array of emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal responses and strategies. This section is organized in terms of our responses to the ever-present threat of consequences for disobedience.

Emotional Responses

We took risks and enjoyed the pleasures of our new-found freedom, but it was not pure pleasure; we also suffered as a result. On one side, we retained a sense of duty and wanted our parents’ approval, while on the other side, we strongly wished to access the choices that came with living in the American culture. Those choices we now felt free to make—perhaps going out at night, meeting friends for a game of pool, or going to the movies—would not have been allowed if we were back home. Therefore, the desire to experiment with freedom juxtaposed with our filial obligations caused a great deal of emotional turmoil within us; any freedom we experienced was tinged with guilt and fear.

Guilt. Several of the women who came to the States despite their parents’ wishes for them to remain in Asia experienced tremendous guilt because they believed they were

dishonoring their parents' wishes. This feeling of guilt was particularly intense for women like Zhilan, who felt she had abandoned her parents when they needed her the most. "I should take care of them because they are old now and I didn't; I chose to study here for my own future" (9, 86), she said. Amaya and I experienced a similar kind of guilt when we decided to pursue our master's degrees in the States instead of returning home as our parents wanted us to.

Repressing emotions was no longer taboo in our new environment, but for some of us, greeting male colleagues with a hug or holding hands with our boyfriends in public was something we could not do without experiencing guilt. As Amaya explained, "We don't hug males in Pakistan, so things like that, those things make me feel guilty" (7, 77). In a different situation, but with a similar clash of cultures underlying it, Amaya experienced a tremendous amount of guilt when she defied her family's wishes by refusing to marry her cousin.

Guilt arising from aspects of our newly found social lives was a shared emotion amongst us. Women like Kayo and Bian, who were involved in intramural sports and on-campus student organizations, talked about feeling guilty as a result of dedicating large chunks of her time towards such commitments: "The purpose I am here is to study and advance (25, 372). . . . I know my parents want me to focus only on studies" (25, 376), Bian said. A further manifestation of the guilt engendered by our newly found social lives came from Ling, who noted, "My parents told me not to date" (17, 148), and said, "I feel guilty sometimes because they are supporting me financially to get an education" (18, 154). Kayo shared similar feelings: "You know the tuition is a lot and I just feel bad" (25, 376).

We bore even weightier guilt if we were involved in interracial, inter-ethnic, or inter-religious relationships. My relationship with Dilan was a source of guilt both before and after I left Sri Lanka, but it was amplified after we decided to live together. As moving day came and went, I was often plagued with thoughts about my parents finding out and feared the disappointment and let down they would feel about my life choices.

Fear. Constantly managing a sometimes intricate deception was a source of fear. Even simple diversions like watching movies, playing pool, or just hanging out could trigger fear of parental disappointment, fear of getting caught, fear of financial cut-off, fear of reprisal, and/or fear of being forced to return home.

The women who defied both parental expectations and cultural stereotypes when they came to America ultimately found that their desire to protect and advance themselves was greater than their fear of parental disappointment. Similarly, although Kayo and I feared parental disappointment as a result of choosing career paths different from what our parents wished for us, it was outweighed by our desire to guard our individuality and create a self-directed future. Along the same lines but with a slight twist, when Amaya abandoned her Islamic attire for jeans and short skirts, she experienced fear of parental reprisal should this information reach home.

For those of us who were dating and in relationships, the fear of getting caught was rather severe, especially if our parents were to find out that there was a physical component to our relationships. As Mali put it, with humor in her voice, “I would be annihilated if they [her parents] found out” (24, 313). Apart from the fear of getting caught, Ling, like several others in this study, including myself, feared that we would be financially cut-off if our parents knew that we were in a relationship, let alone a physical

one. “They [her parents] would probably take away my tuition or something because that’s how they are” (15, 189), she said.

Of all the fears we experienced, the ultimate one looming over us was the fear of having to return home without completing our degrees. As Kayo put it, “I’m pretty sure they [her parents] will pull me back home if they can see what I do here [In America]” (22, 275). Several times during my ten years in America, this fear was a preoccupation in my day-to-day life. If my parents found out about Dilan, or that I was at the beach with friends at 11.00 p.m., or the C- I got on my undergraduate statistics course, they would, I was sure, have me on a plane before I knew what hit me. And, as I write this, the fear of having to return home if I do not complete my doctorate within the next month is much too real.

Cognitive Responses

For some, the fears related to juggling lives and identities manifested as mental images or creations, such as dreaming that our parents were watching our every move. Images of our parents and their disapproving looks were always present somewhere in the back of our minds. In my case, everywhere I went, my parents did too: They watched me play pool, they were with me walking on the beach, and they were even present during intimate times with Dilan. Several of the women, like Daiyu, spoke of similar experiences. For instance, when out to dinner with friends, she felt “as though they [her parents] are sitting at the next table” watching her (10, 94). When we went out at night, many of us, including myself, kept an eye on the time because it was almost as if our parents were telepathically reminding us to avoid staying out late (e.g. Kayo, 11, 127; Bian, 5, 70).

