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ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION: A DYADIC EXPERIENCE

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ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION:

A DYADIC EXPERIENCE

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the

College of Communication and Information

at the University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

2018

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION:
A DYADIC EXPERIENCE

Institutions of higher education in the United States have long been attractors for international students from all over the world. The number of international students had been constantly growing until the past couple of years. This is a concerning issue because international students play several important roles in higher education institutions. International students bring different points of view that enhance other students' learning and institutions gain financial benefits from the presence of international students. Thus, it is important to understand how to improve the experience of international students. For the present study I used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of international students and their spouses.

Participants in this study included 16.5 dyads from 12 different countries. The sample included both graduate international students and their spouses for various reasons. When studying acculturation, studies have traditionally focused on undergraduate students. The needs and experiences of undergraduate students are different from graduate students because they are usually in a different stage of life. It is also true that graduate students often relocate with their dependents, unlike undergraduate students, and therefore they have different challenges and responsibilities. It is important to include spouses because they are often an invisible population. Dependents have critical limitations such as the prohibition to work or study.

This study was conducted through the lens of biographical disruption and participants' accounts were analyzed to better understand the added communication work that they must manage. The findings showed that there was a relationship between acculturation categories and the amount and type of acculturation work. Finally, the study shows how international students

and their dependents reconstruct their biographies by molding their identities. This study should be used to create new policies and services for international students and their dependents.

Ana X. de la Serna Góngora

June 26, 2018

ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION:

A DYADIC EXPERIENCE

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To all who said it was alright to quit

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Universities and colleges across the United States have traditionally been hosts for international students from every country in the world. However, the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2017) found that the number of newly enrolling international student in the U.S. has declined for the first time. There were 3.3% fewer nternational students in the U.S. in the 2016-2017 academic year compared to the previous year. This is a concerning issue because international students play several important roles in higher education institutions. International students bring different points of view that enhance other students' learning. All students benefit from the diversity of thought and life experiences in the course of their time in a higher learning institution.

For universities, having international students also brings financial benefits. International students' primary source of funding (60.3%) comes from their personal and family's funds (IIE, 2017). This contrasts with the 15% of funding that a U.S. college or university might invest (IIE, 2017), or even the 0.6% that the U.S. government invests on international students. Thus, having international students is beneficial on different levels and their decreasing numbers should be addressed by colleges and universities.

Institutions must now begin to find new ways to attract and retain students from other countries. One of the possible ways to achieve this goal is to improve students' conditions including health, emotional, social, and any others that may impact their academic performance and quality of life. To have fewer sources of acculturative stress will allow international students to focus more on their academic roles, and to contribute

more to their institutions as well as to have more fulfilling experiences in the United

States. A first step is for institutions to recognize that "the reality of being a foreigner

makes living difficult in a strange land when a person has to make a number of personal,

social, and environmental changes upon arrival" (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994, p. 437).

Cross-cultural psychologists have found that there are important links between cultural

context and individual behavioral development (Berry, 1997). Individuals who have

developed in one cultural context and then relocate to a new cultural context undergo an

important life event. As a life event, acculturation can be compared to having children,

the death of a loved one, marriage, or being diagnosed with a chronic illness.

Being a graduate student can be an important life event for anyone, it is a time of

increased demands, expectations, and stress (Toews, Lockyer, Dobson, & Brownell,

1993). It is a time of increased risk of physical and psychological health problems

(Nelson, Dell'Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, 2001). There are higher expectations and

academic demands for graduate students, they must establish themselves within their

chosen field of study, they must manage relationships with peers and mentors, and often

they must combine their own academic enhancement with teaching undergraduate

courses or helping in labs or grading. For many graduate students, their academic life

must be combined with their family life including spousal relationships and parenting.

This can all be aggravated for students coming to the U.S. from another country.

International students in general have been found to encounter similar difficulties:

Language barriers are often mentioned even by students whose first language is also

English (Yeh & Inose, 2003), as well as racial discrimination, loss of social support,

alienation, and homesickness (Hsu, 2003). For international graduate students in

particular, time management becomes one of the most important resources. They must allocate enough time to all activities and relationships in order to be successful both academically and personally. Often, international students do not travel alone. An international student may be accompanied to the U.S. by his or her dependents at any time. There are currently over 155,000 dependents accompanying international students in the U.S. (SEVP, 2016). If international students' spouses have a difficult time acculturating, they will need more time from the student. Thus, it is important that spouses have a successful acculturation experience in order for the student to be able to focus on their studies as much as they need to. The wellbeing of spouses will also result in an indirect benefit for the sponsoring college or university. Universities that are centered on the academic needs of graduate international students will often ignore important factors in their potential academic and personal success or failure (Hanasaab & Tidwell, 2002).

We must note that not all sources of stress can be addressed by colleges and universities, there are other institutions that directly influence international students' wellbeing, such as the government agencies regulating visas and immigration status. There are various types of visa that international students may hold in order to access higher education in the U.S., each with its own set of rules and regulations. The type of visa the student holds will also determine the type of visa their spouse will have, which also has its own set of rules and regulations. Often, dependents are not allowed to work or study, giving them few options for the activities they may perform, especially compared to the activities they could perform in their original countries.

The experience of transitioning to a different culture is not the same for everyone. Even within the family unit, individual's experience can vary greatly. In this study acculturation is considered a turning point for several reasons. As an individual is introduced into a new culture, their core beliefs may be challenged. The more difference there is between original and host culture, the more sojourners will see their beliefs challenged. At the group level, individuals will see variations in customs, religious practices, government, healthcare, diet, etc. For example, a person who has grown up in a culture that emphasizes differences in gender roles, will have to accommodate his or her behavior to that of the host culture. In the United States, men and women have fewer differences than many Latin American or Arabic countries. At the individual level, acculturation will be influenced by each person's willingness to adapt to the new culture and give up their original culture, as Berry (1997) describes in the acculturation model.

The experiences of international students' accompanying family members have not been widely studied (De Verthelyi, 1995). However, it is possible that non-student dependents experience a greater amount of acculturative stress compared to international students for various reasons. Accompanying spouses and family members often lack personal fulfillment goals in the new environment. Non-student spouses are often limited by reduced language skills, scarce social support, and restricted activities due to immigration regulations. Host universities provide support services for international students; however, the same resources are not available for their accompanying family members. Resources such as counseling, social events, crisis support centers, and access to sporting and academic are often limited only to enrolled students.

Chapter two: Literature Review

International Students and Their Dependents

International students enter the United States on F-1, M-1, or J-1 visas. F-1 non-immigrant student visas are conferred to people who are pursuing a full program of study in a college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, private elementary school, or other academic or language training program in the U.S. (SEVP, 2016). M-1 non-immigrant student visas are conferred to foreign nationals who pursue a full program of study in a recognized non-academic school (SEVP, 2016). J-1 exchange visitor visas are designated for foreign nationals selected by a Department of State-designated program to participate in an exchange visitor program (SEVP, 2016).

Much research about international students has been conducted with unmarried undergraduate students only (Lee & Rice, 2007; Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, & Lu, 2011; Rajapaksa & Dunces, 2003; Smith & Khawaja, 2011); however, the current study seeks to expand on this literature by including the often overlooked (and fairly common) context of graduate international students with accompanying spouses. Currently, little research (of exception is the somewhat dated work by De Verthelyi, 1995; and the more current works by Sakamoto, 2006, and Myers-Walls et al., 2011) examines the unique context and particular struggles experienced by international married students – both in terms of the student's experience him or herself, and the experience of their spouse adapting to a new country and culture, and the inherent conflicts that can result within the marriage as both partners seek to adjust to their new environment. International students

experience diverse barriers in their process of adapting to a new culture (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Barriers include language, academic difficulties, financial difficulties, interpersonal problems with American students, racial/ethnic discrimination, loss of social support, alienation, and homesickness (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Many of these same barriers are arguably also experienced by the accompanying spouses of married international students, but their voices are yet to be heard.

De Verthelyi (1995) notes that international students' spouses are a population that has been neglected in the cross-cultural literature. Myers-Walls, Farias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu (2011) noted that at the time, more than one-fifth of the international graduate student population in the U.S. was married. De Verthelyi (1995) explains that often, dependents are not expected to fulfill any specific task or achieve any meaningful goal during their stay in the U.S. There are different restrictions for dependents on different types of visas. As of May, 2015, F-2 spouses may study part-time, however they may not accept employment or engage in business under any circumstance. J-2 dependents are eligible for full or part-time employment after receiving authorization from USCIS. Often, however, the limitations come from cultural expectations rather than legal restrictions.

Many of the dependent participants in De Verthelyi's study disclosed struggles due to language difficulties, loss of control, powerlessness, relational distress, lack of social support, financial hardship, homesickness, and loneliness. These themes hold some similarities with the major recurring themes identified by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) in the creation of the international student acculturative stress scale. Although intended for international students, and not their families, homesickness, communication problems, culture shock, and social isolation are noted as sources of acculturative stress. Myers-

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Walls and her colleagues (2011) also identify language difficulty, feelings of isolation, financial and marital stress, as well as loss of roles and status within the Asian students and their families.

The process of acculturation in families is different from the process of individuals (Sakamoto, 2006). Within a family group, individuals take on different roles. Sakamoto (2006) found that there is a large influence of gender roles involved in the process of migration and acculturation. In his study, Sakamoto encountered that female spouses' decisions were largely influenced by their male partners' decisions. Males' decisions, however were mostly influenced by their own goals.

Acculturation

The Social Science Research Council (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1963) first defined acculturation as the "phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (p. 149). During the 1980's acculturation was thought of in relationship to the concept of "The Melting Pot", where people would ideally share a language, identity, and set of values (Berry, 1980). A closer study of acculturation, however led to a more complex understanding of acculturation and its multiple dimensions (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). More recently, Berry (2008) defined acculturation as "the process of cultural, and psychological change that involves learning to live in new social and cultural contexts after one has become socialized into an earlier one" (p. 50). Much of the work about acculturation refers to how cultural groups relate to each other and change when they attempt to merge as culturally plural societies (Berry, 2006). According to Sam and Berry (2010) the two

most common findings of acculturation research at the individual level are that there are large variations in how people acculturate and in how well they adapt to this process. According to Berry (2006) we can study acculturation both at the individual and at the group level. At the individual level we may consider the changes that individuals undergo, as well as their acculturation strategies. The way that individuals utilize the different strategies may be more or less problematic, resulting in acculturative stress characterized by uncertainty, anxiety, or depression (Berry, 1976).

Acculturation and Wellbeing

Mental health is not only the absence of illness. Mental health is vital for our wellbeing. The World Health Organization (2007) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community". Mental health issues may affect anyone regardless of their age, gender, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. Common mental health conditions include: stress, depression, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorder, and eating disorder.

The American Psychiatric Association (2017) defines mental illnesses as health conditions involving significant changes in thinking, emotion, or behavior (or a combination of these) involving distress and/or problems functioning in social, work, or family activities. The number of people with mental illness or mental health problems such as depression or anxiety is increasing (WHO, 2016). In 1990 there were an estimated 416 million people in the world experiencing depression or anxiety, and in 2013 the number had grown to 615 million (WHO, 2016). Individuals will fall into the

continuum of experiencing mild, moderate, or severe mental health problems. The causes

for mental health problems are diverse and they may be related to socio-economic,

biological, and /or ecological factors. An individual's life may be affected in many areas

leading up to a moment when they cannot function and in extreme cases it may lead to

suicide. There are some groups of individuals that are more vulnerable than others given

the added stressors of their particular contexts. One such group is that of migrants.

All individuals cope with stress throughout their lives. Individuals who are going

through an acculturation process, experience a particular type of stress that results from

this process and is known as acculturative stress. Originally, acculturative stress was

proposed as a group-level phenomenon, however it is now conceptualized as an

individual-level phenomenon (Berry & Kim, 1987). According to Poyrazli, Kavanaugh,

Baker, and Al-Timimi (2004) "Acculturative stress is a marked deterioration of the

general health status of an individual, it encompasses physiological, psychological, and

social aspects that are explicitly linked to the acculturation process" (p. 73). Over the

course of their stay in the United States, most international students go through

adjustment issues that include acculturative stress (Poyrazli et al., 2004). International

students need to adapt to the new culture as well as the new educational and social

environment. The major problems encountered by international students include language

barriers to academic performance as well as to daily living, difficulties with the new

American educational system, social relationships due to different cultures and social

norms, their sense of identity, and financial concerns (Lee, Koeske & Sales, 2004).

Acculturative stress of international students has been studied both as an outcome

and as a contributing factor to barriers experienced by international students. Lee,

Koeske, and Sales (2004) reported that acculturative stress of international students was strongly correlated with mental health symptoms. Acculturative stress can range in severity. Individuals who are better equipped to deal with it may experience milder forms of acculturative stress than those who are more resistant to change. Individuals who are forced to emigrate, such as refugees, suffer more severe forms of acculturative stress. Berry and Kim (1988) note, however, that student sojourners can suffer from acculturative stress in a degree similar to that of refugees. International students present intrapersonal and interpersonal difficulties, as well as difficulties with language, the educational system, and finances (Mori, 2000). Acculturative stress often presents along with emotional pain (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Emotional pain may be expressed as feelings of powerlessness, marginality, inferiority, loneliness, and perceived alienation and discrimination (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Acculturation and communication

Communication has long been considered as an integral part of culture, and thus of acculturation (Kim, 1980). **"**Communication, as a vehicle of social integration, is a major determinant of the acculturation level a foreign immigrant achieves" (Kim, 1980 p. 176). It is through communication that individuals learn what the norms, behaviors, and values are in a given cultural community. However, Kim (1980) noted that although communication played such an integral part in acculturation, there were few studies that attempted to explain the phenomenon of acculturation stemming from the field of communication (Kim, 1977). Since then, communication scholars have increasingly investigated the acculturation phenomenon (Hwang & He, 1999; Marfani, & Rimal, 2013; Pawanteh, 2000; Roberts, 2006; Zaharopoulos, 1991).

