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This study explored the acculturative experiences of international graduate

students of Color. Current literature on international students' acculturative experiences

is predominantly limited to students' perceived inadequacies (e.g., language skills) and

challenges (e.g., "passive presence"). Although knowledge about these students'

challenges is valuable for counselors to provide effective interventions, a preoccupation

with limitations and challenges of this community deprives counselors of an opportunity

to offer an empowering space to further strengthen international students' cultural assets

and coping strategies (e.g., strong familial and ethnic community affiliation and

personality traits of resilience) in the face of adversities. Perhaps this preoccupation

partially explains why the utilization rate of campus counseling services for international

students remains at a dismal 2% (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004; Yi, Lin, Jenny,

& Kishimoto, 2003). The Eurocentric narrative of international students as culturally

impoverished perpetuates an impression of deficiency, consequently perhaps limiting

what college counselors address with their international student clients, especially those

who come from People of Color communities. Given that international students constitute

almost 14% of total enrollment in graduate schools in the U.S., this study focused on the

experiences of international graduate students of Color through interviews analyzed using

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996, 2007, 2009). Yosso's (2005)

theory of Community Cultural Wealth challenges the dominant interpretation of cultural

capital and highlights the diversity of cultural assets found in minoritized communities. A

fit between the study findings and Yosso's (2005) was also explored as a secondary research question. Eight participants were interviewed. A total of nine super-ordinate themes were identified: *Acceptance and Interactions with the American Society, Higher Education in the US, Adverse Mental Health Experiences, Home Country and Influences, Acculturation, Coping Strategies, Campus Counseling Services, Familial Cohesiveness and Growth and Self-Development.* Participants identified a variety of mental health stressors and cultural capitals to overcome the former. Implications for counselors and university officials are also offered to further aid a more positive and social-justice oriented support for international graduate students on American college campuses.

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS OF

COLOR AND THEIR CULTURAL CAPITAL:

A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

S Anandavalli

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Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by S Anandavalli has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair   _____
                         L. DiAnne Borders

Committee Members   _____
                         Craig S. Cashwell

                         _____
                         Leila E. Villaverde

                         _____
                         Kyung Yong Kim

February 28, 2019
Date of Acceptance by Committee

February 28, 2019
Date of Final Oral Examination

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Education becomes a sacred responsibility when it carries the dreams, sweat, and tears of three generations. It is not a whim. It is not an achievement. It is a duty that one fulfills to honor a community that pulls together its resources to educate one mind. Hence, to consider this *my* dissertation seems absurd. This document and the journey it demanded carries the stories of my grandparents who sacrificed everything to give their children the gift of education. It carries the numerous trips to annual book fair that my parents undertook to ensure my sister and I lacked nothing to succeed in an English dominated world. Its' folds contain the innumerable hours my relatives spent teaching me math and sciences, as a middle-school child. So, it is understandable that I am a mere presenter of a larger, invisible orchestra of visionaries and leaders in my family and community in India. Thank you Amma, Appa, and everyone for trusting me with your dreams and desires. Thank you Charu, for being my best friend and the most amazing sister in this world.

Every journey result in unanticipated blessings and well-wishers. My journey is no different. My deepest gratitude to Dr. L. DiAnne Borders, who received me into the world of higher education and academia with open arms. You offered my relentless questions a safe space, and responded to them with fierce intellect, and endless kindness. Words cannot describe my family's thankfulness to you. I am also indebted to Dr. Villaverde, for introducing me to myself- a Woman of Color, a feminist scholar and an inquirer. Thank you for teaching me to ask the right kind of questions. My journey would

From Srimad Bhagavatam (11.2.36)

कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा बुद्ध्यात्मना वा प्रकृतिस्वभावात् ।
करोमि यद्यत्सकलं परस्मै नारायणयेति समर्पयामि ॥

"Whatever I do with my mind, body, speech or with other senses of my body, or with my intellect or with my innate natural tendencies, I offer everything to the Creator."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are over a million international students in the U.S., from over 200 countries around the world (Institute of International Education, 2016). Current literature on international students provides counselors and researchers with a comprehensive picture of the challenges this community experiences during acculturation into the dominant U.S. culture. Some of these challenges have been found to adversely impact international students' study abroad experience: stress (e.g., Iwamoto & Liu, 2010; J.-S. Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Olivas & Li, 2006), homesickness (e.g., Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011a; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Thurber & Walton, 2012), loneliness (e.g., Servaty-Seib, Lockman, Shemwell, & Reid Marks, 2016), and English language difficulties (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Benzie, 2010; Dao, Donghyuck, & Chang, 2007a; Light, Xu, & Mossop, 1987), among others. Additionally, researchers have found that such manifestations of psychological distress contribute to the development of mental health issues such as depression (e.g., Dao, Donghyuck, & Chang, 2007), anxiety (e.g., Crawford, 2000; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003), or at times even suicidal ideation (e.g., Servaty-Seib et al., 2016) among international students. Adapting to a new country, language, culture, and education system, in addition to overcoming typical challenges associated with the college transition, can be daunting; these challenges have been connected to negative mental health consequences for

international students (e.g., Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007; Mukminin &

McMahon, 2013; Subanthore, 2011).

Knowledge about international students' mental health and their unique cultural

context is vital for counselors, as the range and frequency of challenges they experience

have been found to exceed those of domestic students' (Mori, 2000; Prieto-Welch, 2016).

Much of the research to date on international students' adjustments and challenges has

been based in Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation. Berry highlighted five factors of

acculturation: nature of the larger society, nature of contact, modes of acculturation,

social and demographic characteristics of the individual, and the individual's

psychological characteristics. One of Berry's main contributions to the acculturation

literature is the *modes of acculturation*. According to him, individuals adopt one or more

of four acculturation strategies in the face of a new culture. These strategies are

integration (strong identification with home and host cultures), assimilation (strong

identification with host culture, reduced identification with home culture), separation

(reduced identification with host culture, strong identification with home culture) and

marginalization (reduced identification with home and host cultures).