One participant experienced her fear in the form of auditory hallucinations. The first thing Zhilan heard in the morning and before she went to bed at night, repeating like a broken record, was her mother's voice in her head: "What time did you wake up? . . . Did you lock the door?" (3, 50). In contrast to Zhilan's experience, Sanoh, one of the women whose purposeful pursuit of independence stands out even in a group characterized by culturally transcending ambitions, found the absence of her mother's voice refreshing. She took delight in not having her mother hovering around her as she would if she were still living in Japan constantly reminding her to "have dinner and go to bed early, don't stay out at night late" (6, 49). Yet, as Sanoh was enjoying her freedom, the feeling of liberation was short-lived. She explained that the absence of her mother's voice in the present highlighted the memory of her mother's admonitions in the past, so they were still, in a sense, with her.

In some instances, the fears were highly technological, notably in relation to social networking modalities such as Facebook or MySpace. Amaya was terrified that a picture of her hugging a male colleague would make its way to a social networking site, where her parents could see pictures of her that she would not have willingly shared with them. She realized that this was how you greeted people in this culture, but stated, "I don't want them to think that I am doing something bad here, as hugging guys would not be approved back home, so I worry about someone putting a picture on face book or it goes around and my family somehow sees it." (7, 77).

Even though we were thousands of miles away from Dad and Mum, in our minds their influence and authority constantly stayed with us. Thoughts about the consequences

if our parents were able to see just a single day of our new free lives in the U.S. crossed our minds recurrently, and these thoughts were terrifying.

Interpersonal Responses

While doing “American style” things that our parents would disapprove of, we were constantly lying to our parents either by omitting or fabricating information. If our parents confronted us as to our whereabouts, in an attempt to protect ourselves, we typically would say that we were studying in the library or home in our apartments when in fact we were hanging out with friends. Hiroko recalled her experience, “if my parents called when I was at the beach, or out shopping, I would lie to them [about where I’d been] (14, 181). Initially, some of the women were up-front with their parents and openly shared information with them about their lifestyle change, but they soon learned that it was not received in the way intended. As Eun-Mi said, “They feel like I don’t obey what they are saying, like I am rejecting what they are saying, . . . so I don’t tell them much about what I do here now” (7, 88).

Because dating is not acceptable in Asian cultures, all of us who were dating and in relationships deliberately chose not to divulge any information to our parents about this aspect of our lives. I believe Bian and Kayo’s statements concisely summarized our typical position: “Nobody in my family knows” (Bian, 13, 153); “I am kind of keeping it a secret from them” (Kayo, 24, 356). A few of us were just partially secretive because we revealed the existence of our significant others to our parents but fabricated the truth and maintained that they were just our close friends; however, some, like Kayo and Bian, chose to keep the fact that they had men in their lives completely protected from their parents, not revealing this dimension of their lives at all.

Some like Amaya withheld information from her parents about going out to dinner with male colleagues and greeting them with a hug. “I would never share that information with my family” (7, 77), she reiterated. Similarly, Kayo had yet to inform her parents about her change in career choice: “They still don’t know what I really want to do, I haven’t found the right time to tell them yet (7, 89). I never told my parents about Dilan’s presence in my life, or that I was wearing a swimsuit in public and holding hands with him at the Fort Lauderdale Beach while sipping a margarita. But the more comfortable I got with this new America life, the more I found it clashing with my Asian cultural and familial values. Like several of the other participants, I maintained an Eastern cultural charade with my parents, while living a lifestyle highly influenced by Western ideals.

Summary

The findings of this study revealed that we were not in the U.S. just as women students. Our parents sent us abroad as ambassadors of our respective countries—to be role models, to study hard, to return with a degree, and essentially to make them proud. We were sent with admonishments to be good: to bring honor, to stay Asian, and to obey our parents. As ambassadors, everything we did was reflective of the culture we represented. Our familial and cultural obligations became both a source of support and a source of stress.

Yet we strove hard to be good girls, to minimize parental disappointment by doing the right thing. But we didn’t do the right thing, maintaining parent-sanctioned behavior, all the time. In most cases, we chose to conceal certain aspects of our lifestyle from our parents and families back home, because any knowledge of our openly acting

like Americans would have jeopardized our relationship with them. We had to shoulder the responsibility of preserving our reputation and that of our family, thereby preventing the potential for scandal and shame.

Although we were living here alone, we were constantly aware of our parents' omnipresence in America. So a part of us always remained in Asia. We were never able to make a total transition from the one culture to the other. In essence, we were ensconced in familial and cultural patterns, ties, and expectations that linked us to the land of our birth and early youth, and we also proceeded with trying to navigate through the complexity of adapting to a different culture. We were engulfed in gales of cultural and parental forces that were buffeting us, and our attempt to straddle both forces had a profound effect on our experience. We were all facing the same situation—juggling two contradictory cultures in the midst of trying to grow up.

Chapter V—Implications for Research and Practice

The best endings resonate because they echo a word, phrase or image from earlier in the story, and the reader is prompted to think back to that reference and speculate on a deeper meaning.

—James Plath (2002, p. 229)

This research explores the struggles eleven Asian women international students (AWIS) on a U.S. college campus contended with when making a cross-cultural transition. Nearly all of the participants spoke about typical culture shock challenges they encountered, but a majority of this study's findings revolve around the participants' discussion about the struggles they faced because of the combination of being Asian, female, and an international student. In the following sections, I reflect on the findings of this research and address the contributions, limitations, and implications of my study. I end the chapter with some concluding thoughts.