Intercultural communication scholars have often focused on enculturation, deculturation, and acculturation, as well as identity processes of migrants and sojourners. Acculturation in particular, is a topic that has gained a lot of attention. For example, Semaan (2015) examined various factors that influence the cultural identity of individuals of Arab ancestry residing in the U.S. The results of this study showed among other things that immigration generation and sojourner status affected acculturation modes. In this study, Semaan (2015) argues that those who were born in the host culture were more likely to fall under the acculturation mode of assimilation than integration or isolation as defined by Berry. In a different study, Ngwira and colleagues (2015) investigated the intercultural communication competence and acculturation process of international students in Chinese universities. They found that the most used acculturation strategy was integration.

The current study seeks to expand on this foundational work by including the unique context and experiences of married international students and their accompanying spouses as they navigate their acculturation and shape their identities – both as individuals and as a married couple – to fit their new home and environment. This study will contribute to the scholarship on intercultural communication by highlighting the particular challenges of individuals within the same married dyad through the lens of biographical disruption and communication work.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study is comprised of two theoretical concepts and their relationship with acculturation. The first comes from Bury's (1982) biographical disruption theory. Although biographical disruption has been mostly applied in the

context of chronic illness, it bears similarity with the context of acculturation and may be applied in this new context. The second, is the concept of communication work described by Donovan-Kicken et al. (2012). Communication work, like biographical disruption, has been applied in the context of chronic illness. Through the present study I look at the kind of communication work engaged by acculturating international graduate students and their spouses. Finally, I differentiate the experience of the biographical disruption and communication work of individuals belonging to different acculturation categories as defined by Berry (1989).

Inspired by Strauss and Glasser's work, Bury (1982) proposed the idea that we can learn from everyday situations in routine settings, by analyzing moments in which those settings are radically disturbed (Bury, 1982). Bury (1982) suggests that chronic illness as an event interrupts "structures of everyday life and the forms of knowledge which underpin them" (p. 169). When such an event occurs, an individual's biography, self-concept, and envisaged future-self become disrupted. Based on these ideas, scholars have been applying biographical disruption theory mainly in the context of chronic illness (Roberts & Clarke, 2009; Bell, Tyrell & Phoenix, 2016; Hannum & Rubinstein, 2016; Iannarino, Scott, & Shaunfeld, 2017). Through the present study, I argue that like the onset of an illness, relocation into a new culture also represents a biographical disruption.

The process of transition between one culture to another, often represents a major disruptive experience for international students and their dependents. Context has been associated with identity through the concepts of social identity, intergroup relations, and social representations. As immigrants and sojourners relocate, their identities change as well (Tajfel, 1981). Individuals develop their identities since childhood through a fluid

and dynamic process (Erikson, 1980). As they form their identities, individuals will place more or less importance on certain identities.

Culture shapes individuals' understanding of the world in different levels. Cannadine (2013) states that there are six cultural regulators of human life and identity: religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, race, and civilization. Therefore, given that identity is inherently linked to culture (Cote, 2006), a shift in context will result in a sudden impact on identity. The impact of relocation to a new country can be compared to the impact caused by chronic and severe illness, as it also "separates the person of the present to the person of the past, and affects or even shatters any images of the self held for the future" (Corbin & Strauss, 1987, p. 249). By moving to a new country, international students and their spouses may see their previous identity regulators challenged and must decide whether they will modify them or not, and to what degree.

RQ1. How does relocation to a new culture represent a biographical disruption?

As international students and their dependents begin their decision-making on whether to adopt or reject the diverse aspects of the new culture, they engage in the cognitive process of biographical work (Bury, 1982) as well as the process of communication work (Donovan-Kicken et al., 2012) in order to achieve their desired acculturation state. Corbin and Strauss (1987) proposed the theory of illness trajectories with the central concept of *work*. Like biographical disruption (Bury, 1982) the theory of illness trajectories was centered on illness as the disrupting element. However, the insertion into a new culture shares various qualities with an illness trajectory. Corbin and

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Strauss (1987) found that couples coping with chronic illness had to manage numerous complicated tasks in order to live their lives while dealing with the added stressors of the illness. International students and their spouses must also deal with complicated tasks associated with their acculturation experience.

The concept of work in this context refers to the way individuals manage various tasks that differ from the responsibilities domestic students and spouses must manage (Corbin & Strauss, 1987). Work entails a set of tasks that must be carried out consecutively or simultaneously, the assignment of tasks to oneself or to others, the coordination of duties and resources, the division of labor, the expectation of perceived benefits, and management over time of changing trajectories (Donovan-Kicken et al., 2012). The description of work was conceived with the trajectories of illness in mind. Work, however, can also be used in the context of acculturation.

Donovan-Kicken et al. (2012) extended illness trajectories theory by developing the concept of communication work. In this study I will treat communication work in the context of acculturation.

RQ2. What is the experience of a) international students and b) their spouses with communication work in the context of acculturation?

The acculturation experience influences the way sojourners and immigrants re-shape their identity. The process of restructuration of identity can also be understood as narrative reconstruction. Williams (1984) refers to narrative reconstruction as the process that follows a biographical disruption. As individuals go through an unusual or disturbing experience (in this case the introduction to the new culture) their narrative has to be

reconstructed in order for them to understand their identity in reference of the new and the previous contexts. Narrative reconstruction provides a way to reaffirm self-concept and purpose. The decisions of whether to keep or reject aspects of their previous culture will result in the narrative reconstruction of their identity. Thus, sojourners and immigrants work to establish their changed identity, and ideas of self and society, reconstructing the past so that it has meaning and purpose for the present (Sanderson et al., 2011).

In this study I contend that sojourn and immigration as an insertion into a new culture are a biographical disruption which presents different challenges for different individuals. It is important to highlight that even within a family unit, individuals may respond differently to the process of acculturation (Berry, 1997). Navas et al. (2005) posit that within each group of immigrants there are different dispositions related to different psychosocial indicators, which influence acculturation strategies. In this regard, Berry (1989) was the first to state that acculturation results from the degree to which immigrants identify with the new culture and the degree to which they maintain their original culture. Using the two dimensions (maintain cultural heritage/identify with the host culture), Berry (1989) designed a 2x2 model that resulted in four possible acculturation attitudes. Crossing the two dimensions can result in: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1989).

	Maintenance of heritage culture	
High		
Cultural adaptation (relationship sought among groups)	Assimilation	Integration
	Marginalization	Separation
Low		

Figure 1 Berry's (1989) acculturation model

According to Berry's (1989) acculturation model, when a person rejects their original culture and blends in as much as possible with the host culture, they are in the assimilation category. The concept is similar to the idea of the *melting pot.* Very often, international students and their dependents leave their home country to seek better opportunities for themselves and for their children. With the understanding that the U.S. has a better quality of life, immigrants and sojourners may often fall within the assimilation category

Unlike assimilation, the separation category results when an individual rejects the host culture and maintains their ethnic identity and traditions, they are situated in the separation category (Berry, 1989). For international students it is difficult to reject the host culture because they are immersed in an academic setting. For international students to be successful in the completion of their degree, they must adopt many of the beliefs and behaviors of the new culture. If a student rejects the host culture they will have a higher degree of dissonance and acculturative stress. International students are required to follow certain social norms as much as domestic students. Students must also be able to

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correctly interact with peers, advisors, faculty, and university staff. A student who completely rejects the host culture would find great difficulty in achieving their academic goal. For dependents the situation is different. Dependents are not expected or obliged to interact with others from the host culture. In fact, dependents have more difficulty socializing. With the restrictions on work and study, dependents are often confined to roles within the home with little opportunity to interact with others outside their family unit. For dependents with strong ties to their home culture it is easier to be in the separation category.

If the separation and the assimilation categories imply the rejection of one culture, the integration category differs as it represents a balance between both cultures. Integration refers to the maintenance of the home country culture, and some adoption of the dominant group's culture (Berry, 1997). The integration category is the most balanced of the four acculturation categories. However, it is not exempt from creating some degree of dissonance. As immigrants and sojourners make choices between previously learned behaviors and ideals and new ones, they must evaluate the implications of such shifts.

The last category, marginalization, is the most unlikely. (Del Pilar & Udasco, 2004). An individual would have to reject both the host and the home culture to be considered within the marginalization category. "The likelihood that a person would develop a cultural sense of self without drawing on either the heritage or receiving cultural contexts is very low" (Shwartz et al., 2010, p. 240). Previous studies that have applied Berry's (1989) model have found none or small marginalization groups (Shwartz & Zamboaga, 2008; Szapoczink et al., 1980).

RQ3. What is the relationship of communication work of a) international students and b) their spouses and their acculturation category?

The study of sojourn and immigration as a biographical disruption, and the resulting communication work of acculturating international students and their dependents is necessary in order to better understand their needs and challenges. Examining how individuals in different acculturation categories structure and make sense of their experience can enable researchers to better understand this particular population's communication. Institutions can benefit from this study in order to make decisions about policy, interventions, and programs for their students and their families.

Identity

It is of outmost importance to reference identity when using biographical disruption and communication work to understand a phenomenon. A biographical disruption shatters individuals' self-perceptions and their identities are challenged; thus, they must decide how they will adapt. With their insertion into a new culture as a disruption, individuals will engage in narrative reconstruction in order to establish their new identity. Identity is a construct that has been widely studied in the social sciences (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Cote, 2006; Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). The interest on this construct may surge from its influence on individuals' life paths and decisions (Kroger, 2007). Identity is often used to describe many things: Internal meaning systems, group membership, nationalism, as well as positions taken in conversations (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). In the present study identity is conceptualized as the responses to the question: "Who are you?" as proposed by Vignoles, Schwartz, and Luyckx (2011). Although the question might seem rather simple, the possible answers

create a very complex construct containing diverse but related contents and processes. A person may answer the question of who they are by thinking about themselves as an individual, a couple, a small group or a larger societal role. Individual or personal identity refers to aspects of self-definition at the level of the individual person (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). These may include, goals, values, beliefs, standards for behavior, and decision making (Atkins, Hart, & Donnelly, 2005). Relational identity refers to a person's roles related to other individuals. A person might define him or herself as a parent, a spouse, a sibling, or a co-worker (Swann, 2005). Collective identity, also known as cultural identity, refers to peoples' identification with the larger groups or social categories to which they belong, the meanings they give to these groups, and the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that result from identifying with them (De Fina, 2007; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Occupational identity refers to the explicit connection between occupation and individual's personal and social identity (Christiansen, 1999).

Relocating to a different country with diverse cultural norms is a highly stressful life event. Both individuals and couples must have heightened awareness of themselves and their surroundings as they undergo the acculturation process. The transformation of an individual's identity through acculturation is complex because the process occurs after the usual process of childhood enculturation (Kim, 2012). "All individuals entering a new and unfamiliar culture undergo some degree of new cultural learning, that is, the acquisition of the native cultural patterns and practices in areas of direct relevance to the daily functioning of the individual." (Kim, 2012, p. 233). The individual then must not only add new knowledge, but they must opt to either stop using previously learned

knowledge completely or to some degree. As the process continues, and the individual

must make decisions about what new knowledge to adopt and to what degree, as they

undergo an internal transformation (Kim, 2012). The identity that the individual has

adopted through their enculturation process will undergo changes based on the new

communicative experiences. As such, the research questions can help with expanding our

knowledge of the international student and their spouses' experience with acculturation

and the impacts on personal identity.

Identity negotiation has its origins in the theory of symbolic interactionism

(Mead, 1934) particularly in the idea that people create their identities from social

interaction. Identity negotiation is the process through which relational partners come to

agreements about the identities that they assume (Swann, 2005). The process of identity

negotiation is particularly relevant for couples who are experiencing the acculturation

process together. Often, each partner is the other's main source of support, information,

and self-verification. When a couple is introduced to a new culture where there are

different norms and expectations as well as new restrictions, each partner must adapt their

identity. The identity then, is not only part of the individual process of acculturation but a

part of the relational identity as well. Swan (1987) states that in the process of identity

negotiation one individual uses his/her expectancies to guide behavior, seeking

confirmation from the other person. The receiver in turn, may or may not confirm the

sender's expectancies with a potential clash between both. For example, within married

dyads, individuals will have more successful relationships when their spouse confirms

their self-views (Burke & Stets, 1999).

Identity negotiation is an ongoing process, as marital partners evolve and go through different stressors in life, they continue to define their place within the relationship. Outside factors also influence the process of identity negotiation. A change in the context such as a relocation to a different country will take a psychological toll on individuals, forcing them to redefine their identities according to the new situation. International students and their spouses undergo new situated processes of identity negotiation as they acculturate. The process takes place during every day communicative interactions.

RQ4 How do a) international students and b) their spouses reconstruct their biographies and new identities in the host culture?