Although Berry's (1997) theory has proven to be valuable in helping researchers

(e.g., Dao et al., 2007a; Iwamoto & Liu, 2010; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu & Asrabadi,

1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003) identify factors that influence students' acculturation

experiences, Berry's theory suffers from some important limitations. Firstly, the theory is

individual-centric. Berry identifies factors such as the individual's psychological

characteristics and demographics, and the individual's modes of acculturation, but fails to

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consider that most international students in the U.S. come from collectivistic cultures, where strong ties with friends, ethnic communities, families, and religious groups play a significant role in an individual's well-being. Although the dominant U.S. culture is individualistic, almost 60% of international students come from predominantly People of Color Communities - China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia (IIE, 2016). These countries have cultures often founded on the principles of collectivism and social connectedness, yet Berry's theory doesn't take these key factors into account when considering an international student's acculturation strategies. The second limitation potentially explains the first drawback of the theory. Berry's theory does not offer researchers and practitioners a multicultural framework to conceptualize international students' preferred coping skills and cultural strengths that they can actively employ to support their mental health (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). On the contrary, international students have been found to actively engage in culturally unique strategies to navigate through the acculturation process. For instance, in many studies, international students have remarked on the positive impact of the strength they received from their families during their study abroad period (e.g., Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009; Sato & Hodge, 2015; S. Tatar, 2005). In one study of Chinese international students, several participants shared that their families were their biggest source of motivation for their academic achievement (He & Hutson, 2018). Co-nationals (a fellow international student from the same national group) have been found to be another source of support and strength, providing emotional support and guidance to new, incoming international students (He & Hutson, 2018; Yakunina et al., 2013).

Although these sources of cultural capital (social strengths that enhance chances of social mobility for individuals, especially in a stratified society) may not be popular and preferred for in White, Western, individualistic communities, international students have been repeatedly found to draw strength and support from families, co-nationals, and ethnic communities to support their well-being (He & Hutson, 2018; Pedersen, 1991; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009; Yakunina et al., 2013). Accordingly, Berry's theory of acculturation provides no avenue for counselors and researchers to intentionally explore and address international students' cultural capital, thereby neglecting to address how international students actively employ these strengths to potentially support their mental health during acculturation.

The tendency to neglect and possibly minimize international students' cultural strengths is not exclusive to Berry's theory. One related example of deficit-centric research of international students is the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). This scale is used to assess international students' experience of acculturative stress. The six factors it captures include homesickness, fear, guilt, perceived hatred, perceived discrimination, and culture shock/stress; all the factors are focused only on the negative or challenging aspects of acculturation. These are the distressful consequences of acculturation that international students can experience. However, this scale provides no opportunity for assessing the possible positive and growth-oriented outcomes of international students experiencing acculturative stress. In a recent dissertation study, Girmay (2017) explored the mental health needs and acculturative experiences of international graduate students. In her semi-structured

interview schedule, questions were predominantly centered around the challenging acculturation experiences of international students - "culture shock," "stressful part about being an international graduate student," and "balancing daily stressors" (p. 191). Admittedly, data on the challenging aspects of acculturation is of immense value for counselors and health professionals. It allows them to easily identity common presenting problems in this community. However, this student's dissertation perpetuates an incomplete and deficient image of international students. Questions around the strengths and strategies international students use to support their transition, as well as growth-oriented experiences of international students as an outcome of acculturation, could have provided counselors a valuable and more complete understanding of international students. Knowledge about the students' cultural capitals also can aid counselors in tailoring coping strategies that are appropriate for their cultural background. Yet, the researcher provided no opportunity for participants to perhaps share their experiences of resilience, growth, and cultural capital in maintaining their mental health during acculturation.

The trend of deficit-centric research of international students was captured well by Pendse and Inman (2017). In their 34-year content analysis of international student literature, the authors noted that "existing research on international students seemed to focus on adjustment problems and psychological distress, with little attention to the coping and resiliency factors of these students." (p. 31). Deficit-based approaches, according to feminist literature, are often employed by dominant cultures to characterize minoritized groups as inferior and inadequate (Harper, 2010; Irizarry, 2009). Similarly, in

a review of the literature of international students in the U.K., Lillyman and Bennett (2014) called for a strengths-based perspective of international students, and the shunning of a "paternalistic" (p. 64) and "deficit" (p. 63) view of them. Thus, a main concern that plagues research in the field of international students is the continuation of a **deficit-centric conceptualization of the international student population, and a lack of strengths-based exploration of their acculturation experiences.**

Long years of deficit-centric research of international students have possibly adversely impacted the multicultural competency of counselors working with international students. In fact, college-counselors' limited cultural sensitivity has been repeatedly found to be one of the primary reasons for international students' under-utilization of campus counseling services (Arthur, 2003; Boafa- Arthur & Boafa-Arthur, 2016; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Pendse & Inman, 2017). In fact, international students' rate of accessing campus counseling services has been found to be one of the lowest of all college students. Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, and Lucas (2004), found that only 2% of all international students used counseling services during the academic year; significantly, a third of them dropped out after intake. Predominantly, the students reached out to the counseling services for support regarding emotional issues (depression, anxiety), and academic concerns (selection of major and career), suggesting many were experiencing serious mental health challenges, and yet they did not continue with counseling. These findings were supported by Yakushko, Davidson, and Sanford-Martens (2008) in their review of archival records of a campus counseling center during a five-year period. The access rate by international students again was found to be low, with only 1.8% of all

international students at this university accessing formal counseling services during this period.