Reflections and Interpretations

In many respects, this dissertation is about growing up. It describes our journeys to figure out our identities—how to define ourselves and who we were as individuals. But this journey is not exclusive to AWIS. Wherever one comes from, whether a different part of the country or halfway around the globe, any child leaving for college experiences stressors associated with the transition to a new environment. All individuals in this situation go through a process of parental shedding and acculturation. As one of the participants in this study stated, “I think every kid goes through stressors and changes in life and does things that they don't tell their parents” (Kayo, 12, 143).

Certainly, young Asian women are not the only ones who are testing boundaries, defying traditions, breaking the rules, and keeping secrets from their parents. But in the case of young Asian women as represented by the research participants in this study, their

personal development is unique because it is across cultures and across continents. When living in Asia, they were protected by their families as part of the benefits and obligations of filial piety and obedience, and when they found themselves in the U.S., they were exposed to freedom and opportunity that was not previously available to them. Trapped in a culture war, these women struggled to find a balance between their traditional, collectivist culture and their new contemporary, individualistic one. Therefore every experience of theirs was amplified. The words of Dad were more pronounced and the eyes of Mum, looking disapprovingly at the spaghetti straps, glared more intensely.

We were dealing with protective (though some might claim over-protective) parents and their injunctions, such as Don't change, Don't become American, Don't drink alcohol, Don't date, and For God sakes, Don't have sex. But we still went out at night. We went out for happy hour and drank alcohol. We hugged our male colleagues in public and wore revealing outfits. And we dated and were in intimate, sexual relationships. The lack of parental presence allowed us to make choices that we would not have made if we were living back home. Not always the healthiest for our emotional and physical well being, most of the choices were an exercise of defiant freedom—lifestyle changes that we were not accustomed to, so we may well have gotten carried away and gone “over the edge.”

Our parents' fears about American distractions were not unrealistic. Going out at night and hanging out with our friends could have become a distraction that caused us to focus less on our studies—counterproductive to our goal in America— and, worse case scenario, drop out of school. The same applies to dating and relationships. Many of the women were sexually active, thereby possibly risking unwanted pregnancies or

contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Some were fond of happy hour and going out to drink; they could have driven under the influence or may have missed classes as a result of a hangover.

But we were determined to balance the cultural and familial injunctions of our parents with the freedom and opportunities of American culture and campus life. So there was a general consensus amongst us that in an attempt to stay sane, we needed to live double lives—the ones our parents back in Asia knew about, and the ones only we knew about. Inside of our double lives, we felt a mix of emotions and employed a mix of strategies to help us deal with the transition from childhood to adulthood and the cultural shift from collectivist Asian values to the less inhibited, far more individualistic U.S. values.

Intrapersonally, we felt guilt, lived in fear, and experienced auditory or visual hallucinations because we were afraid of our parents finding out about our defiant acts. We also speculated and worried about the means by which they might find out, for instance, by slips of the tongue or through Facebook photos. And interpersonally, we lied and masked parts of our lifestyles that we believed would not be acceptable to our parents and families, because any knowledge of our openly acting like Americans could have jeopardized our relationship with them. We did all of this to protect our parents' honor, our relationship with them, our ability to stay in the U.S., and our desire to enjoy the benefits of our new-found freedom. We wanted the best of both worlds.

Several times, especially towards the completion of this dissertation, I reflected on my journey thus far and wondered how different my life would be had I not come to America in the first place. Where would I be now? Would I be living in Sri Lanka or

abroad? Perhaps I would have complied with my parents' wishes and gotten married to a nice Hindu boy and had children? I would probably never have had the opportunity to earn a Ph.D., that's for sure.

I have wondered about the other women, as well. Would Amaya be married to her cousin to whom she was promised at the age of seven? Would Kayo be a pharmacist just like her parents anticipated? What about Mali? Would she be trapped in Thailand or would her dreams of traveling the world have materialized? Perhaps Sanoh and Bian would have gotten married and given their parents the grandchildren they always desired. Zhilan probably would have taken on the role of her parents' caretaker and been the model Asian daughter as per their expectations.

For AWIS, the simple prepackaged life plan of coming to America, obtaining a degree, and returning home to marry the nice groom our parents picked for us, all the while holding onto the idea that nothing about us was going to change, fails the test of reality. Our parents, who sent us abroad to get an education and generally expected us to return home, most likely did not anticipate our transformation into women they would not recognize. What was it about coming to America that gave us the strength and courage to defy our parents, go against the norms of our culture, and stand up for new ideas and ways of life that we truly believed in?

This is in essence what cross-cultural travels actually do. This immense undertaking was not simply a geographical journey in which we were relocating from one continent to another; it was also a journey from one culture to another. And there was another journey occurring simultaneously, a much more personal, becoming journey beyond visas, passports, and airline itineraries, a journey that led to a deeper

transformation. Immersing ourselves in a different culture, despite the resistance and clashes, made us different people; in the process, the relationship with our families changed, and our families changed, too. These are the sorts of transformative processes AWIS go through—we are living proof.

Contributions of My Study

Past research on Asian international students and their adjustment to campus life has noted the considerable language, academic, and social difficulties these students experience as a result of moving to a foreign country and culture (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Servaes, 2000; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Yang, Teraoka, Eichenfield, & Audas, 1994). In keeping with these past findings, nearly all of my research participants detailed typical culture-shock challenges they faced while transitioning to America. These struggles included having to navigate logistical difficulties, issues of language proficiency, and problems of loneliness, especially during the early days of their transition. Future AWIS, or perhaps even all international students, might better prepare for their days as sojourns knowing such information upfront, possibly saving them from disappointments and regret as experienced by some of the participants in this study.