Chapter three: Method

In this chapter, I delineate the methodology used for this dissertation. I describe the participants of this study and the process I use to recruit them. I describe the procedures applied for data collection and data analysis. In this study I follow a qualitative approach, specifically phenomenology. As this is a study that is exploratory in nature, it is imperative to capture the lived experience of participants in the process of acculturation. Qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to examine a phenomenon by giving voice to those who experience it.

Research Design

Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that qualitative methods are more appropriate when researchers want to better understand any phenomenon about which little is known. As stated previously, the experiences of international students have been widely studied,

however there is minimal research about their dependents, and of the dyadic experience. Thus, this study was primarily designed with a qualitative methodology. Quantitative measures were only used to better understand the situation of each of the participants. The measures included the interview protocol, which was designed based partially on an existing multiple goals scale.

A Phenomenological Approach

In this study, I take a phenomenological approach to understanding the lived experiences of international students and their spouses. Phenomenology is characterized by the view that "man is shaped by and gives shape to the world" (Fish & Dorris, 1975, p. 1). A phenomenon is anything that appears or presents itself, as one experiences it (Hammond et al., 1991) Individuals shape their culture through their own experiences, and in turn, their culture shapes them. Phenomenology is focused on participants' perception of particular phenomena. Phenomenology allows researchers to gain insight and understanding of and sensitivity to their participants. Through this perspective I am not directly observing a behavior, rather I am understanding the experiences of acculturation and identity negotiation and their meaning for the participants. Phenomenology is best suited for the analysis of the experiences of acculturation of international students and their spouses because it is important to understand several common or shared experiences of the phenomenon. The understanding of common experiences could lead to a deeper understanding of the experience and could even inform different practices or policies aimed at improving the conditions of this population.

Participants

The sample for this study ($N = 33$) was composed of 16.5 student-dependent dyads. Seventeen dyads included married couples in which only one person is an international student currently enrolled in a university or college. The other person was accompanying the student as a dependent. One of the dyads was incomplete as one of the participants decided to opt out of the study. It was important for this study to include both the student and the dependent because the couples are experiencing the acculturation process together. Every day interpersonal conversations are used to negotiate each individual's identity, the dynamics of the relationship, as well as each person's needs. It is also important to view the individual acculturation experiences and compare them within the dyad.

Both participants were required to be 18 years of age or older. It is important that one person of the dyad was a dependent and not a student themselves – under the assumption that the student and the dependent will have distinctly different experiences. The non-student accompanying dependent population has certain characteristics such as lack of resources and limited social support that make them especially vulnerable. Participants were required to be able to speak English, Spanish, Chinese, or Arabic. I decided to include these languages because the majority of the international students at the University of Kentucky are proficient in one of these languages (UKIC, ND).

Participants were 16.5 student-dependent dyads ($n = 16$ students, $n = 17$ dependents). By country of origin, China ($n = 6$), Iraq ($n = 5$), Colombia ($n = 4$),

India ($n = 4$), Chile ($n = 2$), Russia ($n = 2$), Czech Republic ($n = 2$), Albania 9 ($n = 2$),

Honduras ($n = 2$), Turkey ($n = 2$), Mexico ($n = 1$) and Japan ($n = 1$). Students included 12

males (75%) and 4 females (25%). One male student did not take part in the study.

Dependents included 4 males (23.5%) and 13 females (76.5%).

Participants ranged in age from 27 to 50 years old with an average of 33.6 years

($SD = 5.8$). All couples were married, the range of time married varied from 3 to 25 with

an average of 7.3 years ($SD = 5.5$). Couples had been living in the U.S. from 1 to 8 years,

with an average of 3.6 years ($SD = 1.8$). Only 2 couples did not have children. All student

participants were enrolled in a doctoral program, while dependents had different

education levels from high school to doctoral.

Procedure

After approval from the institutional review board, I began the recruitment

process. Participants were initially recruited through messages sent through the graduate

and family housing office listserv, as well as the International Center listserv. Both

listservs reach the international students directly. Participants were invited to enter their

information on a Qualtrics survey. The Qualtrics survey included demographic questions

such as, "Are you an international student?" and, "Is your spouse an international

student?" This allowed me to not only obtain their contact information but to screen

participants based on the specified characteristics for the study. The second set of

interviews came from snowball sampling. After each interview, participants were given

printed information about the study in case they knew of other couples interested in

participating. When participants contacted me, I described the purpose of the study. I

explained the process and their involvement, and the estimated time they would need for their interviews.

The dyads consisting of one enrolled international student and their accompanying spouse were each interviewed as close in time as possible and independently. One participant was interviewed after the other one so that they would not have opportunity to comment on their responses before their participation. Individuals were asked to meet me at a location that allowed enough privacy for them to speak openly. I met with one participant in that location and immediately after that they would leave and their spouse would come in to the same space for the interview. Eiskovitz and Koren (2010) point out that one of the benefits of dyadic analysis is that interviewing each participant in a couple relationship separately, the similarity or overlap in answers can be identified, as well as the difference and contrast. The purpose of conducting interviews simultaneously, or as close in time as possible, is that participants do not influence each other's answers by sharing information prior to an interview (Eiskovitz & Koren, 2010).

Before the interview, one participant required translation to Mandarin Chinese, therefore an interpreter was provided. Ten individual interviews were conducted in Spanish. Interpreters for Chinese were recommended by the university's affiliated Confucius institute and had prior interpreting experience. The available Arabic interpreters were recommended by the Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures, and Cultures Department of the University, and also had prior experience. I conducted interviews in Spanish as it is my first language, and I have prior experience in interpreting as well. The role of the interpreter was to translate the questions and answers

during the interview. Interviews took place in a convenient location that afforded enough privacy for the interviewees to express their experiences freely (e.g., a meeting room, my office). Before the beginning of any interview, participants were provided with the IRB-approved informed consent form (in English, Spanish, Chinese, or Arabic) and a clear description of the voluntary and confidential nature of the study. Participants were asked to sign the form if they agreed to the study's conditions. Participants were reminded that the interview was audio-recorded.

Participants were interviewed following a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix 1). However, in an attempt to thoroughly understand the unique experience of each person, the interviewer asked respondents to share their accounts through narrative elicitation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Interviews lasted between 35 and 65 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded.

At the end of each interview, the respondents were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. Upon completion, the interviewer filled out a brief observation sheet with reflections about the interview. All audio and digital data files, including transcriptions were kept in password protected files in an independent hard drive which was also password protected.

Researcher as Instrument

In phenomenology, the researcher is an integral part of the study. Since the present study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, it is recognized that there are multiple truths. The diverse experiences are recognized through the interviews and exchanges between researcher and participant. This study originated from my interactions with several international families and conversations sustained along several years. Given

my previous interactions, I needed to be aware of my impact on the direction of research. It would have been impossible to achieve complete objectivity in the research, however I strived to be aware of my biases and assumptions.

To achieve my goals, I was purposeful when conducting each interview. I worked on not showing facial expressions that would show my disagreement to some opinions. It proved difficult to not intervene when some participants struggled to find a word to describe their situation, given all participants who responded in English were not native English speakers. I also worked with my committee to produce an interview protocol that was not leading, so that the interview would be impartial for everyone. I became particularly aware of my preconceptions after each interview, when I revisited my participant's surprising responses. The clearest example was when participants described their past experiences in their home countries and I understood that everyone had gone through unimaginable hardships in order to get to the U.S. International students and their families immigrate not only to obtain quality education, but to distance themselves from harsh realities that few others are aware of.

Data Analysis

Each dyadic interview was transcribed soon after its completion. This allowed me to revisit the encounter and make adjustments to the interview protocol as needed. Some of the questions had to be arranged in a different order so that the interview had a better flow. Some of the questions were re-worded so that they were better understood by participants. Memos for each interview were kept along with the transcripts for each dyad.

The first step for the analysis of the qualitative data was pre-coding (Layder,

1998). As I read the transcripts, I circled, underlined and color coded significant

participants quotes that appeared to be "codable moments" (Saldana, 2016, p. 20). Once

all the data had been gathered, data was coded In Vivo, as a "splitter", splitting all the

data into smaller codable moments (Bernard, 2011, p. 379). Splitting the data rather than

lumping it allowed a more nuanced analysis from the start. In this sense, Charmaz (2008)

mentions that a detailed coding results in a more trustworthy analysis allowing the

researcher to distance his or her own assumptions from the participants. In Vivo coding

was selected for the first round of coding based on the type of research questions. Trede

and Higgs (2009) suggest that ontological questions that address the nature of

participants' realities are better answered by In Vivo, Process, or Focused coding. Next, a

codebook was created from the emergent codes, their descriptions, and a brief example

for reference. This technique allowed the opportunity to later organize the codes into

categories.

"Coding the codes" (Saldana, 2016) was used to reduce the initial larger number

of sequential split codes into a more manageable amount for analysis. This reduction

lends itself to more abstract, conceptual levels of analysis. Coding the codes was used as

a transition from the first into the second round of coding, allowing a more advanced way

of reorganizing and re-analyzing the data.

For the second round of coding I used Berry's (1989) acculturation model to aid

in the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This form of analysis allows

researchers to explore how participants are making sense of their personal and social

world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). IPA was particularly useful in that it involves detailed

examination of participants' life-experiences. IPA is useful when using a small purposive sample such as the one in the present study because it is used to report detail about a particular community and does not claim to say something about all communities (Smith & Osborn, 2007). As participants make sense of their world, the researcher strives to make sense of the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Using IPA the researcher is able to look at the data and interpret it with the application of theoretical concepts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In this case, I used Berry's model to understand the phenomenon. After both cycles of coding were complete, the data was organized based on the research questions. Organizing the data in an outline allowed me to "weave" the results into a coherent narrative. I used the final outline to aid the actual writing process.

Quality Assessment

There are no absolute ways of ensuring that there will be no errors in qualitative research (Mays & Pope, 2000). However, there are ways of improving rigor. Respondent validation, or member checking was used in the present study. The researcher's account was shared with participants, who provided insight and clarifications that were included in the results. Respondent validation presents some limitations. The way data is structured and presented responds to the researcher's positions and purposes. Overall results and accounts may not reflect specific participants' accounts. Thus, respondent validation is part of a process of reducing error.

Chapter four: Results

Acculturation as a Biographical Disruption

Chronic illness has often been studied as a biographical disruption (Bury, 1982; Carricaburu & Pierret, 1995; Williams, 2000; Wilson, 2007). Through this study, I show

that acculturation can also be understood as a biographical disruption, extending the theory to a new context. Chronic illness and acculturation share characteristics that allow researchers to explore both events through the lens of biographical disruption. Initially, Bury (1982) argued that there are three aspects of disruption to the unfolding of a chronic illness: the disruption of taken for granted assumptions and behaviors, more profound disruptions in explanatory systems normally used by people, and the response to disruption involving the mobilization of resources in facing the altered situation. In the following section, I describe how acculturation presents the three aspects of disruption.

Bury (1982) considers that non-communicable diseases do not "break out" they "creep up". In the same way, acculturation is not a sudden event that happens on the moment a person enters a new country. The process of acculturation begins before the actual relocation. When an international student comes to the U.S., it is implied that they come to learn and obtain a degree, however reducing the decision to only seeking academic achievement is an oversimplification of the situation. There are many other reasons that motivate students to move to a new country with their spouses and families. Past studies (Berry & Sam, 1997) have taken in consideration the pre-departure factors that influence individual's acculturation process. However, they have proposed a typification where students, refugees, immigrants, and indigenous people have different motivations for relocating. It is not considered then, that international students may also be refugees, or indigenous people, for example.

During the interview process, the first reaction to the question "How did you decide to come to the U.S.?" was common amongst all participants. Participants

referenced the student's (or their own) desire to obtain a degree in their particular area of study. Aadhya, who has been in the U.S. for four years expressed:

It was my long-time dream to come to the U.S. actually. I did my bachelor's in my state in India, and then I did my Master's in another state in my country. Then I got married in 2009, at that time I was doing my Master's, the last part, the dissertation or something, and I got job, and I was working, then I had to take a break from working to do family-related things, and I had my baby, and then, OK, now it's time to do Ph.D. Yeah! I took a break between my Master's and Ph.D., a five year break. I worked two times in-between that. I had my baby, and then, like, OK, it's time to do something. Then I started preparing for my Ph.D. in the U.S. I mean, that was my dream, like, doing Ph.D. somewhere outside India, so yeah, I prepared for almost one year because of GRE and the admission, being international student it takes some time. I started working with certain professors. I had some seniors who were doing the same thing, entomology, then they suggested some of the professor's names and then I contacted them, and they asked me to apply to the Graduate School, and then I got my scholarship, so that's what happened.

The pre-departure period as the starting point of the acculturation experience, showed there are differences for students and spouses. Students in particular, spoke about having to prepare for years before they were able to be eligible for a study abroad opportunity. Students had to work in many cases to improve their language skills, take exams in English (i.e., GRE, GMAT), find the right program of study, find an advisor, etc. The application and preparation process were an addition to the stressors that they

already encountered in their everyday lives in their home countries. Mahmod, a 39-year-old Ph.D. student from Iraq expressed:

> Actually, what I did, I got job in Iraq, at Mosul University, and then because of bad situation in Mosul, and terrorist, and killing people, educated people, so I decided to go to South Iraq. So over there I was academic assist, academic lecturer at University of Kufa agricultural department. Before that I had a degree from Turkey on vegetable protection so I got higher, good position over there, and after that I decided to apply for Ph.D. in UK, and Ireland, Australia, and 5 or 6 countries, and after that I decided that, well, we go to the United States. At that time Government before there were corruption, but we didn't know, so they send many, many students to go get higher degrees, Ph.D., so my part was here in the United States. I applied and I got in contact with my supervisor, Dr. J*, and they accepted, and that's why I started.