Since international students' utilization rate for counseling centers remains low despite their difficulties, it is worth exploring their alternative coping strategies, and how they support their mental health. A strengths-based approach recognizing the value of cultural support systems and capitals for international students can aid counselors in intentionally incorporating these resources in their work with international student clients. Learning how these cultural strengths and coping strategies are used by international students to support their mental health could enhance counselors' multicultural skills, which has been found to be crucial when counseling international students (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2000). Such research could help college counselors approach international student clients with increased cultural sensitivity and more comprehensive knowledge of their culture.

At present, some researchers indicate that international students indeed have unique cultural strengths and preferred coping strategies to support their mental health (G. Bradley, 2000; L. Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bingi, & Gould, 1995). For example, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) found that social supports provided by co-nationals had direct and buffering effects on stress symptoms for international graduate students. These social support systems were particularly helpful in reducing academic stressors for participants in the study. Yan and Berliner (2011) found that Chinese international students received emotional support, new information, and coping resources from their co-nationals, which made their transition more positive. Family support was found to be

another culturally unique way for international students to seek relief during emotional distress (He & Hutson, 2018; Komiya & Eells, 2001; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). A review of current literature on international students' mental health reveals that, although cultural strength-oriented variables such as friendship networks and family support (He & Hutson, 2018; Yakunina et al., 2013) have been explored, a theoretical framework viewing these variables as cultural assets have not been incorporated. Although it has been almost three decades since Pedersen's (1991) critique, the lack of singular framework to organize existing research findings and guide new discoveries regarding international students' mental health remains unaddressed by researchers in counseling. Using culturally inappropriate theories to counsel diverse communities without proper knowledge of their cultural norms and practices goes against the spirit of multiculturalism (American Counseling Association, 2014). A multicultural theory, on the other hand, can help us clearly identify cultural capital of international students and provide counselors an effective framework to guide their work with this community. The current research is an effort to explore the cultural strengths that international students employ to support their mental health, and potentially identify a theoretical framework to support it.

Critical Race Theory challenges the deficit-oriented perspective of minoritized communities. The theory's focus is on highlighting historical realities which have crystallized into oppressive, dogmatic structures in our society that disadvantage and minoritize individuals. The aim of critical theory, then, is "the critique and transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and

exploit humankind, by engagement in confrontation, even conflict" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.113). To engage in the process of transformation and challenge the exploitative structures of Euro-centric research, researchers must let go of the myth of singular reality- one of the main tenets of positivism. Critical Race Theory offers researchers a multicultural framework to conceptualize the cultural capital of international students.

Alternative Multicultural Framework

In one promising theory for understanding international students, Tara Yosso (2005) has used a Critical Race Theory perspective to understand cultural capital, or as she names it "Community Cultural Wealth." She called for researchers to resist and challenge Pierre Bordiue's (1985) traditional and oppressive interpretations of cultural capital, whereby ideals of only the privileged White, Western, middle class social groups were recognized as valuable. In her theory, she explored how an exclusive and privileged perception of cultural capital has resulted in minoritized groups being viewed as deficient, less capable, and low in cultural capital. For instance, historically, students of Color have scored lower on achievement scales (typically normed using the White population) than dominant White students. This finding was interpreted as White students being more intelligent than students of Color.

Yosso's (2005) theory on Communities of Wealth offers a theoretical framework that challenges a deficit-centric perspective of people of Color. Instead, it highlights the cultural knowledge, skills, and strengths possessed by socially marginalized groups such as multilingualism, familial support, and strong ethnic affinity. Yosso claimed that cultural strengths of minoritized communities were prone to be ignored, especially in the

face of dominant White culture, even if they provide significant strengths to these minoritized communities.

Although Yosso (2005) proposed the theory of Community Cultural Wealth to highlight the cultural capital of racial minorities in the U.S., her theory also may provide a theoretical framework to explore the cultural strengths and capital of international students in the U.S. The current deficit-oriented research and counseling approach towards this minoritized community can be challenged by exploring and recognizing international students' unique cultural capital, using Yosso's theory.

Yosso (2005) named six types of capital (see Figure 1): **aspirational** (an individual and community's ability to maintain hopes and dreams, beyond their present situation, despite structural barriers); **social** (social networks within one's community, friendships and interactions that help one draw resources from each other to overcome challenges); **familial** (commitment to family, 'extended family,' one's community that provides a model for caring, coping, and loving); **resistant** (fighting oppression through oppositional behavior); l**inguistic** (intellectual and social skills developed through the use of more than one language and the traditions associated with language, such as story-telling, and shared narrative); and **navigational capital** (successfully *maneuvering* through social institutions that are inherently designed to be disadvantageous to people of Color). Several researchers have found that people of Color use one or more of these types of cultural resources to effectively maintain their physical, financial, and academic well-being (Alva, 1991; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Additionally, international students have been found to use familial support, aspiration to succeed

despite institutional barriers, and strong ethnic affinity (e.g., He & Hutson, 2018;

Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009; Sato & Hodge, 2015) to maintain their well-being.

However, the foundation of a strengths-based approach and a theoretical framework from

a multicultural perspective is lacking. Thus, Yosso's theory can potentially provide a

culturally sensitive theoretical framework to explore the various cultural capitals

international students actively use to support their mental health.
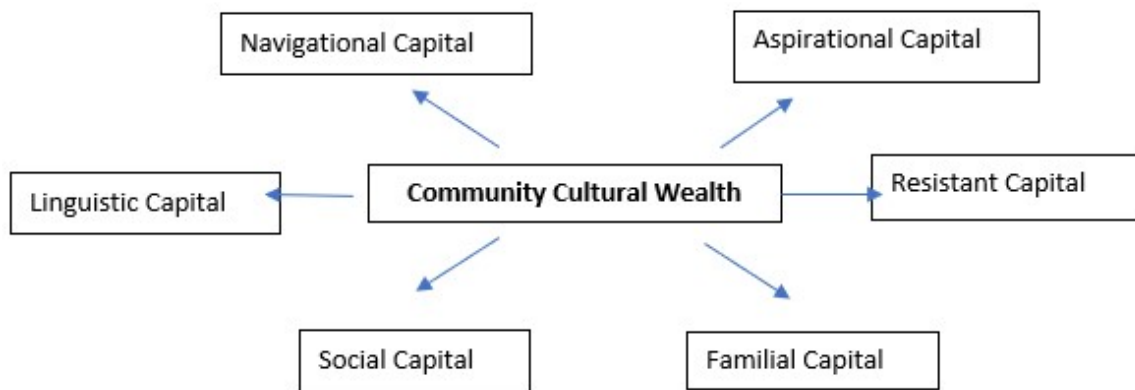
Figure 1. Yosso's Theory of Community Cultural Wealth (2005)