Previous researchers have noted that sex differences have a role to play in the adaptation of international students (Fong & Peskin, 1969; Marville, 1981; Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1988) and especially Asian international students (Yokomizo, 2002), and my results certainly support and elaborate on this contention. The participants in my study articulated how our parents' injunctions reflected not only Asian mores about honor, but also Asian assumptions about and expectations for us as daughters.

In the past, what university personnel, researchers, and clinicians could glean about AWIS from the literature was limited to a general understanding of the challenges facing all international students. The present study provides a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of our lives, emphasizing that our familial and cultural obligations became both a source of support and a source of stress that inevitably complicated our transition experiences. Many participants in essence stated that our filial obligations were overriding factors in choices we made in our daily lives and in ways in which we experienced American culture. As a result, guilt and fear were ever present and overshadowed our experiences.

In terms of methodology, both researchers and clinicians will gain an appreciation for how a systemic focus can be maintained while interviewing individuals. Because I was unable to interview my participants' family members, I drew on my family therapy background and, instead, conducted systemic, circularity-informed conversations with the student participants. This allowed my curiosity and their answers to reflect not only the experiences of the participants themselves, but also their understanding of the experience of their families. By doing so, I brought a systemic understanding to the women's experiences, and I was able to gather information about parental involvement in their lives through the parental injunctions these young women encountered. This approach will be useful for others who are interested in bringing a systemic focus to interviewing individuals, while also allowing them to attend to the importance of family context, especially in cases like this where families play a vital role in an individual's lives.

Limitations of My Study

As with all conducted research, there were numerous limitations in the study, specifically in the areas of inquiry and methodology. For instance, the women in this study came from Asian cultures, where they were urged to limit their academic and career attainments and find suitable spouses or take care of their elderly parents. In retrospect, I see that I failed to do a thorough enough job of exploring how some families, despite being immersed in a patriarchal culture, sent their daughters to America to get an education. And in some instances, it was the fathers' support that gave my participants the extra push to make their way to the U.S. I didn't explore how these fathers differ from those who discouraged their daughters from coming to America.

Some of the women were adamant about not getting married and having children, and framed their pursuit of an American education as an explicit alternative to this cultural norm. I did not find out enough about the strengths and resources they drew on to make the choices they did, in opposition to persuasion from their parents. A few of the participants in this study came to pursue undergraduate degrees, while others came for graduate and doctoral degrees. Some were even previously employed in their home countries, so they were all at different stages in their lives. I neglected to investigate how these variations in circumstances may have influenced the participants' transitional experiences.

During the interviews, a number of the research participants commented on turning to religion to help cope with the struggles encountered as a result of living in two opposing cultures at the same time. But I did not pursue the role of religion when navigating through those struggles with those women. Additionally, I did not sufficiently

examine the changes in family dynamics brought about by the transformation these young women went through during their days as sojourns. What happened when they went back home for vacations? Did any of them notice a shift in their relationship with their families, or did it seem like they had never left home in the first place? This study brought to light the double lives of AWIS created as a result of challenging parental injunctions. But clearly the findings did not do full justice to the complexity of our doubleness, which needs further elaboration. There remains a depth of knowledge about this experience waiting to be unearthed at a later time.

The core idea of this study was to explore the struggles AWIS on a U.S. college campus contend with when making a cross-cultural transition, and so it came as no surprise to learn that these women's strong ties to their family unit and culture complicated their transition process. In fact, all of them discussed familial conflicts and cultural challenges they encountered after moving to the U.S. Ostensibly, then, it would seem to have been very helpful to hear also from the women's families. However, it would not have been possible to correct this apparent limitation. Given the nature of Asian families and the sorts of life-style choices that AWIS made after coming to this country, my involving the families in this study could have jeopardized the very relationships I was interested in studying. Thus, as a culturally sensitive family therapist and researcher, I deliberately decided not to interview family members in order to preserve confidentiality and to protect the student participants.

My autoethnographic account could have delved deeper, but I chose not to reveal every aspect of my personal life. I completely refrained from discussing the complexities of being brought up as a traditional Hindu and then going on, once in America, to defy

my parents, my culture, and my childhood religion. I did not discuss my attempts to preserve my Asian identity by not rocking the boat too much with Dilan, who believed I was becoming too American. I did not talk about living through undiagnosed depression while trying to finish my doctoral education and desperately struggling to hold onto the only intimate relationship I had known all my life.

As ways of establishing credibility of a study, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested prolonged engagement, persistent observation, progressive subjectivity, and member checking, with the latter as being the most crucial criterion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, my personal experience as an AWIS satisfied prolonged engagement and persistent observation. To ensure progressive subjectivity, I, throughout my study, remained purposefully overt about my intentions and avoided privileging my own experiences when exploring those of my research participants. I recorded my autoethnography before the interviews began and continued to reflect on and add to it throughout the study.

I also continually made it a point to member check with my participants, restating and summarizing the information they shared with me throughout the interviewing process. This gave them the opportunity to correct my understanding immediately. After the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, I emailed all my participants a copy of Chapter Four for their review and feedback, but I received a very limited response. Perhaps this could have been due to the constant member checking I did while conducting the interviews, but still, it would have been very useful to obtain detailed feedback from the participants. I also emailed them the final version of the document following my final defense, but none responded. This is a limitation of the study; below,

in the Implications section, I will discuss some of the ramifications of my participants' silence.