The pre-departure moment for dependents was different. For most dependents, moving to the United States was a way to show support for their spouse. The initial decision to move to a different country was taken by their spouse and they agreed to follow. Dependents did not have to take academic or language tests or prepare in any specific way. Often, they stayed behind in their country of origin while their spouse sought living arrangements or even years while their spouse began their studies abroad. For dependents, the decision to relocate can be compared to an illness diagnosis. The decision to move to a different country brings individuals, their families, and their social networks to question their normal rules of reciprocity and mutual support. In the context of chronic illness, the patient becomes increasingly dependent of their support network as

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a spouse becomes dependent of their student partner. In order to begin the acculturation process they need to negotiate with their spouses what their new role will be within the relationship and in the new context. Often the role of the dependent was to provide emotional and enacted support for their spouse. As Jasmine, a 29-year-old Chinese dependent mentioned, "I think it is a very important thing, to accompany the husband in China." Often, the couples were separated during an initial period of time as the student travelled ahead and a few months or even years later, the dependent followed. The separation from family was an added stressor for students, who expressed feelings of isolation. For some students in particular, the concerns for their loved ones were overwhelming and proved to be sources of anxiety. Mahmoud, for example, provided testimony of his anguish as his family tried to escape from the invasion of his home city:

> The bad thing, we had a job in our countries, we had a really good source. But we lost everything. With terrorists. I was here in 2014 on June. I was living in second floor. I was sleeping, and my friends came. Hey Mahmud how are you? I'm good. Are you sure? How's your family? My family is good. One of them said: are you sure? Yes, what's going on? You have to call now! Just call them. You don't know? Did you watch the news? No. They told me: Mosul is gone! It's gone by terrorists! All the soldiers are gone and killed and now the terrorists control Mosul! I called my dad, no answer. I called my brother, no answer. I couldn't get any response. Next day night, they called. We are OK, we are good, don't worry, we are good. Dad, tell me the truth. I know terrorists control Mosul. He said we are in north Kurdistan area. I said what about Mosul? Don't focus. We lost everything, we just get our passport. Our ID. OK? Cars, house, machines, tools,

farms, land, animals… all gone! All of it! We lost everything. They started to kill people, because we are Azerbaijani, Turkish, Shiite. The terrorists are all Wahhabi, supported by Saudi Arabia military. Created 300 years ago. Really bad people. This people killed Muslim before. Killing Muslim, killing Christian, killing Jewish people, killing everyone.

Other students had less traumatic experiences yet, being away from their loved ones presented a stressor that domestic students do not experience as often. Spouses are left behind so that they may continue their employment, care for other family members, or because it is required by their sponsors. In the case of Mahmoud, who was sponsored by the Iraqi government, he was conditioned to finish a year of ESL before his family could join him. Fortunately, due to the circumstances, he found a way to bring them to where he was studying. He remembers that day during his ESL class:

I was in ESL, I went to class I'm crying. We had students from Arabic countries. They speak Arabic. I don't hate Arabic language but I hate Arabic cultures hence I am not Arabic. They're all happy. None of them said sorry. I told the teacher, he said why are you crying? I told him what happened in Mosul. The teacher said sorry, Brazilian, Mexicans, Chinese, said 'Sorry Mahmoud, I'm sorry about that.' Except Arabic students. I will never forget that, I am going to tell anyone. They're all happy, none of them said sorry. Because they're happy, especially in Arabic peninsula. They were dreaming they will build Islamic State. What kind of State? Terrorist, killing people, destroying everything, civilization.

International students are allowed to enter the U.S. one month before their program of studies begin formally. Therefore, once they enter, they must establish

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themselves and their families in the new surroundings. In the case of chronic illness, people report finding themselves in a critical situation of great uncertainty (Bury, 1982). A chronic illness is usually unexpected, and patients are suddenly faced with a new situation that they may have no knowledge of. In contrast, acculturation is a situation that can be foreseen and can be planned to some extent. However, the actual encounter with the new culture will always be fraught with unforeseen circumstances. Until individuals arrive to the host country they may have little or no idea of what is happening. For some students, the situation is facilitated by having previously contacted people from the host country who are willing to help them, some have friends who are already established and provide support for the new arriving family. A few families had contacted people from the University who volunteered to help, and many others arrive without knowing anyone. Manuel, a 38-year-old Guitar Ph.D. student from Chile recalls:

> Everything was new, it was exhausting. It was a good experience because I found a very kind person, when I got there, who helped me find a place to stay. That day, without knowing me or anything they invited me to stay at their place. The next day they helped me find an apartment. I met him at the University. It was a Christian University so there are many people concerned about that. He saw me by myself and he took me to find a place. The apartment was really expensive so he said just stay at my place tonight. Next day he gave me breakfast and dinner. He took me to different places to see the cost, he accompanied me all morning until I found something.

It was when individuals arrived to the U.S. that they began to realize that they had to shift from what they had known as their projected trajectory. The emergence of

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unknown situations became a time to reevaluate their previous self-perception and it also provided the opportunity to incorporate changes into their previously established identity. During the initial encounter with the new culture, many behaviors that had been assumed to be normal became challenged. With the encounter of a new culture it becomes apparent to immigrants and sojourners that the life experience that they had up to that point was different from the life experience of others, it might even be considered incorrect or deficient in some ways. The culture change marks a biographical shift from what they had assumed to be a normal trajectory through predictable chronological steps.

Bury (1982) highlights the place of uncertainty in the experience of chronic illness. Uncertainty is linked to both lack of knowledge of the impact and course of the illness and the appropriate behavior in the face of its effects. A person who is affected by chronic illness may now have access to more information through online sources, however this does not mean that there will always be accurate information or that the existing information will apply to them particularly. In this sense, acculturation is also fraught with uncertainty. With technology it is easier than ever to find information about places in the most remote corners of the world, however having information is not the same as being immerse in the new place and culture. Aleha, a 32-year-old dependent from Iraq remembers:

> My husband thought to come. I actually was afraid because it is so far away and I don't know anything about American culture. So, all we knew was from T.V. it's so different, it's like they have mafia, they have criminals, so I was so scared about those things. So next, it's two continents you now? It's too far away from my family so I am afraid of that at first. They said: your income is low, so you

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can't live in that place. It's hard for low income, but we came and it's so different. We changed our mind.

It is difficult to predict the new experiences that a person can encounter in a new place. Participants in this study found that leaving their country, sometimes for the first time, could be overwhelming. Raiha, an entomology doctoral student from India, had never travelled outside of her country, as she left her husband and daughter, she ventured by herself to a distant place. She describes her journey and her husband's support:

I remember missing my connecting flight in Chicago, because international travel, and there was a long queue because of the July-August…you remember, the first time you come, there will be a long queue for visa, processing and all those things. I was a little bit scared because all those things, and he was messaging me: you don't have to worry about that, just take your bag out there and they will help you to book another flight, and so that helped me at first when I landed here.

The Communication Work of International Students and Their Spouses through Acculturation

The concept of work, like biographical disruption, comes from the study of communication in the context of chronic illness. In the present study, I argue that communication work is used by acculturating individuals because acculturation is not only the state of being present in a new culture but is also a social experience. During acculturation people exchange information, renegotiate identities and relationships, mutually manage uncertainty, and communally cope (Charmaz, 1991; 2000). Donovan-Kicken, Tollison, and Goins (2012) centered on the concept of work from Corbin and

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Strauss' (1988) theory of illness trajectories as they noticed that the work of managing an illness was a burden shared by patients and significant others. Through the interview process of international students and their spouses, it was evident that they too shared the work of managing acculturation. Acculturation communication work was an added demand to the other demands and duties that local students with families had to deal with regularly.

Donovan-Kicken, Tollison, and Goins (2012) extended Corbin and Strauss' (1998) concept of work when they contended that the theory of illness trajectories did not fully recognize that communication is richer, more challenging, and more consequential than what the theory recognized. In the present study, I refer to acculturation communication work as the process resulting from individual's efforts to share the communicative labor and the differences in work of students and spouses.

Acculturation communication work

It has long been recognized that international students must overcome barriers like language fluency, lack of social support, and differing culture norms (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003). However, acculturation communication work is more than the ability to speak fluently in English or using technology to communicate. Acculturation communication work requires individuals to manage multiple pieces of information such as relationship types, social norms, previously unknown non-verbal cues, and new situations in order to design effective and appropriate messages.

Acculturation communication work occurs between the acculturating individual and others in their context, for graduate international students this means communicating

with their peers, professors, and their own students. In addition, graduate international students manage acculturation communication work with their spouses and other family members. For international students, the communication with others in academia is extremely important for different reasons. Academia is international students' reason for being in the United States and it is their way of remaining in the U.S. and obtaining a degree. Advisors and professors provide not only academic support, but guidance for students to be successful and navigate an educational system that may be different from their own. Advisors and professors provide a model to follow as successful academics and experts in their field. They also have the possibility to provide students with valuable experience and other opportunities. Na-Lin, a student from China had a particular experience. She originally came to the U.S. as a dependent and found the experience to be unbearable; therefore, she applied for a graduate program and became a student herself. She expresses the importance of being able to communicate with other students and the opportunities she received from her professors:

> So, the first year was empty. Empty and meaningless, then the next year it was
> like OK, I got into graduate school. Then I didn't find any money in the beginning
> then a professor asked me if I want to work for her, then I got half an
> assistantship. That was like from the air, it just fell on me. It was very rare even
> for the other Chinese students because they went through more hardships than I
> went through. So, then I knew my classmates, my professors, I worked for her, it
> feels like I built my own social circles in addition to his [her husband's]. The first
> year I only knew his friends, then my first year in grad school I began to have my
> own social circles. I think I cherished the opportunity so much because, it feels

like, I was thirsty for too long, and now, somebody gave me water or I got into a

shower, I feel like Oh! I have so much water!

The importance of effectively communicating with others in the academic setting

involves some of the most salient acculturation communication work. Participants

recalled that they had not always been skilled at producing messages that were

appropriate for the context. Manuel recalled trying to communicate with his professors

early in his program and using language that was not considered suitable:

I think at the beginning I was not aware of the hierarchies here and how things

work. Sometimes at first, I would send emails to my professors and I used their

first name. In Chile this is acceptable because you can speak to your professors by

their first name since high school, I was always used to that. Then one day my

friend saw this and said: Manuel! Why are you writing like this to Dr. Y*? They

will think you are very disrespectful! Oh! I felt very embarrassed, I did not know

this before. It has been some time since that happened but I wonder sometimes if

they remember. I am now very careful about how I write emails, even now, I still

think Oh! I hope I am not being disrespectful, I always think this when I write.

In his experience in particular, Manuel recognized that there were cultural

differences that he needed to address, he also had to think about the purpose of the

communication so that it was clear, and he had to deal with the uncertainty of whether he

was missing or misunderstanding any other culture norms. The management of the

competing demands in this case resulted from the addition of acculturation to the

communication demands that other local students would encounter.

For dependents the context is different from students. Dependents are not expected to manage the demands of an academic setting be that as it may, they must still manage their acculturation communication in their everyday encounters. Natalya for example fears that people in her community will cast judgement on her because she is not highly educated. She had to leave her studies at an early age after she got married and had a daughter with a severe incapacity. After her child passed away, she had a second daughter that she takes care of even now that she is in her teenage years. Natalya feels that her lack of schooling makes it difficult for her to be open with people around her. Having what she considers a less acceptable occupational identity results in a barrier to her integration into many social groups. She centers most of her conversations around her child, strengthening her identity as a dedicated mother by managing her message production:

> Here people are so smart, so educated. I am scared to talk to them. I am very invested in my daughter's life. Seems like since we have a teenage daughter, most of our conversations are about raising her, and I would say that in the way I feel like his interest, his willingness to accept my point of view…is not really clear, the understanding, but he will catch up and it will work out, and he will say yeah, you are right, and I will be happy. Since she is a girl and I am a woman, it is easier for me to understand her. Just like a girl in this world.

International students and their spouses manage acculturation communication by sharing tasks and recruiting help in a similar fashion as families affected by chronic illness (Donovan-Kicken, Tollison, & Goins, 2012). Participants reported reaching out to friends and family members during stressful times. It was interesting to note that while

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the literature has often reported lack of social support as a stressor for international students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhang, 2016) participants in the current study reported that they had never encountered a situation in which they needed help and they could not find someone to provide it. Disclosing the difficulties of acculturation to others in their home country proves to be complicated for both students and spouses. Sojourners and immigrants must manage their messages when communicating with loved ones who are far away so that they do not worry. Aadhya for example, recalled getting support even if she did not directly construct her message requesting support:

> I keep a good communication with my parents, we use the Skype to see each other, and talk to each other every week. It is really healthy to have a good relationship with parents. Even if sometimes they don't know I need their support, I can talk it, even if I am not talking the thing, but I am talking other things, if I see they are happy, they are healthy, and they are happily living together, then I have a younger brother, I will ask do you read any books? Just this kind of talks help me. To think my parents are doing good, my younger brother is doing good. Even on awful days I can just overcome it. If something is not overcoming it, then I go to my counselor friend. I even go to the counseling center on campus. I think it is really helpful. I went to group therapy, and everyone talks about their bad situation. After everyone talked about their situation, I felt I was the person who least, least, needed to come. I think that coming to the counseling center will be my last, last option but I have a signal in my mind, that if it is really bad then I should go to the counseling center, just to keep me being healthy.