Statement of the Problem

Given the dearth of strengths-based research in the area of international students

and their mental health, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996) will

be the most appropriate methodology to explore how several types of Community

Cultural Wealth are used by international students to support their mental health. IPA

seeks to understand a lived experience through the voices of eligible informants. Eatough

and Smith (2008) suggested that "IPA attends to all aspects of this lived experience, from

the individual's wishes, desires, feelings, motivations, belief systems through to how

these manifest themselves or not in the behavior in action. Whatever phenomenon is being studied, the emphasis on what it is like to be experiencing this or that for this particular person" (p. 188). Thus, by using IPA, the experiences of international students using cultural strengths to support their mental health can be gathered.

Given that international students are a heterogenous community, with diversity in race, educational qualifications, and culture, it is prudent to narrow the population further. One in three international students in the U.S. is a graduate student, and 14% of all graduate students in the U.S. are international students (IIE, 2016). Graduate students complete their program over several years, and often face even more stressors than undergraduate students, given their academic commitments and the demands of graduate education (e.g., research, assistantship responsibilities). Hyun, Quinn, Madon, and Lustig (2007) explored the mental health needs of over 500 international graduate students and found over 44% of those surveyed had experienced emotional or stress related problems that significantly impacted their well-being. Although these rates were comparable to domestic students' percentages, international graduate students in the study were significantly less likely to reach out for counseling services. In short, a gap between the mental health needs and counseling services for international graduate students exists. Exploring the experiences of international graduate students in the current political and social climate in the U.S. may be particularly salient. For example, in a reflective essay by an international graduate student from India (Subanthore, 2011), the author shared his experience of acute xenophobia during the post 9/11 era. He shared his experience of "finding sanity and staying with it" in the face of persistent racist attacks. His choice of

the word *sanity* highlights how mental health of international students is vulnerable to various social and political factors. The author shared multiple resources he reached out to during this time - international students, mentors and advisors in his field, the honor society for graduate students in his field, and others. Yet, counseling services was not mentioned as a viable option to battle the distress he faced.

Researchers have also noted that international students from countries with predominantly people of Color populations experience more discrimination than international students from White, Western countries. Lee and Rice (2007) interviewed several international students, and found that those from the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Latin America, and India experienced significantly higher challenges than those from Canada and Europe. The researchers labelled this as "neo-racism" wherein the basis of discrimination are skin Color, culture, and relationships between home and host countries. In the same study, they found that one in four participants had experienced an intense form of neo-racism from advisors, domestic students, faculty members, and members from the community. Similarly, participants in Lee's study (2007) shared that they had become used to incidents of hate crimes: "Yeah, we generally walk back home from campus, and it was not a big deal, but people threw bottles at us. Being international students, you get used to it" (p. 29). Unfortunately, Lee did not explore what the participant did to cope with the potential shame and anger associated with the incident. Clearly, there are grave challenges to the mental health that international students of Color. Researchers must explore the informal support networks and cultural assets these students access to support their mental health in a hostile environment. Empirical support

on how these students use their cultural capital to possibly support their mental health can help counselors provide more informed mental health services. Thus, for this study, I will be focusing on international graduate students who also identify as persons of Color, and their experience of using Cultural Wealth to support their mental health.

Purpose of the Study

Current counseling and psychology literature on acculturation experiences of international students is predominantly dominated by a deficit-perspective. The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), for instance, only measures the negative and stress-related responses to acculturation. An opportunity for international students to share growth-oriented experiences as an outcome of acculturative stress is not provided in this scale. Use of such a scale limits counselors and researchers from understanding the multiple strengths international students may be incorporating in the face of acculturative stress, and their potential for growth in the face of acculturative stress. Another scale, American-International Relations Scale (Gargi Roysircar Sodowsky & Plake, 1991) views the ideal acculturation process as one in which the student tends to adopt American standards. For instance, international students' retaining their affinity with their ethnic groups and strong familial ties were viewed as an impediment to acculturation. Counseling and psychology literature on international students' mental health is saturated with a pathological and limitation-oriented perspectives (Pedersen, 1991; Pendse & Inman, 2017). Despite calls from researchers (Pedersen, 1991; Pendse & Inman, 2017) to address this gap, there are no multicultural theories to guide counselors and researchers in their work with this community. Thus, the

first purpose of this research is to provide a holistic understanding of the unique challenges international students faces and the specific strategies employed by them to support their mental health.

Also, through this research, I am seeking to explore a possible multicultural foundation for counselors to understand the international student community. Over 60% of international students in the U.S. come from predominantly People of Color communities, including China, India, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea (IIE, 2016). Current theories and instruments used by counselors and mental health professionals to understand the international student community are heavily based on White, Western ideals of acculturation. A multicultural theory acknowledging the cultural strengths and capitals that international students employ to maintain their mental health is needed to address this gap. Thus, a second purpose of this research is to examine a potential theoretical framework-Community Cultural Wealth theory (Yosso, 2005) to support international students' acculturation experiences from a strengths-based perspective. Yosso's theory (2005) of Community Cultural Wealth potentially offers counselors a multicultural framework to understand coping strategies and cultural capital of international graduate students of color, and how it potentially supports their mental health.