Implications of My Study

For Academics

Given that I was a member of the culture that I was studying, my commitment to inclusion of self extended beyond the standard recognition that I as a researcher was influencing those whom I was researching. My biases, values, and judgment were crucial to this research, but they could have also compromised my study's strengths. To address this potential limitation, initially I employed the phenomenology researchers' concept of bracketing. I wrote a memoir of my own experiences prior to data collection, intending to present it in Chapter One to provide readers with the context behind this study and to keep it from interfering with my interviews and analysis of data.

As the study evolved, I recognized, with the help of my dissertation committee, that my background and research focus warranted a level of reflexivity (Steier, 1991) that other researchers exploring this population would not necessarily need to include. I could not merely stop with bracketing; my story was much too complex. In the end, I incorporated autoethnography as a methodology, rather than simply including a memoir only as a contextualizing account. I analyzed the ethnographic data alongside the autoethnographic, deriving themes from both sets of data in a comparable manner.

Looking back now I believe it was reflexivity that kept me and my research honest (Allen, 2000). It would have been a tremendous disservice to my research participants and to the field of social science had I eliminated my voice or underplayed my experience. As things transpired, reflexivity worked in my favor. By deciding to write

and include my autoethnography, I was able to interview the participants in a way that would have been impossible for another researcher who did not share a similar background.

By virtue of my experience, I employed the technique of Ericksonian storytelling, sharing elements of my background with my participants, provided it seemed appropriate. This self-disclosure may have put these women at ease; they probably felt more comfortable knowing that I could relate to their experience and thus were perhaps more willing to disclose sensitive information. My approach helped “level the playing field”; there was no relevant distinction between the researcher and the researched. They too made comments such as “You’re Asian, you know what it’s like,” or, “You know how Asian families are.” Because of my “Asianness,” I was able to gather candid, in-depth information from my participants, information that allowed me to write and co-construct our stories together. In effect, we share authorship.

Rather than relying on only my autoethnography as data for this study, I learnt that including an ethnographic component served as a way of member checking. It gave me the opportunity to extend my voice and find out how and to what varying degrees my participants’ experiences diverged from, as well as converged with, mine. The research participants’ contributions extended my understanding beyond my understanding of myself; their voices contributed to the formation of a broader perspective. At the same time, conducting interviews while writing my autoethnography created a synergistic effect. The information I gathered from my participants stimulated my memory and created questions for me to ask myself. This led to the creation of a richer, more detailed

autoethnographic account than would have been possible had I not conducted the interviews.

Despite experiencing firsthand the benefits of conducting an auto/ethnography, I deliberated on an ongoing basis whether or not to incorporate my voice in this study. Sharing my struggles was mortifying and I was never entirely certain if I wanted to put myself “out there.” It was nerve-racking *and* comforting because thanks to the ethnographic component, I always knew that I had the option of pulling the plug on my narrative portion of the study. Recognizing that I had an escape hatch, I continued with the mixed methodology, all the while keeping my backup plan ready as a last resort.

As mentioned earlier in this Chapter and also in Chapter Three, only three participants agreed to respond the initial draft of Chapter Four (and it was not clear how much time each of them invested in actually reading the material), and none read the final version of this document. Therefore, member checking in my study was restricted to my checking with my participants during the interviews to ensure that I had understood them correctly. From Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) point of view, this is a significant limitation. However, perhaps we qualitative researchers should take a second look at a criterion that sets up an unrealistic expectation for the continued interest and involvement of participants who are themselves not academics. We need to not misrepresent the ideas and experiences of those we study, but we also need to not overtax their good will.

For Clinicians

Even though I did not seek therapeutic help at the FAU or NSU Student Counseling Centers, Dilan and I did see a therapist for a few sessions during my last stages of completing this dissertation. We believed that working with a therapist would

enable me to deal in a healthy manner with the stress of writing, which in turn would help work out the kinks in our relationship. Our therapist, Lynda, was an older, Caucasian family therapist with several years of experience. Initially, we were reassured by this.

In all honesty, I must say that even after being in the U.S. for ten years, I deliberated several times on whether or not to work with Lynda because of the shame and stigma I felt, as an Asian woman, seeing a therapist. However, my American side won. Both Dilan and I agreed that Lynda was trying very hard to learn from us about our families and culture and that she did an excellent job of taking a non-expert stance. But unfortunately, at her request, Dilan and I became her teachers, with every session feeling like a lesson on Asian cultures and families. We wanted someone with more cultural knowledge than what Lynda evidently had, and it might have been useful if we saw some signs that Lynda was familiarizing herself with Asian families and culture in between sessions, instead of expecting most of our time together to be spent illuminating her.

Given that Lynda knew that I was training as a family therapist, she recommended that I read about Bowenian self-actualization as elaborated in the book *Extraordinary Relationships* (Gilbert, 1992). She explained that completing this homework would considerably reduce our number of sessions together and allow us to reach our goal sooner. Having read the entire book as part of my doctoral training, I already knew what Lynda was talking about, but I was not looking for textbook knowledge.

For me, the Western notion of self-actualization was no easy task. It completely contradicted my Asian cultural beliefs, which revolve around interdependence, family togetherness, and priority of family well-being over self. The sessions led me to believe that either Lynda did not entirely comprehend the nature of Asian families and cultures,

or perhaps Dilan and I were not doing a good enough job of explaining to her the intricacy of our family and cultural situation. The sessions became frustrating and counterproductive; we decided to call it quits.