Rahul, Aadhiya's husband also spoke about social support:

> The only need was to take care of the baby. I can take care of my daughter,
> especially when she is gone. I try to support my wife, because she may be going
> to the lab. If I have any issues, any questions I can always ask my family. It is a
> natural tendency to support everyone, I mean, that's the situation in India. So,
> let's say you are in trouble, everyone has a solution, especially aunts and uncles.
> Sometimes it is not required I would say. We are grown-ups and we can make our
> decisions, but pretty much they have an influence on our lives.

There is an important amount of acculturation communication work that sojourners and immigrants must engage in when they are away from their loved ones. They are not always as successful as they would like in their need to manage the flow of information to their loved ones who are in their home country. One such aspect that was highlighted during the interviews was the inability to provide social support. This issue has not been mentioned often in the intercultural communication literature. Students and spouses must manage the frustration when they learn of situations in their home country where they wish they could help. Students and dependents speak of their desire to provide support to people in their home countries but their limitations to actually do it. There are different circumstances that prevent their ability to provide enacted support. For some students, the relationship of their countries to the U.S. represents a barrier. For Iraqi sojourners, for example it is impossible to travel outside the country and come back, it is also nearly impossible for their friends and relatives to visit due to the imposed travel ban. For Russian sojourners, it was the tense relations between their country and the U.S.

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that often preoccupied them, although they were not banned from international travel, they felt this could happen at any point and opted not to do it.

Throughout the time sojourners are away from their countries, there are family crises, natural disasters, friends in need, and many other unforeseen situations. In Mexico City, for example, there was a devastating earthquake in 2017 where many buildings collapsed and people lost their lives. People then, took to the streets and worked tirelessly to help anyone who might be trapped in the rubble. For Jaime, a 30-year-old Mexican Music Ph.D. student, watching from afar as the people in his city helped each other was a very stressful moment:

> I started watching the videos on Twitter, it was almost a surreal experience. There were all this buildings, places I had visited a thousand times, and they were gone. Reduced to mountains of rock. I felt so useless, so helpless, everyone here was just going about their day. I had to teach a class. Nobody cared. I wanted to run there, do something but I couldn't. I wouldn't have been able to be there on time. During the time right after the earthquake I called my friend, she couldn't find her brother, phone lines there were down, so she gave me the number and I was able to reach him. For some reason my calls were getting through. It was all I could do really. I used Facebook to post about places that needed supplies or volunteers. If I had been there I would have been lifting rocks with everyone else.

Participants often found it difficult to disclose their concerns to their loved ones abroad. They perceived their concerns to be a burden on others. As their loved ones had to go through difficult situations, expressing discomfort for not being able to help did not seem like an appropriate choice. It was a common practice, however, to share their

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experiences with others who were in a similar situation. International students often held conversations with other international students, who were more appropriate outlets for conversations about acculturation. Dependents, on the other hand, had a more difficult time finding others with whom they could speak and disclose their feelings and concerns. This was due to the fact that dependents were not obligated to communicate with others on a regular basis. Dependents were limited in the places and occasions they had access to in order to meet other dependents. Often dependents had more language limitations than students, which also proved to be a barrier for communicating amongst each other. The lack of opportunity and abilities were added demands to dependents acculturation communication work. Dependents would sometimes have to consider what the costs and benefits of communicating with others and this could result in their social isolation.

Donovan-Kicken, Tollison, and Goins (2012) found that cancer survivors manage communication with others by delegating tasks and recruiting help. The division of labor is also noted in acculturating individuals, particularly in the married dyads that participated in the present study. Individuals engage in an ongoing negotiation as to their roles and obligations within the dyad. They negotiate how these roles and obligations are distinct for each other, and what meaning individuals attach to each role and obligation. Within the dyads, there is also a negotiation as to how they will approach their acculturation experience. Often spouses will try to help each other decipher the new culture and how to navigate it. Aadiyah for example, talks to her husband about her role in the new culture, her observations, and how they can adapt:

We speak all the time about hospitals, when we take D* we say: Oh! you see? It's like this. So sometimes he says no, you can't go. I say I can, now I'm strong. I'm

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different, I'm not like last times. If I'm in Iraq I can't go shopping alone, or I can't take D* alone, I should need him with me. But now, no. I am stronger. I am changing. Like, in my country if my husband stays in another city, I can't stay alone. But here I can. It's hard for me, but I can do it. I should do it.

Communication work entails preparing and planning for talk (Donovan-Kicken, Tollison, & Goins, 2012). This is especially true for acculturating individuals whose first language is different from the host country's language. Speaking a different language requires an extra effort for preparing and planning talk. For international students it is of great importance to use the appropriate language in the academic setting. Although international students are required to be proficient in English for most graduate programs, their level is different from native English speakers. Manuel recalls having trouble when he first arrived in the U.S.:

> When we got to the U.S., I did not have very good English. In fact, my wife learned more before me. I was stuck in the studio repeating the same words over and over because I would be teaching the same thing to different students. I was not learning new vocabulary. She was learning more because she would go to the store and this and that so she knew more than me! When I wanted to talk to other people it was difficult. I will think in Spanish, then try to say it in English. Sometimes I get tired doing this. At the beginning I didn't want to speak English a lot, I just got tired doing it, and some people are not nice! They don't want to understand you if you are not speaking perfectly. They are not patient.

Acculturation communication work requires individuals to design all their messages and be more strategic than individuals who are not acculturating. For both

international students and their spouses there are added demands as they create their messages which requires extra-efforts.

Communication Work and Acculturation Categories

Acculturation communication work is not the same for all individuals, in the same way that acculturation is not the same for all individuals. In order to illustrate the difference in the experience, Berry (1982) proposed a 2x2 matrix of acculturation. The categories of the model include assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Berry's (1982) model has been used to explain how individuals respond to their new context. In this section I show the relationship between acculturation communication work and the categories of Berry's (1982) model of acculturation. Berry (1997) notes that the nature of a person's acculturation is a combination of the outside factors (i.e., political context, economic situation, attitudes of host society) and the individual factors that arise during the process (i.e., age, gender, migration motivation). In the case of graduate international students and their spouses, age is one of the factors that separates them from the international student populations that have been studied previously. It has been shown before that when acculturation starts during childhood, the process is generally smooth (Beiser, 1988); when acculturation starts later in life there appears to be increased mental health concerns (Yeh & Inose, 2003). International students and their families are generally older than the undergraduate student population that has been studied and therefore they have greater risk of suffering heightened levels of acculturative stress.

Although factors like age influence acculturation, the way that individuals mold their behavior and cope with acculturative stress is affected by their characteristics prior to acculturation. As mentioned before, Berry's model describes four possible outcomes of

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acculturation that result from the combination of outside and individual factors. The

amount of effort individuals make in resisting or merging into the new culture will

require different amounts of acculturation communication work. As shown by the

participants in the current study, all acculturation strategies required a purposeful use of

communication resulting in added communication work. However, each category

presented particularities in the way individuals strategized and produced messages. In the

following section I describe how participants expressed such differences in acculturation

communication work depending on their acculturation strategy. The first category is

assimilation.

Assimilation

Assimilation results when individuals separate from their home culture and seek

to adopt the behaviors of the host society (Berry, 1997). When individuals use

assimilation to acculturate, there is substantial behavioral change (Berry et al., 1989), this

is due to their desire to match the behavior of the host society. Some participants in this

study expressed a desire to blend into U.S. culture since they found it to be more

congruent with their own beliefs and values. Edgar, a 42-year-old student from Colombia

expressed:

> Well, you know, we think that our children will have better opportunities here. In
>
> Colombia things are difficult, I had a job but it was not appreciated, I couldn't
>
> charge what people charge here for the same thing. I had to pay the rent, and the
>
> school for the kids and that's it, there was no extra money for anything else. So,
>
> my kids, if they grow up here, they will have a better education. People also have

the same values, we go to a church that is very conservative and that is more like

the way we think, so our kids are surrounded by that.

Having the desire to blend in to the new culture motivated Edgar and his wife,

Mayra to shed some of the home culture and adopt new behaviors. Whilst adopting the

new behaviors, they had to be purposeful and make conscious decisions about how they

communicate in their new context. Edgar mentioned, for example that he was teaching

his younger children to speak English before they were ready to go to school in order for

them to lose their accents and become more "American". For individuals whose strategy

is assimilation, it is important to modify their non-verbal communication in order to

blend into the host culture. In this case for example, Edgar wants to influence his

children's paralanguage so that it is as similar as possible to that of the local children.

Other non-verbal adjustments that assimilating individuals must make include kinesics,

such as head nodding to express agreement and proxemics by adjusting personal space.

Non-verbals are often unique to each culture (O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders,

Montgomery, & Fiske, 1994). Therefore, changing non-verbal cues is also acculturation

communication work.

Acculturation communication work is often managed and negotiated within a

family unit. Spouses negotiate the strategies that they deem most favorable for their

goals. Edgar and Mayra share the tasks of acculturation communication work by

discussing the best way to assimilate into the new culture. Together they design strategies

that they deem more appropriate for their inclusion as part of the new culture. Both

students and dependents who sought to assimilate into U.S. culture sought identity-

confirming groups. For Edgar and Mayra, belonging to a church that shared their values

and beliefs made them feel included and also allowed them to socialize with local individuals.

Integration

The integration category results in a balance between the home culture and the host culture, this means that there is some resistance to change as well as some adjustment (Berry, 1997). Integration is the most desirable category of acculturation because it is a state of balance where individuals will encounter less dissonance. During the course of the study, it was more frequent to identify students than spouses in the integration category. Individuals in this category, like Carlos, a 29-year-old student from Colombia, describe being comfortable with both cultures. They seek to learn how to navigate in the host country but also keep their home county's norms:

> I have enjoyed my time here, it has been almost three years now and I feel I am always learning something or teaching something. What I mean is that I am learning the ways of the American culture, there are many things that I like that I didn't know or use back in Colombia. But I am also always showing people the good things about my country because they always think Oh! Colombia, must be a drug dealer, you know? I try to not lose my roots, we eat Colombian food often at home, I speak to the children in Spanish, but I know that outside, at school, they are learning English so that is not a problem. We also try American food all the time, and food from other places because that way we are more knowledgeable. We could live anywhere.

Using integration as an acculturation strategy requires less communication work than assimilation because individuals do not feel inclined to change everything about their culture but they do not feel the need to reject everything about the new culture either. Integration allows immigrants and sojourners to keep the aspects of their culture that can work within the new culture. Acculturation communication work in this category is more important when individuals are making the decision to adopt the new behavior or keep the behavior they had already learned. For the home culture aspects that are kept, individuals do not require as much acculturation communication work as for the ones that change. Abeda, a 37-year-old dependent from Iraq described some changes she had to make:

> Now I can go to shop alone. It's so different because M* and T* when they had 3 months I put them in daycare, so I don't remember how they are while growing up, or they wake me up at night and make me tired. With D*, no, it is hard because all the time we are together. Sometimes if I am tired I can't rest because I have to take care about everything. I can't leave the home like this because I have two kids that are big now. In Iraq, when I was pregnant with M* and T*, my husband's mom would come and help me. So here no. My husband tries to help me but you know, he can't. It's not like mom. So hard being lonely.

In Abeda's culture, it is not customary for women to be by themselves, especially in public places. Abeda and her husband decided to change this aspect of their culture and conform to U.S. practices where if she could, she would freely go by herself to the store. Although she has more freedom now, she is still unable to leave her home. She has no family support or financial means to arrange childcare which results in a barrier for her

and often leads to her feeling confined to her apartment. Bury (1982) explains that the presence or absence of a supportive social network can make a significant difference in the management of chronic illness, in this case, Abeda mentions that the conflict is often discussed with her husband as they negotiate the possible strategies to effectively adopt the new behavior, which contributes to the biographical disruption and adds to the acculturation communication work.

Separation

The separation category results when a person does not have substantial interaction with the host culture and they strive to maintain their original culture (Berry, 1997). For some sojourners, it is important to meet U.S. citizens and establish relationships with them, while sojourners whose identity is more related to their home country will want to socialize with other co-nationals. This is a situation that many Chinese students experience while living in another country, they will seek other Chinese students to socialize with and will not look to establish close relationships with other groups. Chinese dependents in this study expressed this situation when asked about the social groups they belonged to in the U.S. Bo, a 29-year-old Engineering student explained:

> When we first got here, we found that there were some people from my place. My wife talked to them one day at the store and it was really, really great. We meet with them often because we can talk about things that we know. Sometimes we just hang out. For my wife especially it was very good to meet them because her English is not so good, so with them she doesn't have to try. She says she will get tired when she is talking English for too long. We have other Chinese friends too,

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in the apartments there are many Chinese families so we talk about our gardens and they have showed me how to grow better vegetables. In the summer we all stay by the gardens in the afternoon when it is not so hot. There are always people from China everywhere you go, so it is good for us.