Research Questions

The research questions that need to be answered, given the gap in the literature, are the following:

Research Question 1: *How do international graduate students of Color support their mental health during the early acculturation phase in their study abroad period?*

Research Question 1.1 *To what extent does Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth theory offer a potential theoretical framework to support a strengths-based understanding of international graduate students of Color's mental health?*

Learning about the strategies and resources international students employ can help counselors identify specific mental health interventions and support resources they can intentionally incorporate into their work with international students. Identifying preferred cultural resources and a supporting theoretical framework can aid in bridging the persistent gap between professional counseling and the mental health needs of international students.

Need for the Study

Currently, there exists a gap between the acculturation-related mental health needs of international graduate students of Color, and counselors' understanding of the same (e.g., Hyun et al., 2007; Nilsson et al., 2004; Yakushko et al., 2008). To alleviate the various acculturation-related stressors international graduate students of Color experience, they seem to be reaching out to their friends, families, and ethnic groups more often than professional counseling services (Brinson & Kottler, 1995; He & Hutson, 2018; Yakushko et al., 2008). However, researchers have neglected to explore how and why international students use these informal support networks and cultural assets to support their mental health, and what other cultural assets they rely on to support their mental health. Additionally, there is no multicultural theoretical framework to guide

counselors in understanding how and why international students prefer accessing their cultural resources, and how these alternative resources support their mental health. Understanding this community's values, resilience, and coping strategies can provide a more holistic picture of the international student community for counselors and help them recruit and retain their international clients more effectively.

Multiculturalism is defined as "counseling that recognizes diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts" in the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014, p. 20). International students come from vastly diverse cultures. To remain ignorant of the Cultural Wealth of an international student in a counseling relationship would go against core counseling values of multiculturalism.

Definition of Terms

As the current research is founded on multiculturalism and critical theory, it is vital that the terminology used here is clearly defined.

Acculturation: the process of social, psychological and cultural change in an individual and/or group as a result of a cross-cultural encounter.

Bicultural friendship: Friendship between international student and U.S American individual

Community Cultural wealth (or Cultural Wealth): Refers to the six types of Cultural Wealth Yosso (2005; see Figure 1) identified in Communities of Color. These types include aspirational, navigational, linguistic, resistant, family, and social capital.

Co-national or Monocultural Friendship: Friendship between persons of same nationality

Cultural Asset or Cultural Capital: A strength that has value because of its contribution to a community or individual's creativity, wisdom, practices, and growth.

International graduate students of Color: Students who have travelled on a student visa with a specific purpose of gaining educational training at a master's or doctoral level. These students also identify as persons of Color.

Multicultural Friendship: Friendship between international students of nationalities other than the U.S.

Person of Color: A person who is not of European or White descent.

Brief Overview

This dissertation study is divided into five parts. Chapter I has provided the overview, significance of the study, the gap in the literature, and how this study will address the gap. It has also provided a brief introduction to the theoretical framework, research questions, and methodology that will be employed in this dissertation. Chapter II provides a detailed literature review toward a critique of existing research in the field of international students and their mental health. A detailed understanding of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth theory is also given to present relevant background content for the research question. Chapter III includes a description of the methodology, and the approach to be used in this study. The rationale for the methodology will also be provided, supported by empirical findings. Chapter IV will describe the findings from this study, and the concluding section, Chapter V, will present a discussion and interpretation of the findings.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

International students in the U.S. come from over 200 countries around the world (IIE, 2016). These students come from diverse racial, religious, ethnic, political, and socio-economic status. Researchers exploring their cultural transition, also known as acculturation, have provided a diverse range of variables impacting international students' acculturative experiences, and its impact on their mental health. This section provides an in-depth critique of current status of acculturation research, its limitations, and gap in the current literature.

Acculturation

Acculturation is "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Although there are several groups that experience acculturation due to cross-cultural engagement (e.g., businesspersons, travelers, immigrants, refugees and Third Culture Kids), the acculturative experiences of international students are somewhat unique, given that these are individuals who travel to another culture specifically for the purpose of advancing their educational and career

development. Thus, international students from around the world have to adjust to a larger cultural as well as an academic system in the host country.

To help mental health professionals better understand the acculturative experiences of international students and the factors influencing it, John W. Berry (1983, 1987, 1997), a Canadian cross-cultural psychologist, proposed a theory of acculturation. Although this theory was developed keeping a variety of cross-cultural groups in mind (e.g., refugees, sojourners, international students, and immigrants) it has been applied extensively in the international students literature (e.g., Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Boafa- Arthur & Boafa-Arthur, 2016; Dao, Donghyuck, & Chang, 2007; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Wang et al., 2012; Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013).

Berry's (1983, 1987, 1997) theory of acculturation has five influences or factors that determine the process of acculturation. The first influence is *the nature of the larger society.* This factor includes macrostructures and social institutions such as universities and education policies. and their impact on an individual. The second influence is *nature of contact* with the U.S. It reflects a wide range of contexts, including immigrants, international students, refugees, ethnic groups, and so on. Within this factor, international students are in an especially unique situation, given that they come to the host country for furthering their education, and most of them aim to return to their home country post education. The third factor refers to *modes of acculturation.* Berry described four strategies of acculturation, with each one having its unique challenges and concerns. *Integration* is one approach in which the individual is an observer and participant of the

dominant culture; however, attempts are also made to retain their original culture. The second one is *assimilation*. In this strategy, individuals give up their cultural practices, values, and beliefs to absorb the host culture. *Separation*, the third strategy, refers to individuals maintaining their own unique cultural identities and avoiding involvement with the host culture. The fourth strategy is *marginalization*, wherein the individuals participate neither in their own culture nor the host's culture. Berry's fourth factor includes *social and demographic characteristics* of international students while the fifth factor is comprised of one's *psychological characteristics*, such as personality, attachment style and expression of anger.