Granted, therapists can't be informed about all the diverse cultures in the world, and they do not have to be. But if Lynda had been more culturally sensitive, she would have recognized that there are obvious differences between Asians and Americans, the most significant one being the Asian cultural emphasis on collectivism versus the American cultural emphasis on individualism. We as Asians tend to be more family-oriented, and less self-oriented; sacrifices on behalf of the family, and efforts to maintain and enhance the welfare and integrity of the family, supersede individual needs and self-identity. Americans, in contrast, emphasize self-actualization and individual autonomy within the family. For example, in Asia, the transition into adolescence is merely considered an extension of childhood, whereas in America, it includes significant changes in roles, status, and responsibilities.

Western therapists could be inclined to believe that a Western solution to an Asian dilemma is a fairly easy fix, but unfortunately in my case, simply following an American idea of self-actualization purely in its Western form did not capture the complexity of my reality. I was, like the participants in my study, living a double life, coexisting in two cultures, so a therapeutic resolution would have needed to attend to the reality of both. Extrapolating from my experience with Lynda and from my clients' experience with me, I can offer a few suggestions for Western therapists working with AWIS.

First, clinicians should recognize and acknowledge that if a young, Asian woman is presenting for therapy, she probably deliberated over a long period of time before requesting help, and she is quite possibly experiencing a lot of guilt and fear. The decision to seek outside help is not easy, given our reluctance to disclose personal information to outsiders; admitting problems brings shame and disgrace to the family. Since Asian cultures privilege the collective, she is basically defying her familial and cultural belief systems in several ways before uttering a single word.

Second, clinicians should consider how cultural values and assumptions such as family structure, family loyalty, respect for elders, and a collectivist worldview impact the academic and personal experiences of AWIS. This will help them recognize that simply abandoning Asian values, stepping out of prescribed roles, and embracing American culture is not the solution. Therapists must be willing to appreciate the complexity of the challenges these women face so as to avoid stepping on these women's cultural toes. Failing to do so will result in culturally incompetent therapy.

Third, clinicians should not abandon their Western therapeutic training and their knowledge of how families work. They do have something important to offer AWIS, and they will succeed in doing so if they find a way to introduce it with patience and sensitivity. Lynda's message to me was important and correct—I did indeed need to differentiate myself somewhat from my family. She just needed to find a way for me to hear and accept this possibility in a way that didn't threaten my identity.

Concluding Thoughts - A New Beginning

A few years back, my parents had no idea about my double life in the U.S. or the choices I had made. But, as a result of writing this document, I knew my parents' finding

out about it all was inevitable. The irony of my keeping it a secret was outrageous, given the very topic of my dissertation. Nevertheless, at that point, I had not decided on when or how I was going to handle disclosing that kind of information to them. As many say, acculturation is an ongoing process (Coll & Pachter, 2002; Hutchinson, 2003; Naylor, 1996), and so was mine. But my defense was nearing and it had to be soon.

Writing my autoethnography complexified my experience with acculturation to the point where I felt as though I was being pulled in opposite directions. My Asian side was compelling me to provide my parents with a separate “sanitized version” of the document, in which I would carefully eliminate all content about my double life in the U.S., while my American side was pushing me to acknowledge that we were all adults and to come clean with them. Right smack in the middle, my Asian-American self was deliberating on perhaps coming clean with my parents about my relationship with Dilan without somehow revealing to them certain elements, such as the fact that we had been together since 2000 and living together since 2001; I did not want to add more stress to an already sensitive ordeal.

In the end, my acculturated American side won. But the dilemma on how to handle this situation—the constant going back and forth on what to do—came with a price. Since the very beginning of our relationship, Dilan and I had dreams of owning a home together, and then proceeding to marriage and children. One of those dreams came true; we bought that home and lived together in it for 25 months. We decided to put marriage and children on hold until I finished my studies, so I was determined to finish this dissertation as quickly and as sanely possible, get a job, get married, and move onto the next stage in our lives. But rarely does life go along as planned.

Dilan urged me repeatedly to “grow up” and tell my parents about our relationship. He wanted me to stop keeping it a secret. But I couldn’t. Guilt and respect for my parents, combined with the fear that, if they were to find out about my double life, I would be on the next flight back home, kept me frozen. This impasse continued for a very long time and eventually put considerable tension into our relationship. Yet even after I came clean, our relationship continued to be shaky, despite our both hoping that everything would fall into place once I finished school and got a job. Oddly enough, the closer I got to defending this dissertation, the more things really started to go downhill between us. Perhaps the cultural clashes within me were also playing out between us. We felt mixed up, conflicted, and unhappy. We broke up.

When I started this dissertation, I was extremely excited to be studying and writing about the culture of my own group and the way of life of women like me. I embarked on this journey hoping to bring forth the voices of Asian women international students (AWIS) on U.S. college campuses. Being a part of this population was an added incentive, as I already had insider information. Therefore, it made all the more sense to begin by recording my personal experience. So in my autoethnography, I began narrating my story from when I was an 18-year-old with my life in the U.S. about to begin, my role as an international student just beginning, and my relationship with Dilan having just begun. By the time I was 28, about to defend my dissertation, I reflected on the fact that my life in the U.S. was about to possibly end, my role as an international student was ending, and my relationship with Dilan had just ended. Everything about my life as I had known it for the previous ten years was ending all at once.