For graduate international students it is not so easy to be completely separated from the host culture. They will have to adopt the behaviors that are acceptable within their program of study. Students must constantly communicate with others from the host culture, whether it is other students, professors, advisors, or staff. Students are immersed in the U.S. education system and must adapt to the norms in order to be successful. For spouses, the situation is different since they do not have an obligation to communicate with others if they do not choose to do so. Spouses may choose to only associate with others from their home culture, speak only their language, and follow their traditions. The people who are in this category will perceive so much dissonance in the new culture that they decide to completely reject it. The rejection of the host culture can be identified in participant's expressions, for example, Abeda, a 37-year-old Iraqi dependent who has lived in the U.S. for 4 years related:

> You know, in Arab country we have tradition, we don't change it. It's very hard and it started many years ago and you can't change it, you can't break it, you can't break the rules, you can't broke the tradition, it's very hard. Yeah people here are different, but I told you, we can't change. We have tradition, we have rules, and we stay with that. Even if we live in different country, we have tough rules.

During the interview process, I found that some individuals do not use the same acculturation strategies all the time. The fact that graduate international students must adopt certain cultural aspects in order to be successful academically, does not mean that they do the same at home within their family unit. For some students there are different standards held while they are interacting with colleagues or professors and the standards they upkeep at home. This situation was observed particularly in cases where spouses opted for the separation strategy. Thus, students would use integration during educational events or encounters and separation while at home. Edgar for example, mentioned that he had certain conservative viewpoints and values that he and his wife found central to their worldview. They made conscious decisions not to associate with people whose lifestyle was contrary to those beliefs. The dissonance between Edgar's beliefs and the cultural norms that he had to follow resulted in his careful message design, which meant he had to incur in acculturation communication work to modify his expressions and adopt the behaviors that were expected and accepted in that context.

Marginalization

The last category in the acculturation model is marginalization. In this category individuals reject both their original culture and the host culture. When describing this category, Berry (1997) mentions that this strategy is rarely used. Individuals who have been forcibly removed from their home culture like asylees or refugees may be more likely to fall within this category than international students because they may not have a choice of the place they will go to. None of the individuals interviewed expressed complete discomfort with both cultures. This is congruent with various other studies

(Shwartz & Zamboanga, 2008; Szapocznik et al., 1980; Unger et al., 2002) that have found small or nonexistent marginalization groups.

Biographical Reconstruction and New Identities

Acculturation is a biographical disruption and as such, acculturating individuals must find ways to manage it. One of the aspects that must be managed is the loss of self. Across the life-span there are transitions that can have significant effects on self-definition (Ethier & Deaux, 1994) such as becoming a parent, losing a loved one, chronic illness, and in this case acculturation. For international students and their dependents being in a different context inevitably leads to a reconstruction of self-definition. During the interview process there were several aspects that were salient in participant's accounts of their biographical reconstruction. Some aspects were shared by both student and dependent, and some were pertinent to only students or only dependents. Occupational identity, for example changed for most participants during acculturation. For students there was a clear transition into their new occupational identity within their chosen academic field however, for their spouses there was a new restricted existence which led to fewer opportunities of reconstructing a valued self (Charmaz, 1983).

> "Occupational identity refers to the conscious awareness of oneself as a worker. The process of occupational identity formation in modern societies can be difficult and stressful. However, establishing a strong, self-chosen, positive, and flexible occupational identity appears to be an important contributor to occupational success, social adaptation, and psychological well-being." (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011, p. 693).

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When international students were asked the question: "How would you describe yourself before you came to the U.S.?" there was a common sequence among participants. The first association was to their occupational identity. These results are congruent with the idea that occupational identity is often conceptualized as a major component of one's overall sense of identity (Kroger, 2007; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Often, a person's self-evaluation is related to occupation or work-related achievements. Occupational identity serves in the creation of meaning and structure in individuals' lives. As mentioned before, international students often trade their careers in their home country to become graduate students. As Ivan narrates:

> I think that mental change, what you are referring to, I think before I came to the U.S. I was going through an interview at the American embassy, and they asked me what I am going to do, and I filled out all the forms, and I think from that time it was a slow change of being a rector of the university, of a college, to being a student again. Because I realized and I told myself don't think of yourself too high, I kind of managed that change that it doesn't bother me that I am a student again. In fact, I want to learn, and I there is so much to learn, and they know so much more than I do. Learning the tools that they can teach me, and I apply these tools to study cross-cultural differences, and similarities, and how cultures are different, that speaks to the globalization of the world and I like that. I don't mind being a student.

At the particular moment when he began to identify himself as a student, Ivan realized that he was changing an important aspect of his identity. This was a conscious effort that not everyone undergoes. For others, there is a struggle as they compare

themselves before and after their relocation to the U.S. For spouses the conflict is greater because they have voluntarily given up their occupational identity, even if they were not completely convinced by the idea. Dependents make sense of their occupational identity by placing more importance on the family or spousal relationship and understanding their loss as a sacrifice for the greater good. This is especially true for individuals whose original culture was collectivistic. Xia, a 29-year-old dependent from China expressed her feelings about her occupational identity:

> So, I think I really changed a lot to what I was before. I really miss the old me, a lot, because I was happier, and I was more powerful when I was in China. I can control a lot of things in my life like, where I want to go, what I want to do, which person I want to be. Here, I think the freedom of free choice becomes lesser for me. Especially, I can't really choose a job, right? I have to worry about my status first.

For dependents, a restricted life contrasts with the lives of other adults who have more possibilities for constructing valued selves (Charmaz, 1983). Immigration restrictions make dependents more aware of the loss of freedom of choice that they enjoyed in their home culture. In order to cope with this loss, dependents must design different strategies. Some strategies include dedicating their time to their children, taking up activities like exercise, taking online courses, and in some cases taking up low-paying jobs that don't require them to provide identification. All coping strategies provide dependents with the opportunity to reconstruct their biographies and self-definition in a positive light. For example, Fen, a 27-year-old dependent from China felt so restless she found ways to keep busy:

That's something, I tried to read books because in China it got so busy you didn't have time to do your own stuff, like the things you really want to do, so I tried to discover what I can do with so much time. My friends, I would sneak into their classrooms, because I have a friend who is nearsighted and he cannot see the screen so he got into the Ph.D. program because he has a good listening ability, not because of his sight. So, I helped him to take notes. I tried to learn all the biochemistry stuff. I feel like although I am not in school, I am still learning and I am trying to adapt to the environment. I went to the Chemistry department seminars. I didn't really understand the stuff but I tried to observe the presenters. There if I don't understand the content, I can still learn how they present, how they can learn and try to organize the themes. There are times I understand the things and I feel super, super happy. Then if I have questions I can ask him [her husband] when we get home.

Coping strategies offer dependents proof that their lives were not entirely restricted because the activities became symbols of independence. Students also found restrictions although they came in a different form than their dependents. Immigration regulations become a constant reminder that a person does not fully belong in the new culture. As they adapt to their new occupational identity as international students, participants found themselves preoccupied with their immigration and visa status. Students must be observant of laws that dictate if they may accept employment and the type of employment, the availability of post-completion training with its own set of rules, ability to enter or leave the U.S., etc. Zang Wei, a 35-year-old Engineering student from China explained:

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When I first came to U.S. I thought, I will be here for four or five years, that's long time, we can live OK for that time. But it has been three years now and it doesn't feel like long time. I should find a job soon because my visa will not work after some time and I don't want to become F-2. I have to count exact days when I graduate because there is a window when you can apply for OPT. I worry because I have heard people in immigration are very tough. I can't make any mistakes or I will lose all of the work I did.

Zang Wei's expression of concern refers to losing his status as a student and having to become an F-2, or a dependent of his wife. In this way, immigration regulations become an integral part of the biographical reconstruction and a determinant of occupational identity.

Another aspect of identity that is challenged when individuals immigrate to the U.S. is the roles that men and women play. Gender identity is socially constructed since childhood in accordance to the cultural expectations of the home country. Each culture has a set of gender categories that are the base of individuals' social identity in relation to other members of that culture.

Participants often explained that they had changed certain gendered behaviors as a result of the biographical disruption. Although many graduate students across the U.S. experience difficulties with study-work-life balance, there are cultural differences that add to international students' responsibilities. For female students in particular, there was an expectation that they should take care of most household chores and most of the child rearing responsibilities on top of providing financially for the family and obtaining their degree. The challenge of traditional gender norms created dissonance in both student and

dependent participants. Reconstructing a biography where such fundamental beliefs are challenged represents added acculturation work for both student and dependent, which resulted in participants often adjusting their discourse. When male participants spoke of taking up new responsibilities within the household, they would always refer to their actions as "helping their wives" there was never an assumption that there was an equal responsibility from both partners. Female dependents, however, were always assumed to be in charge of household and child-upbringing. For Ajit, a male dependent from India, his new responsibilities in the family have proved that it was something he was unaware of before he came to the U.S., and that it had been a strain on his wife; however his contribution is still not recognized as part of his share of work, but as a kind gesture towards his wife:

> Laundry is something that I would mention, it is something that changed, after coming here, because when I was in India, laundry is something that I never did, as I remember. She always did it. When we came here, she got busy with the work and I was free so I took over that kind of work, like doing laundry. I basically started *helping her more*, after coming here. I don't think I was doing the same thing in India probably.

Like other forms of knowledge, gender stereotypes are part of each individual's culture (Devine, 1989). Challenging gender roles is a stressor for some individuals because it questions the gendered identity that they have learned in their culture since childhood. Although the traditional view of the male as the breadwinner and female as the homemaker has shifted over time in the United States, this is not the case in many other places around the world.

Like gender identity, cultural identity allows individuals to view themselves and others as belonging to a particular group with shared characteristics. An individual's worldview is shaped by their culture, ethnicity, and race. As individuals go through the acculturation process, they develop cultural identities that integrate their original culture and their host culture. As individuals are exposed to new behaviors and experiences, they adopt the ones that seem most congruent with their ideals. Cultural identity formation is not static, it changes as individuals explore the meanings of other cultural identities. For the participants in this study, there were various behaviors that were accepted and adopted. Participants felt that the new behaviors were congruent with their values and ideals even when they differed from their home culture's. For Damla, a 38-year-old dependent from Turkey, there were several behaviors that she found appealing from the new culture:

> I changed 90% in my design, my way of dress it's all different. In my country I
> can't dress like at home. I had a dress with a scarf, you know? The culture is like
> this. But here, no, I'm so free because I'm alone with my husband. My brother is
> not with me, my uncle is not with me, so I'm taking a rest.

Damla's husband, Acar, also found it liberating to adopt new behaviors that he would not be able to engage in his home culture, and he agreed with his wife:

> My wife, in Turkey, they all dressed in black. I say don't dress in black. Black
> dress reminded me always of a sad thing. Like terrorist, all dressed in black.
> Don't dress in black. Black means sadness. Maybe one day, but we changed that.
> Absolutely.

The topic of religion naturally emerged in participant's accounts. It is important to recognize that participants' religion was regarded as an integral part of their sense of self. There were several meanings attributed to religious practices or lack thereof. For some participants, the way they had practiced and understood religion in their home country was challenged when they arrived in the United States. For example, Mayra a 39-year-old dependent from Colombia talked about how when she arrived in the United States she had to become more tolerant to differences and diversity:

> When we lived in Colombia it was very different, they told us in church, because we are Christian, and there are not many Christian churches in Colombia, it is mostly Catholic, so they would say we had to follow all this rules and see the world in a specific way. When we got here I realized that we could be Christian and still co-exist with people who are different. It opened up my mind, I feel like I know so many different people now, I don't have to agree with all of their decisions, but I can be a friend or neighbor you know?

Religious identity is an important contributing factor in the multiple identities that make up the sense of self (Peek, 2005). Religion often aids immigrants in their preservation of cultural and ethnic traditions (Bankston & Zhou, 1996). When reconstructing their biographies, international students and their spouses must determine to what degree they want to preserve or reject their religious practice as they had integrated it in their original culture. For dependents in particular, religion provides a worldview that may be familiar for those seeking to retain some of their home culture or an entryway for those seeking to assimilate into the new culture. As Natalia stated:

Like here, at first, our first stay in U.S. 15 years ago, it seems like we stayed in a

Christian environment and it seems like it was very friendly, very secure, more,

openly and more naïve way, and it was just easy to live.

Identity is also negotiated as a couple. Dyads have engaged in the process of

identity negotiation since they first met. As they establish their identities they define their

mutual expectations, obligations, and the nature of their relationship (Swann, Johnson, &

Bosson, 2009). As couples move to a different country, each individual goes through a

series of changes in their identity. As it was mentioned before, individuals' occupational,

religious, and cultural identities encounter challenges that can potentially strengthen or

transform them. As their identities change, partners must establish their new identity

within the dyad and accommodate their place within the family. The communication

between partners is fundamental in the reconciliation of the two competing processes in

the relationship. Stable identities provide people a sense of psychological coherence that

provide order into relationships (Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). When there is

perceived incongruence in the messages of the dyad, the dissonance may result in conflict

within the dyad.

Married dyads travelling abroad often rely on each other to navigate the new

culture. Occasionally, dyads will have made contact with people already established in

the host country, but the contacts are often acquaintances or people whom the couple has

never met in person. Individuals have a need to feel connected to others, and arriving to a

place where they do not have many friends or acquaintances makes that need be unmet.