Berry's theory (1983, 1987, 1997) provides researchers a helpful theoretical framework to guide their research and identify gaps in knowledge about this community. Several variables such as English language efficacy (e.g., Dao et al., 2007; Ryan & Viete, 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2003), homesickness (e.g., Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007), and friendship networks (e.g., Brown, 2009; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013) have been identified using Berry's theoretical constructs. For instance, in the research on the role of English language proficiency on international students' acculturative experiences, researchers have typically found that increased expertise in the English language is an indicator of an international student's higher acculturative status. Typically, according to the researchers, low expertise of English language skills meant increased difficulties for students in adjusting to the U.S education system (Dao et al., 2007b), building meaningful friendship with domestic students (Pedersen, 1991), and difficulty in navigating through daily-life social situations

(Sam, 2001). The negative impact of poor English skills appears to be severe. In fact, in a study of Taiwanese international students in the U.S., depression among the participants was associated with low English language skills. English fluency mediated the effects of acculturation level on depression for men and women in the study. In at least one additional study, English language fluency was a predictor of international students' acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Given that international students in the U.S. come from over 200 countries, with varying linguistic backgrounds, it is possible that tens of thousands of international students suffer the harsh impact of the central role of English language skills in the nature of the larger society (Berry, 1983, 1987) in the U.S.

Friendship and social support is another variable that researchers have extensively explored in their work with international students. Lee, Koeske, and Sales (2004) tested for the buffering effect of social support on acculturative stress for a group of Korean international students in the U.S. The researchers found that acculturative stress was strongly related to symptoms of psychological distress in their sample. Additionally, they found that social support moderated and buffered the effects of stress on the distress symptoms. The buffering effects of social support was seen especially when international students indicated high level of acculturation to the "American language" (p. 399) and interpersonal associations. It is interesting that the buffering effects of social support, according to the researchers, was "mainly or exclusively" (p. 399) present when the participants were high on acculturation to the U.S. American normative culture and language use. It indicates the possibility that social support during acculturative support is conceptualized keeping predominantly popular U.S. American culture in mind. A

similar approach to acculturation was found in Zimmermann's (1995) study of international students' intercultural communication competence. According to her, verbal engagement with domestic students, was international students'' single most important predictor of acculturation. A host-culture centric perspective seems to advocate for increased interaction with domestic students as a marker of acculturation, and the lack of a bicultural friendship was an impediment to the adjustment process (Maundeni, 2001; Zimmermann, 1995).

Although Berry's theory (1983, 1987, 1997) offers researchers a valuable framework to guide their discoveries and research on the international student population, it suffers from several important limitations. Firstly, developed in the Western world, with generally homogenous populations, Berry's theory is glaringly individualistic. Ngo (2008) examined the status of popular acculturation theories used and noted that most acculturations theories were developed by White men of European descent who rarely spoke immigrant languages. These theorists, including Berry, seldom offered how their worldview limits the applicability of the theoretical framework. For instance, Berry identified five factors that impact acculturation for international students but did not include the role of intra-group relations in influencing acculturation and acculturative strategies. However, researchers have found that international students, especially those from collectivistic cultures (e.g., East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East), often rely on co-nationals and monocultural friendships to navigate through a new cultural and educational system (He & Hutson, 2018; Kashyap, 2011; Li & Zizzi, 2018). Co-national or monocultural friendship refers to friendship among people from the same nationality.

International students from collectivistic cultures appear to support one another through challenging experiences in the host country. Support from co-nationals and ethnic groups have also found to have a positive impact on international students' well-being (Kashyap, 2011; Li & Zizzi, 2018). Following co-national friendship, multicultural friendship (friendship with other international students), especially with those from collectivistic cultures, seem to be the most popular sources of support (Li & Zizzi, 2018). Given the natural support system international students seem to provide to one another, cutting across ethnic and nationality differences, the gap in Berry's theory to incorporate this influence is noteworthy.

Secondly, Berry's theory (1983, 1987, 1997) reflects the dominant values of research of that period. His theoretical propositions are overwhelmingly positivist and naturalist. Berry identified four distinct modes to acculturation, giving the impression that the four types are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Berry and Sam (1997), for example, insisted that although there are significant variations in the life circumstances of the cultural groups that experience acculturation, the mental processes that operate during acculturation are essentially the same for all the groups. However, based on international students' experiences, modes to acculturation are often varied, depending on the nature of the setting, individuals involved, role of demographic factors, among other factors. For instance, in a reflective essay on his graduate study experiences, Subanthore (2011) shared that the honor society for his professional organization, at both national and local levels, were profoundly supportive of his career development as a geographer. Hence, as a young professional, he felt welcomed and supported into the U.S. American

professional setting. However, as a community member in rural Oklahoma, his experiences were quite the opposite. He recollected moments of extreme fear and harassment he and his peers faced, in the post 9/11 period. Thus, the author experienced very different reactions from the U.S. American society based on his roles and the relevant context. Thus, a singular approach to acculturation to capture the myriad of experiences international students have is obscure and impractical.