There was an oddly familiar sense of déjà vu about the emotions I was feeling. I flashed back ten years to the late December wintry morning when Priya and I made our way to Sacramento International Airport; she headed to Austin to visit her fiancé, now my brother-in-law, and I headed to Fort Lauderdale to get ready for my first semester at FAU. The feelings of how my excitement turned into confusion and then into anguish remained freshly imprinted in my mind as though it happened only yesterday. For me, Priya represented all things familial and culturally familiar; leaving her meant leaving behind my life as I had known it. I was going into the unknown, but realizing that Dilan would be there on the other side of the jetway helped ease the pain.

Once again I found myself going into the unknown, leaving behind all things that had become culturally familiar to me during my stay in the U.S. Except this time around, wherever I was headed, I was headed alone. Dilan was not going to be there on the other side of the jetway; our story did not have the “happily ever after” fairytale ending. Initially, I titled this section of the document “Final Thoughts,” but then I realized, Well, not really. My dissertation and I are both organic and living. We have been through so many transformations and we are still evolving. So by no means is this just an ending; it is also a new beginning, in more ways than one (More doubleness in my life!)

It is now several months since my defense, and I am finishing up my revisions. Even though I’m almost done, I have been contemplating a Chapter Six for this document, because I cannot decide how to end a story that has no end. How does one conclude an autoethnography? Even now I am being self-reflective, even now I am constructing my identity. My document and I are constantly transforming, and that will continue until the last period is put in place; and until I place that last period, what I

continue to write will change me. To mark an end for my story, I need to bring it up to the present moment.

Dylan and I, after being apart for a year, have decided that we want to be together for the next phase in our life. And as I write this, I am realizing that Lynda was right all along. What ended up occurring was what she suggested needed to happen, although it did not happen in the way she intended. I was able to have a conversation with my parents about information that I thought they would disapprove of, and my position in my own being and in my family is different as a function of what I have gone through. This has a flavor of Bowenian self-actualization, but an ironic Asian version of it: I'm not sure I could have done it without my family's help.

Before I end, I must include a word of caution for my fellow researchers, based on what happened to me: There is no question about it, writing an auto/ethnography is so painful, it can break your heart. As I discovered, you meet, head-on, things about yourself that are less than flattering, and this kind of exploration "generates a lot of fears, self-doubts, and, not to forget, emotional pain" (Ellis, 1999, p. 672). You are revealing yourself as a human being and placing your life as well as your work for critique and scrutiny; you also have to be extremely careful on how you implicate others in your story (Ellis). You can't take back what you have written and interpretation of your work is in the hands of your reader (Ellis). Still, if I had to do it all over again, I would not change a thing about this study.

Why? Because writing my story evoked strong emotional responses in me that allowed me to understand myself and consequently my participants in deeper ways. Throughout the study, I continued to explore my experience alongside the experiences of

my participants. I recognized how culture-bound my story was, which in turn allowed me to appreciate the cultural constraints binding my participants' lives. By delving deeper into my struggles, I became sensitized to the struggles of my participants. My study grew much stronger because I chose to turn my curiosity on to my own experience rather than take the easy way out and exclude my voice.

Having experienced this process of evocative, heart-felt writing, I have been transformed as a researcher, a therapist, and most importantly as a human being. I wish a similar transformation for my readers. Ultimately, I hope that I have been true to the purpose of auto/ethnography, which is to tell the story for all to "benefit from thinking about their own lives in terms of other people's experiences" (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 18).

I knew since the very beginning that by incorporating my autoethnography I was risking exposure to my colleagues, subjecting myself to judgment, and relinquishing my sense of control over my narrative. But ironically, in exchange for being vulnerable, I became stronger. I gave up my sense of control, but I claimed a new sense of empowerment. At the end of it all, it really is worth the pain, the regrets, and the heartbreaks. Because an auto/ethnography is a gift; it is a gift to yourself, your participants, and your readers.

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Appendix A

Letter of Introduction

July 2, 2009

Dear _____,

I am currently a doctoral student in the Family Therapy program at Nova Southeastern University conducting research in the area of acculturation and related issues. My dissertation is titled "Women in Transition: Experiences of Asian Women International Students on U.S. College Campuses". The purpose of this research is to explore the unique circumstances of Asian women international students who are in the U.S for the first time and particularly the acculturation challenges they face upon and after arrival. I am hoping that you or someone you know will agree to participate in the study.

The research data will be collected from interviews with women like yourself who are over the age of 18 years. Time involvement will include one interview that should take a minimum of an hour to an hour and a half and will be scheduled in a mutually agreed upon location. Your participation in this study will provide information to others in academia, particularly to professionals in student affairs and, more specifically, student counseling centers. Additionally, this study may reveal data that could help future Asian women international students, family therapists, and other helping professions.

Enclosed is a consent form that explains confidentiality and anonymity. If you have any questions or decide to participate in my research study, please contact me as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Siva Jeyabalasingam
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 592-1329

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: OCT 13 2009
Continuing Review Date: OCT 12 2010

**Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled
Women in Transition: Experiences of Asian Female International Students on U.S.
College Campuses.**

Funding Source: None.

IRB approval # 09180910Exp.

Principal investigator
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Nova Southeastern University
Graduate School of Humanities
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3301 College Avenue
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What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to explore the experiences of Asian Female International Students, both current and former, while in the U.S. and the acculturation challenges they face upon and after arrival.

Why are you asking me?