Dyads in this study often expressed having a stronger family relationship than they had

had before moving to the host country. They talked about having new relationships but

relying mostly on each other. Being away from their family and life-long friends, made

the marriage stronger as they overcame obstacles together. Each individual within the

dyad had a need for connectedness within the dyad, and they achieved it by cultivating

their identity as a good, supportive spouse. In order to achieve this goal, they sought to

contribute to the family, both emotionally and through actions such as cooking when one

of them was too tired to do it, or going places they did not necessarily want to go, but

their spouse did. This was the case for Jasmine, who loves travelling and seeing new

places:

> Also, I really want to go outside and try different things like, I am in Kentucky so
>
> I want to climb all the mountains I can climb so he is always cooperating. He is
>
> the person that always wants to stay at home, and because I really like to travel,
>
> he will accompany me, and we bring the baby too. So, we hike, in the summer we
>
> go hiking if the weather permits. Also, I love to go to the park, national parks, so
>
> during Christmas holidays we always go to see all the national parks. I think
>
> that's good too. It builds my confidence if I can prove myself in travel, like in a
>
> new place, totally new, I feel more powerful when I come back. His cooperation,
>
> or his agreeing is really important for that.

As individuals communicate their identities, they will often receive feedback from

their partners. The feedback should allow the sender to meet their needs of

connectedness, and of agency. In a married dyad, this may be achieved by establishing

each person's specific roles or characteristics. For example, one individual may be

established as the caregiver and the other as the provider. To assert these roles,

individuals constantly behave in ways that are self-verifying. Keiko, a 27-year-old

dependent originally from Japan, talks about trying to be what she considers a good wife to Jaime. The assertion of her identity is expressed through her words and her behaviors:

> I think I fulfill all his expectations! [Laughs] No, really, I think I try to be a good wife always, or most of the time, because he is working so hard at school and to make enough money for us yes? I am not like a traditional Japanese wife, I guess that's why I married a Mexican man. But I do try to do as much as I can so that he doesn't have to worry about things. I know this is temporary, but even when we go back to Mexico I think I will continue to do a lot of this things because I like to be supportive. Even if I get a job when we go back, I will be the same. It make me happy.

Jaime, tries to give Keiko good feedback and expresses his appreciation for what she does. This in turn reaffirms Keiko's agency and her role within the dyad. Her identity within the couple is validated and she continues to enact behaviors along the same line. For some couples, there are instances when the feedback results in contradictions to an individual's identity. In those cases, individuals asserting their identity must reassess and decide whether to continue with the same strategy or give up the behavior completely.

Individuals communicate their identities between one another through different means. On the non-verbal level, participants referred to using identity cues or signs of who they are. For example, individuals who were in the assimilation category of acculturation, would exhibit cues that referred to their home culture, and would reject those that were associated with the host culture. Alexa, a 28-year-old dependent from Colombia was eager to show pride in her Latin-American roots and expressed concern for becoming "too American". She wore a bright colored dress and said it had been hand

made in her hometown. Her cell-phone displayed a case with the map of Colombia in blue, yellow, and red (the national flag colors). Alexa referred to a recent conversation she had with Carlos, her husband:

> I have already told Carlos, we are going back to Cali as soon as he is done. I miss my people, I miss my food, I miss my music! Don't get me wrong, it has been a good experience being here, but honestly there is so much missing! I don't want to lose my rhythm you know? [Laughs] People here, they are not creative like we are, we love color in our clothes, we love to dance, we are so creative. Here it is like everyone wears a uniform. Winter, everyone has the same coat, wears dark colors. Fall, they wear the pants with the vest. Every time it is like who are you? What do you want to say about yourself you know? He wants to stay, but no. We are going back.

Alexa, like other sojourners, expresses her ethnic identity both in her discourse and in other visual cues. For her husband the message is clear and he accepts it even if he would like to pursue other professional opportunities in the U.S.:

> I think I am OK, here or in Colombia, to tell you the truth, I think I could have a better job if I was to stay here after I am finished with the Ph.D. But Alexa has made it clear she wants to go back, so… [Laughs] I guess we are going back! Even when we are here it is like being in Colombia with this wife! She has pictures of Cali and all our relatives all over the apartment. I don't even know how she does it but she cooks Colombian food so often, she even made *agua de pana* the other day! I thought it was not easy to do that here, but leave it to Alexa…

Alexa's identity negotiation strategy has multiple expressions. For Carlos, this represents only minor dissonance, since he thinks he could have better opportunities in the U.S., but he recognizes that in order to have a successful relationship he must negotiate and give up something that is less important.

Another strategy used by sojourners to negotiate their identity is joining identity-confirming groups. For some sojourners, it is important to meet U.S. citizens and establish relationships with them, while sojourners whose identity is more related to their home country will want to socialize with other co-nationals.

Religious identity is also commonly reinforced through group membership. For Mayra, going to mass every Sunday provides opportunities to connect not only with other Catholics but with a Spanish speaking Latin-American group. Through the group, Mayra and her husband have created close bonds with other couples from their native Colombia, and from a few other Spanish-speaking countries. Through those friends, Mayra was able to secure a part-time job that was allowed by her particular visa status. Occupational identity is easy to reaffirm for students, who are dedicated to the study of their particular field and work with others from the same discipline on a daily basis. For dependents, however the link to their occupational identity is lost as they are unable to practice their profession. For some many dependents it is a difficult moment when they meet someone and they have to identify themselves. Ajit, a 37-year-old male dependent explained that when he meets someone he would like them to know about his job back in India:

> Maybe I'll talk about my promotion, because that's what I think of. Basically,
> yeah, I started working very early. Right after college I started working as a
> software engineer and I worked full-time for eleven years.

Negotiating identity is an ongoing process, even for couples that have been married for a number of years. Alexander and Weil (1969) described the term *situated identity* to refer to identity negotiation within a certain context. In the case of acculturating couples, the change of culture contributes to a thorough reassessment of their identities. Individuals must decide whether the person they were before they relocated is the same person they want to be in the new country. In some cases, such as with occupational identity, individuals are obligated to adapt their new biography and self-perception and redefine who they are, within and outside the dyad.

Chapter five: Discussion and Conclusions

For the first time in decades, the number of international students coming to the U.S. has not grown. Just as many universities believed that the crisis from the 2008 recession was over, campuses across the U.S. are forced to make cuts, in part because of a loss of international students (Saul, 2018). If educational institutions want this trend to change they may start by providing services that address the needs of international students and their dependents. It is important to raise awareness of how acculturation represents a biographical disruption. For the participants in this study, acculturation began even months or even years before they came to the U.S. This constitutes an event of great importance. Immigrants and sojourners must deal with varying levels of acculturative stress in part because of the added acculturation communication work. Acculturation communication work is influenced in turn by each person's acculturation category. As international students and their dependents navigate through the new culture, they must reconstruct their biographies and their identities in order to have a successful experience.

In this dissertation, I gathered the narratives of the experiences of 16.5 couples of sojourners, 12 male and 4 female graduate international students, as well as 13 female and 4 male dependents from 12 different countries. In this case, I used Berry's acculturation model to understand the phenomenon. After both cycles of coding were complete, the data was organized based on the research questions. Organizing the data in an outline allowed me to "weave" the results into a coherent narrative.

The results in Chapter 4 show that acculturation is a biographical disruption in a manner similar to chronic illness. Graduate international students and their dependents begin the acculturation process before they leave their home countries and communication with others often heightens their feelings of uncertainty. Relocating also means that sojourners and immigrants are obligated to change aspects of their original culture. Often, they must adjust their behavior to fit the new cultural norms. Whether they need to change their language in order to communicate or they need to be constantly aware of immigration regulations, international students and their dependents have added communication work. Examining how international students and their dependents talked about the experience of acculturation provided new illustrations of acculturation communication work.

The findings also show that the biographical disruption and acculturation communication work are different for students and dependents. The source of students' acculturation communication work was often within the academic context while dependents found acculturation challenges from their loss of freedom of choice. Dyads engaged in acculturation communication work by redefining their roles. New roles sometimes meant challenging gendered behavior norms from their home countries.

The present study places the existing interpersonal communication literature in a new context. Biographical disruption can be studied from contexts other than health and chronic illness, in this case acculturation. This analysis considers that participants' narratives of their experience with acculturation are representative of a life-altering moment in their lives. This is highly influenced by the acculturation category they are in and the subsequent strategies they use. Understanding the relationship of acculturation communication work and acculturation categories shows that assimilation and separation result in higher levels of communication work than integration. The experience of acculturation is complex and unique to each person. In order to support acculturating individuals, I present the theoretical and practical implications of this study.

Theoretical Implications

With this study I contribute to the literature on acculturation by focusing on graduate international students and their spouses, a population that had been scarcely focused on before (DeVerthelyi, 1995). I also extend the research of biographical disruptions beyond the field of chronic illness to also include acculturation. I show the difference between the communication work of graduate international students and their spouses in order to highlight how each individual is influenced by their own acculturation style in order to cope with the added demands of acculturative communication work. Finally, I describe how international students and their spouses use narrative reconstruction to establish new identities in their new context.

Through the first research question I found that participants found acculturation to be as much a disruptive experience as chronic illness has been described to be. The disruption begins when students decide to apply for a program of study in a different

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country. Students discuss with their spouses the possible benefits and drawbacks of furthering their education in a different place. The nature of acculturation has been mostly examined from the moment a person arrives to the new location. Students and dependents engage in different modes of communication with those around them and sometimes with others who have preceded them in studying abroad. They seek to reduce their uncertainty by seeking information from various sources. This practice can be flawed since co-nationals often hold stereotypical views of the new culture. The initial move to the new country also presents difficulties. Often students must travel to the new place by themselves and are separated from their loved ones for days, months, or even years. Previous literature (Irwin, 2007; Pedersen, 1994; Xia, 2009) considered that all individuals who moved to a new location went through the same stages of culture shock, including "the honeymoon stage". This first stage was thought to be a moment when sojourners and immigrants had their first contact with the new culture and found everything to be good and exciting. This is hardly the case for international students and their dependents, who found great uncertainty in their arrival and a new experience of acculturation communication work.

Like biographical disruption, communication work has been studied in the context of chronic illness. Introducing communication work to a different frame of reference provided insight into the communication process of immigrants and sojourners. Consistent with the existing literature on communication work, international students and their dependents constantly experienced competing demands as they purposefully designed their messages. Unlike communication work during chronic illness, acculturation communication work was present during all students' and dependents'

interactions except the ones amongst themselves. This meant that only in conversations held within the dyad there was no added acculturation communication work. Participants spoke of different forms of acculturation communication work. This could be in the challenged gender roles, in language difficulties, and in different ways of practicing religion, amongst others.

In order to better understand communication work, I examined its relationship to the four acculturation categories described by Berry. The first category, assimilation required high levels of acculturation communication work because individuals were making an effort to blend into the new culture. Participants in this category had heightened awareness of their differences with the host culture and sought to minimize them by shedding their original culture. This was similar to those participants in the separation category in the sense that they too were constantly aware of their differences with the host culture. Participants who chose separation rejected the new culture and continuously found ways to symbolize their adherence to their original culture. The constant rejection resulted in higher levels of communication work. It was only participants in the integration category that had less communication work. This was due to the fact that they decided to adopt some of the new behaviors but also keep some of their previous behaviors. As mentioned before, there were no individuals belonging to the marginalization category in the sample.

Finally, participants spoke about how they reconstructed their biography by adapting their identities. Identity is formed since early childhood and is shaped by the culture in which a person is encultured. For several participants, moving to the U.S. was the first time they had been away from their original culture. Therefore, changing their

identities to fit into the new culture was not a simple feat. The change in identities was a

different experience for students and their dependents. Occupational identity, for example

was a positive experience for students, who had chosen to follow their academic

aspirations. Occupational identity was a main source of acculturative stress for many of

the dependents, who had to adhere to immigration regulations and were limited in their

freedom of choice. Biographical reconstruction meant that students and dependents had

to adjust their self-perception in a way that allowed them to make sense of their place

within the new society.

Practical Implications

The findings from the present study provide information that can be used in the

design and implementation of future institutional policies and interventions aimed at

improving the quality of life of international students and their dependents. As it has been

mentioned, it is in the best interest of institutions of higher learning to attract and support

graduate international students. The success of international students is not only

determined by their academic abilities, their acculturation experience influences the

amount of acculturative stress they experience and their ability to cope with it. By

providing a better experience for their dependents, institutions also improve students'

quality of life. International students will benefit from knowing that their dependents

have a positive acculturation experience and will be better able to function in the

academic setting.

Colleges and universities that sponsor graduate international students and their

dependents can use the findings from the present study, first, by acknowledging that

acculturation represents a biographical disruption. During this turning point, international

students require different support than local graduate students. Providing resources specific to this population will result in benefits not only to the students but to the overall environment at the institution. Having personnel that are dedicated to international students' quality of life and not only for educational/immigration issues would ease the acculturation experience.

Institutions can also benefit from understanding the additional acculturation communication work of international students and their spouses. For students in particular, it would prove beneficial to raise awareness of acculturation communication work within the institution. Staff and faculty could better understand and accommodate to the specific needs of graduate international students. It would be especially useful to raise awareness of the different categories of acculturation so that those who are identified as having more dissonance can receive the support that they require.

It is of particular relevance that institutions recognize that dependents are indirectly a part of institutional culture and should be helped to navigate their acculturation experience. Dependents often struggle to reconstruct their identities with their various limitations. Identifying the acculturation categories of dependents and providing them with the support that they require would be an indirect way of helping international students during their acculturation process.