Thus, an assemblage of these factors has resulted in an approach to acculturation that is lacks multicultural and social-justice values. An individualist and positivist approach to exploring acculturative experiences of international students has provided only a partial and, perhaps more importantly, a passive impression of this community. Ngo (2008) captured this grave limitation of Berry's acculturation theory in his observation that, "Without being grounded in social justice, bidimensional acculturation theories (such as Berry's theory) have faced some serious conceptual limitations. Depending on their dominant-subordinate experiences and subsequent effects, struggles and resilience, immigrants may view their cultural identities differently at various points in life, and at times even experience a false sense of identity, as in the case of internalized oppression. The conceptual focus, therefore, should take into consideration factors and players that have been involved in the formation and reformation of multiple identities (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and so forth) among immigrants." (Ngo, 2008, "Bidimensional Acculturation" para. 3)

Although numerous researchers have relied on Berry's theory (1983, 1987, 1997) of acculturation to guide their work, a large section of research studies of this population

lack *any* theoretical framework. An atheoretical approach to counseling research on international students has resulted in "isolated, uncoordinated, and fragmentary studies on specialized variables, with no clear application of results to comprehensive theory building or to practical implications for institutional policy," Pedersen (1991, p. 50) observed some years ago. Unfortunately, a positivist, Euro-centric approach is common in the larger researcher agenda on international students' acculturation and mental health. An individualistic, and positivistic approach to exploring the experiences of this diverse student group has resulted in persistence of the limitations discussed above. For example, Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) developed the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS). The instrument has 7 main themes that quantify dominant themes associated with acculturation. These themes are *perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, stress due to change/culture shock, guilt,* and *nonspecific.* Normed on the U.S. international student population, the researchers sought to identify the typical adjustment problems that foreign students face. However, the scale provides no avenue for researchers to examine what intersecting, multicultural identities impact the experiences of international student's acculturation experiences. A formulaic approach to explore how items such as "Homesickness bothers me" doesn't capture how recent (2017) travel bans on certain countries by the U.S. government could selectively affect some international students more than others.

Although attempts have been made to incorporate a multicultural perspective in research of international students' acculturative experiences, these studies lack a strong social-justice and culturally sensitive approach. For instance, Yakunina et al. (2013)

examined the multicultural strengths of international students and their role in predicting acculturative stress for this population. Interestingly, the authors measured participants' multicultural strengths by assessing the universal-diverse orientation in the Milville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (Fuertes, 2000). Using this scale, they operationalized multicultural strengths as "diversity of contact," "relativist appreciation," and "comfort with differences." In addition to defining multicultural strengths using a few broad variables, the instrument itself was based on a Western approach to personality and culture. International students in the U.S. come with an array of other cultural strengths, such as multilingualism and determination to succeed. Thus, to conceptualize multicultural strengths as only three variables produces and perpetuates a culturally impoverished perspective of international students.

Acculturative Stress and Mental Health Challenges

The mental health challenges experienced by international students has been explored in-depth by researchers over several decades. Multiple stressors associated with acculturation has provided counselors and counselor educators a detailed picture of the challenges international students typically face during cultural transition. According to current literature, some of the most common concerns to well-being that this community of students face include English language difficulties (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Benzie, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003), loneliness (e.g., Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008), and xenophobia (e.g., Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; J. J. Lee, 2007; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013), although a range of other concerns,

depending on students' ethnicity, level of education, and personality factors, have also been identified.

International students in the U.S. come from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds (IIE, 2016). Given the heterogeneity found in this population, it will be prudent to further define the target group for this study to facilitate a detailed examination of their acculturative experiences. Most studies centered around the experiences of international students either examined one specific ethnic group- [e.g., Chinese (Bertram et al., 2014; Bourne, 1975; K. T. Wang et al., 2012), and Turkish (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; S. Tatar, 2005)], or studied a conglomerate sample of international student population.

However, researchers have found that people of Color are united by their unique position defined by culture and race in a highly stratified society like the U.S. American. For instance, Lee and Rice (2007) found that students of Color, predominantly from the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Latin America, and India, endured more frequent and intense forms of bigotry than their Canadian and European counterparts. The authors labelled the intentional targeting of international students of Color as instances of *neo-racism* (Balibar, Wallerstein, & Wallerstein, 1991)*,* wherein racist acts are often subtle, and typically displayed via microaggression.

An oppressive attitude towards students of Color seems to permeate into classrooms as well. Beoku-Betts (2004) explored the experiences of graduate women of Color from Africa who studied abroad in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. These women narrated experiences of White professors compelling them to sign up for remedial classes

and criticizing them for their accents, despite their strong academic abilities. Although the author admitted that race and gender of the participants played a role in contributing to such difficulties, she also drew attention to ''the colonial experience and the marginal position of their societies in the global economic system'' (p. 132) ingrained in the prejudiced perceptions of their home culture exhibited by people in the hosts countries. Considering recent political developments, in what has been termed by some as the "Trump Era" (Pottie-Sherman, 2018), international students of Color are ridden with increased uncertainty and apprehension. Pottie-Sherman (2018) interviewed several international students of Color to explore how their experiences had changed post President Trump's success in the election. An Indian international graduate student shared that, since the election, at least two Indian students had been shot in Kansas, which had exacerbated her anxiety and apprehension regarding her physical safety. Another participant, a student from Nigeria, disclosed that she had begun to pay more attention to "who supports the leadership and who doesn't" (p. 35) since it could significantly determine her safety. She alluded to instances of self-regulation of outward expression of her thoughts.

Other drastic measures against People of Color have also created an atmosphere of fear and disquiet. The recent ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in favor of banning travel from certain predominantly Muslim countries had a "chilling effect" (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017, p. I) on international students, especially those from Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Iran, Libya, and Chad. It is no wonder then that, across the U.S., international student enrollment has slumped by 2.2 percent and 5.5 percent at the

undergraduate and graduate levels respectively, from fall 2016 to fall 2017 (Redden, 2018). Current research on international students' experiences rarely refer to the obvious impact of neo-racism and socio-political developments in the U.S. on international students. Instead, a perfunctory exploration of their acculturative stress is discussed, with only a limited reference to these students' larger reality of physical danger and psychological distress.