You are invited to participate because you are or were an Asian female older than 18 years of age who formerly was or currently is an international college student in the U.S. and was or is experiencing acculturation challenges upon and after arrival.

Initials: _____ Date: _____

Page 1 of 4

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

You will partake in an interview, which will last for a total of approximately one to 1.5 hours and will focus on your acculturation experience after arriving in the U.S. You can stop the interview at anytime if you need to do so. A follow-up interview lasting between 1 to 1.5 hours may also be conducted with your permission.


For telephone interviews, the Principal Investigator will call you at the scheduled time of the interview in order to protect your confidentiality and to eliminate costs. As mentioned above, the interview will last for a total of approximately 1 to 1.5 hours and will focus on your acculturation experience after arriving in the U.S. You can stop the interview at anytime if you need to do so. A follow-up telephone interview lasting between 1 to 1.5 hours may also be conducted with your permission. Again, the Principal Investigator will call you at the scheduled time of the follow-up interview in order to protect your confidentiality and to eliminate costs.

As a final step, you will have the opportunity to modify, delete, and add to my findings about your experience. I will be mailing the transcribed interview to you in a plain envelope via certified mail. You will be asked to review the interview transcripts giving you the opportunity to make alterations. If you request any alterations, you may do so by making notes in the transcripts themselves or by typing your suggestions in a Word document. The packet will also include a return self addressed envelope with prepaid postage for your convenience. Your suggestions will be honored and the final draft of the dissertation will reflect the changes.

Once the data have been analyzed and categories and exemplars established, I will mail a copy of the de-identified results to you in a plain envelope via certified mail. You will be asked to review the findings and comment on or make suggestions for any necessary changes. If you request any alterations, you may do so by making notes in the document itself or by typing them in a Word document. The packet will also include a return self addressed envelope with prepaid postage for your convenience. Once again, your suggestions will be honored and the final draft of the dissertation will reflect the changes.

Initials: _____ **Date:** _____

Page 2 of 4


NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: OCT 13 2009
Continuing Review Date: OCT 12 2010

Is there any audio recording?

Yes, the interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder and the recordings will be transferred to the Principal Investigator's personal computer which will be stored securely in a locked cabinet in her home office for the duration of the study. Both the interview files and the laptop computer will be password protected and the passwords will be known only to the Principal Investigator. The interviews will be available to be heard by the Principal Investigator, personnel from the university's human research oversight board (The Institutional Review Board, IRB), and the dissertation chair, Dr. Douglas Flemons, Ph.D. The interviews will be transcribed by the Principal Investigator who will use earphones while transcribing to protect your privacy. The interviews and documentation pertaining to this study will be kept for 3 years from the end of the study and then deleted from the laptop at that time. Since your voice will be potentially known by anyone who hears the interviews, the confidentiality for things you say during the interview cannot be promised, although the Principal Investigator will limit access to the interviews and laptop computer as discussed in this paragraph. Additionally, your confidentiality will be protected with the use of pseudonyms throughout the study and in the final text, with the exception of this consent form.

What are the dangers to me?

In this study, risks to you are minimal. You will be given the opportunity to take breaks during the interview if needed. You can also withdraw from the study at anytime.

If you have any concerns about the risks of participating in this study, you can contact the Principal Investigator or the university's human research oversight board (the Institutional Review Board) at the numbers indicated above.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating; however you may find it useful to talk about your experience.


If you have any concerns about the risks or benefits of participating in this study, you can reach the Principal Investigator or the IRB at the numbers indicated above.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

You will not receive payments for participating in this study. You will have to pay for gas and transportation to the interview. If we are conducting a telephone interview, the Principal Investigator will call you in order to eliminate costs of the phone call to you.

Initials: _____ Date: _____

Page 3 of 4


NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: OCT 13 2009
Continuing Review Date: OCT 12 2010

How will you keep my information private?

Maintaining participants' confidentiality is highly important to this study. Therefore, I will not use your name and I will not use any identifying information linking you to this study. Only pseudonyms (made up names) will be used to protect your identity throughout the study with the exception of the consent form. As mentioned, the saved interviews along with any documents will be destroyed 36 months after the study ends.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In the unlikely situation that you disclose information that I or my co-investigator are mandated to report (suspected abuse or neglect of children, elders, or disabled persons; or imminent danger of harm to self or others), then one or both of us will be required to report the situation to the appropriate authorities. The signed consent forms will be kept separately from the recorded interviews in a locked cabinet. The university's human research oversight board (Institutional Review Board or IRB) and regulatory agencies may review the research records.

In the unlikely situation that you disclose illegal activity, then the Principal Investigator will have to report the situation to the proper authorities.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any point. If you do decide to leave, or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty. If you decide to leave the study, your data will be retained for 36 months after the end of the study. If you choose not to have your information included in the study you must inform the Principal Investigator immediately.

Other Considerations:

If the Principal Investigators learns anything which might change your mind about being involved, you will be told of this information.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

I have read the preceding consent form, or it has been read to me, and I fully understand the contents of this document and voluntarily consent to participate in the research study entitled "Women in Transition: Experiences of Asian Female International Students on U.S. College Campuses." All of my questions concerning the research have been answered. I hereby agree to participate in this research study. If I have any questions in the future about this study they will be answered by Ms. Siva Jeya. A copy of this form has been given to me. This consent ends at the conclusion of this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Person Securing Consent: _____ Date: _____