By gaining insight into the acculturation strategies of both students and dependents, institutions could design and provide material that could help individuals and families to navigate the new context. Both students and dependents can be made aware of the challenges they will encounter even before they relocate to the new place. Providing access to the experiences that other graduate students and dependents have faced in the

past and how they have been able to manage and overcome them will allow incoming students and dependents to be better prepared for the challenges and also will give them the opportunity to plan for their own ways of dealing with the new situations.

For couples where one person is a student and one is a dependent, it would also be helpful to be aware of the added acculturation communication work before it begins in order to anticipate possible strategies. Couples can avoid conflict if they are able to discuss issues that might cause acculturative stress on one or both spouses straining the relationship. Universities can help acculturating couples by raising awareness of possible sources of stress or conflict and strategies other couples have used to overcome it. For example, making dependents aware that they will not be able to work or study, but also provide some alternatives like volunteer work with partner organizations or available parenting groups close to the institution.

Limitations

As in any scientific inquiry, there were limitations to the present research study. There are as of this date, 195 countries in the world. Some regions share cultural backgrounds and may be similar in the values and behaviors that are deemed acceptable. In the present study there were individuals from only 12 countries. There was enough consistency to reach saturation on the specific topics that were being investigated, however it would be interesting to explore more dyads from other countries and cultures.

Another limitation rose from the fact that I chose to conduct face-to-face interviews, this limited my recruitment to individuals in a same geographic location. Experiences from students and families in other regions may encounter different barriers in their acculturation experience. International students may encounter different reception

in different locations, depending on the location, urbanity, demographics, etc. The experience of my participants was influenced by the fact that all students attended the same Midwestern institution.

An added limitation refers to the recruitment of participants who belonged to the marginalization acculturation category. Berry (1997) mentions that marginalization is an unlikely category, it would imply that an individual does not have any interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in relating to others. Such individuals would be difficult to reach if they were indeed present.

Finally, my own presence as an international student might have had an impact on participant's accounts. Often this quality meant that participants would share their stories because I was considered "an insider" but it could also mean that they could skip part of their narratives assuming that I would already know it as part of my own experience. I found that some of the students might have more reluctance to disclose aspects that they found face threatening given the fact that I was a peer.

<center>**Appendix 1**</center>

Interview protocol

International students and their dependents recruited for this study will be asked the

following questions in an in-depth interview:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to

understand the experience of international students and their families in the U.S. Your

participation is very important. The interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes.

I will now, ask you a series of questions about your decision to come to the U.S., and

how that experience has been for you.

<center>International students and their spouses</center>

<center>Interview protocol rationale and questionnaire</center>

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to

understand the experience of international students and their families in the U.S. Your

participation is very important. The interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes.

I would first like to ask you some general questions about yourself.

Demographic initial questions

1. What is your gender?

2. How old are you?

3. What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?

4. What is your relationship status with the other person included in this study?

5. How long have you been in this relationship?

6. Do you have any children?

7. Where are you originally from?

8. How long has it been since you moved?

General questions

Now I would want to ask about your decision to move to the U.S., and how you talk about it with your spouse and others.

1. Can you tell me the story of how you decided to come to the U.S.?

    -Who came up with the idea? What things were more important for you in making that decision?

2. Can you tell me about the first day you arrived in the U.S.?

Identity

3. Can you tell me a story that describes who you were before you came to the U.S.?

    -What activities did you do before you came that made you who you were? What activities do you do now that define you? What activities made you feel fulfilled?

4. What do you think is important that other people know about you?

5. Moving to a different country means changing many aspects of your life. Can you tell me about a time when you felt you had changed from the person you were before you came to the U.S?

6. Can you tell me about a conversation you have had with your spouse where you talked about these changes?

- What was most important for you to obtain from this conversation? Would you say you were more concerned about getting your spouse to do something, about expressing your values and beliefs or about improving your relationship?

7. Would you be willing to risk upsetting your spouse during a conversation if it meant he/she would better understand who you are?

Relational

8. What is important to you in your relationship with your spouse?

9. What are some ways you are trying to accomplish those things that are important to you?

10. What do you think is important to your spouse in terms of your relationship?

-What are some ways that your spouse is trying to accomplish those things that are important to him/her?

11. What is the most recent conversation you had with your spouse about your relationship?

-What did you want to accomplish with this conversation? Would you say it was more important for you to get your spouse to do something, to preserve the relationship, or to express yourself and your values?

12. In a marital relationship each person plays different roles. What roles do you play within your marital relationship? Can you tell me a story of those different aspects in your relationship?

13. Within this marital relationship, how do you think your spouse would describe you?

14. How do you think someone who knows you as a couple would describe the two of you?

-How would the way people in your home country versus the way people in the U.S. would describe you as a couple be similar? How would the two groups be different in how they describe you as a couple?

15. As a couple, what social groups did you commonly spend time with in your home country?

-Can you tell me a story of why you felt a sense of belonging to those groups? Are there groups in the U.S. that make you feel the same as the ones in your home country? How are they different? What roles did you play in those groups?

16. [STUDENT] There has been a changing political climate in the U.S. in the last year. Can you tell me a story of how this has impacted your decision to study in the U.S.?

-What are some of your most important concerns about the current political climate? Do you discuss this issues with other students? Do you feel you can express all of your concerns about these issues with your spouse?

17. [SPOUSE] There has been a changing political climate in the U.S. in the last year. Can you tell me how this has impacted your desire to live in the U.S.?

-What are some of your most important concerns about the current political climate? Who do you talk to about this issues? Are you able to express this issues to your

spouse? Do you ever feel there are some issues relating to the political climate that you cannot discuss with your spouse?

18. When having a conversation with your spouse about the political climate in the U.S., are there specific actions you want your spouse to do? Do you feel you can express your values and beliefs openly? Do you feel concerns about making the other person upset?

19. [STUDENT] When speaking to other foreign students about the political climate in the U.S., are there specific actions you would want them to do? Do you feel you can express your values and beliefs openly? Do you feel concerns about making the other person upset?

20. [SPOUSE] When speaking to friends about the political climate in the U.S., are there specific actions you would want them to do? Do you feel you can express your values and beliefs openly? Do you feel concerns about making the other person upset?

21. Can you tell me of a time when you felt you could not or should not share your concerns with your spouse?

     - What prevented you from openly disclosing those concerns?

22. Can you tell me about any incidents that you have encountered with people from the host country that you think are related to the current political climate?

23. Can you tell me about the changes your relationship has undergone since your move to the U.S.?

24. Can you tell me about the different responsibilities you have undertaken when you moved to the U.S.?

25. [SPOUSE] How do you feel about being labeled as your spouse's "dependent"?

26. [SPOUSE] Can you tell me about some limitations that you have now that you did not have in your country of origin?

   - Can you tell me about an activity that you cannot participate in as a result of being a dependent?

27. What would be a common situation where you received support from someone in your home country?

   -Other than that, who would you ask for support when you needed it in your home country? Did those people also expect you to provide support for them? Are there ways you can still provide support for them now?

28. Can you tell me about a time when you felt support from someone in the U.S?

   -How did you ask for this support? Do you feel you need to have different strategies for asking for support in the U.S. than in your country of origin?

29. Can you tell me about a time when you felt you did not receive the support you needed in the U.S.?

30. Can you tell me a story of how your spouse has provided support for you when you need it?

   -How did you ask your spouse for the support?

Finally, I would like to thank you for sharing your experiences and your thoughts with me today. Your help with this study is very important. What questions do you have for me?

Appendix 2

Demographic information

<div align="right">Participant code_____</div>

Age_____   Country of origin/Nationality_____

Current studies in the U.S. _____

Time in U.S. (in years and months) _____

Duration of relationship (in years and months) _____

Number of children and ages (if applicable) _____

Highest level of education completed _____

Occupation in home country _____

Number of hours worked per week in home country before moving

_____

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    the effects of gender, religion, nationality and sojourner status. *Intercultural*

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chronic illness and biographical disruption. *Sociology of health & illness*, *29*(4),
610-626.

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Yeh, C., & Inose, M. (2003) International students' reported English fluency, social
support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress.
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Zaharopoulos, T. (1991). Acculturation through the study of intercultural communication:
Learning the Greek culture. *World Communication, 20*(2), 91-98.

Ana X. de la Serna
Curriculum Vitae

Education

Ph.D., Communication
University of Kentucky, Expected August 2018
Area: Health Communication, Intercultural Communication
Advisor: Donald Helme Ph.D.

M.A., Political Analysis and Media
May, 2013
Instituto Tecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey.
Mexico City, Mexico.
Thesis: Health Communication: HPV Vaccination Public Policy in Mexico
Advisor: Uriel Caballero Ph.D.

B. A., Visual Design and Communication
November, 2004
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico
Thesis: Image Bank for the National Cancer Institute of Mexico

Academic Employment

2014-present Graduate Teaching Assistant- University of Kentucky
August, 2016 Microteaching group leader, Graduate School, University of Kentucky
July, 2016 Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEARUP) Summer Academy at UK
July, 2015 Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEARUP) Summer Academy at UK

Book Chapters

De la Serna, A. X. (contracted). We are not free in the land of the free: International students. In Davis & Crane (Eds.) *The body politic: Bodily experience in a post-Trump world.* University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

Manuscripts in process

Dai, M., **De la Serna, A.X.**, Harrington, N. Condom use, knowledge and attitudes by educated females in China, India, and the U.S. (Submitted for publication)

Smith-Bachman, A., Helme, D., **De la Serna, A. X.,** Wombacher, K. Physician's perceptions of adolescent obesity: An ecological approach. (Submitted for publication)

De la Serna, A. X., Helme, D., Smith-Bachman, A., Wombacher, K. Divergent and convergent messages of high BMI adolescents and their parents. (Revising for journal submission)

De la Serna, A. X, Helme, D., Mazariegos, C. The dark side of social support: Dipping as a community of practice. (Revising for journal submission).

Conference Presentations

May, 2018 Physician's perceptions of adolescent obesity: An ecological approach. International Communication Association. Prague, Czech Republic.

May, 2018 The dark side of social support: Dipping as a community of practice. International Communication Association. Prague, Czech Republic.

April, 2018 Smokeless tobacco use in rural Appalachia. Kentucky Conference on Health Communication. Lexington, KY.

November, 2017 Latino Mentorship Initiative, National Communication Association Conference. Dallas, TX.

November, 2017 Microaggressions, visual literacy and educational instruction. Multicultural Opportunities, Strategies and Institutional Inclusiveness Conference. Lexington, KY.

April, 2017 Divergent and convergent messages of high BMI adolescents and their parents. D.C. Health Communication Conference. Washington, D.C.

April, 2017 Physician's perceptions of adolescent obesity: An ecological approach. D.C. Health Communication Conference. Washington, D.C.

November, 2016 Representation in keyword-based image search engines: Mexicans be like National Communication Association annual conference. Philadelphia, PA.

June, 2016 Condom use, knowledge and attitudes by educated females in China, India, and the U.S. International Communication Association annual conference. Fukuoka, Japan.

August, 2015 Fear Appeals and PMSV in Visual Warnings on Cigarette Packages as Predictors of Smoking Cessation among Young Adults. CDC National Conference on Health Communication, Marketing and Media. Atlanta, GA.

Research in process

De la Serna, A. X. International partners: Identity management and acculturative stress.

Helme, D., **De la Serna, A.X.**, Mazariegos, C. Masculinities and rurality and the practice of dipping. (Data analysis).

De la Serna, A. X., Garrison, M., Xeng, X., Radway, N. Microaggressions, visual literacy and educational instruction (data collection).

De la Serna, A. X. Frida Sofia: Rise and fall of a media created Mexican heroine. (Data collection).

Teaching (Instructor of record)

>Communication and composition I (2014 Fall & Spring)
>Communication and composition II (2015 Fall & Spring)
>Interpersonal communication (2016 Fall & Spring, 2017 Fall)
>Intercultural communication through film and media (2017 Summer & Fall: 2018 Spring)

Invited presentations

>March, 2018. Culture and Health. Webinar for the Building Epidemiological Capacity in   Kentucky (BECKY) committee.

Curriculum Development/Involvement

2017 Course development, University of Kentucky
>COM312 Intercultural communication through film and media
>Created syllabus with assignments and required reading for course

Awards

2016 College of Communication and Information Research Fellowship in Health
>Communication

2014-2017 Lyman T. Johnson Fellowship

2018 Viji Jeganathan Scholarship for Cross-Cultural Understanding

Service

>March, 2018 Reviewer for National Communication Association
>December, 2017 Reviewer Kentucky Conference of Health Communication
>November, 2017 Reviewer International Communication Association
>April, 2017 Reviewer National Communication Association
>November, 2016 Reviewer International Communication Association
>August, 2016 Graduate Student Panel for International Student Orientation
>August, 2016 Organization International Student Orientation
>April, 2016 Organization, logistics Kentucky Conference of Health Communication
>December, 2015 Reviewer Kentucky Conference of Health Communication
>December, 2015 Reviewer International Communication
>March, 2015 Teaching in the Global Classroom Panel
>August 2015 Logistics Graduate International Student Orientation
>August, 2015 Graduate Student Panel for International Student Orientation

May, 2015 Reviewer National Communication Association
January, 2015 Graduate Student Panel for International Student Orientation

Professional Organization Memberships

2013-present National Communication Association
    -Latin@ Communications, La Raza Caucus
2015-present International Communication Association
2016-present University of Kentucky Communication Graduate Students
Association
    -2017 CGSA Intercultural Communication Research Task Force Group
Leader