However, to argue that a toxic climate of marginalization is only a recent development as a way to justify the consistent lack of social justice foundation in international student research would be erroneous. International students of Color have been long suffering the impact of political rhetoric and racist ideologies. Subanthore (2011), a graduate student from India described how his life as an international student in rural Oklahoma changed for the worse after the September 11 attacks. He recalled times when he and other international students would go grocery shopping only in the wee hours of the day. Growing xenophobia meant going to public spaces was no longer safe for these students of Color, who were often mistaken to be supporters of radical Islam, based on their physical features. Subanthore shared that such instances of self-regulation and extreme caution were harrowing for him and his peers. In Kashyap's (2011) study of international graduate students' and their experience of social life in the U.S., one participant from South Korea shared how her racial and ethnic identity defined every aspect of her life in the U.S. She had hoped to gain more access to the U.S. social life over time but found that it was always a one-way effort from her end. Domestic students and faculty members were mostly cold and uninviting of international students of Color,

which contributed to a further sense of alienation. Thus, it appears that international students of Color in the U.S. have been experiencing aggravating challenges for a long time. Unfortunately, research on their acculturation experiences and mental health is predominantly devoid of references to how their race and ethnicity impact their experiences in a stratified society like U.S. American. The few studies which have incorporated their socio-political reality (e.g., Kashyap, 2011; Lee, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Pottie-Sherman, 2018; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017) have not considered how their intersecting identities impact their mental health and well-being in a racially hierarchical society.

Although the total number of international students in the U.S account for only 3.7% of college students, international students account for over 10% of total graduate students in the U.S. (CGS, 2009). Given the impact of intersecting minority identities on international students of Color, exploring the experiences of international graduate students of Color, from a multicultural perspective, is particularly vital. Erichsen and Bolliger (2011) interviewed international graduate students mostly from China, Indonesia, and Kenya. Participants in their study recollected moments when they "felt as though they did not belong, sensed their differences and alternative perspectives were not recognized, were unwanted, or were simply ignored" (p. 318). These experiences were described as instances of acute academic isolation by the authors. Interestingly, in their mixed-methods study, Erichsen and Bolliger (2011) found that international students shared more positive experiences of feeling acknowledged and respected in the first year of their graduate study than in the subsequent second and third year. It potentially

highlights a honey-moon phase in acculturation, wherein students don't "see" and "hear" the marginalization at first, or possibly choose to focus on the positive aspects of their transition.

The impact of acculturative stress on graduate students' well-being has been well-documented by Ogunsanya, Bamgbade, Thach, Sudhapalli, and Rascati (2018). They explored the determinants of health-related quality of life of international graduate students in the U.S. It was found that the quality of the mental health of international graduate students was much lower than the U.S. average population. The researchers hypothesized that the acculturative stress that international graduate students experience had impacted their psychological well-being. Thus, international graduate students of Color appear to occupy a unique position, exposed to multiple stressors and threats to their psychological and physical well-being.

<center>**Mental Health and Allied Services**</center>

Given the multitude of stressors international students, especially international graduate students of Color experience, it is essential that researchers explore this population's use of professional mental health services. Unfortunately, research around this topic with international student clients is limited, due to concerns of anonymity and cultural stigma. The few studies that have been conducted (Nilsson et al., 2004; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yi, Lin, Jenny, & Kishimoto, 2003) present a bleak picture of international students' utilization of mental health services. Nilsson et al. (2004) found that only 2% of all international students enrolled at a large university utilized campus counseling services. Unfortunately, 38% of those students dropped out prematurely after

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the initial intake session. When the researchers compared these numbers to the utilization rate of domestic racial minorities in the university campus, they found that the utilization rate of international students was the lowest, compared to Black/African Americans (15%), Hispanic Americans (5%), and Asian Americans (13%). Yakushko et al. (2008) found similar results in their review of archival records of a five-year period. International student clients comprised only 1.8% of all clients at the campus counseling center during the five-year period. The most common presenting concerns of international student clients, according to the researchers, were emotional (e.g., feelings of sadness, worrying too much, low self-confidence) and academic (e.g., selection of major, grades) concerns. Despite the presence of psychological and scholastic issues, most international students in these studies did not seek the help of campus counseling services; and even when they did, they attrition rate was high.

These concerns indicate that there appears to be a gap between the mental health needs and utilization of counseling services by international students. Several reasons for the same have been found by researchers, with one of the most important being limited counselor cultural competence in working with students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., Kronholz, 2014; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Zhang and Dixon (2001) conducted an analog study to compare the differences between culturally sensitive versus culturally neutral (no attention paid to client's cultural background and its impact on their presenting issue) counselors. Asian international students in the study were interviewed by "culturally sensitive" and "culturally neutral" counselors. On analyzing participants' rating of counselors' trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertness, the researchers found that

participants' ratings of culturally sensitive counselors were significantly higher than that of the culturally neutral counselors. Although some of the research recommendations on the importance of counselor cultural competency in their work with international students is decades old (Herring & Jespersen, 1994; Mori, 2000; Sandhu, 1994), the critical role of multicultural competency to provide effective counseling services for international students stands true even more so today.

It has also been found that international students' cultural backgrounds and values associated with mental health also adversely impact their help-seeking behavior (e.g., Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Wong, Wang, & Maffini, 2014; Zhai, 2002). Zhai (2002) explored the acculturative and help-seeking behaviors of international graduate students in the U.S. In their interviews, participants shared that they preferred to seek the help of family and friends over campus counseling services to overcome their psychological distress. Based on the participants' experiences, Zhai also recommended that campus counseling centers must engage in culturally sensitive outreach programs to support international students' mental health. Dadfar and Friedlander (1982) compared the psychological help-seeking behavior of international students based on their continent of origin and prior counseling experience. They found that international students of Western origin (European and Latin American) were much more likely to seek psychological service compared to those of African, Asian, and Middle-Eastern origin. Despite the variations in the help-seeking behavior within the international student community, the overall tendency to seek psychological services was significantly lower for international students than American students in the study. Wong et al. (2014) explored the extent of

humility and emotional self-regulation among Asian international students in the U.S. and its impact on their psychological help-seeking behavior. They found that participants who strongly adhered to values of humility and self-regulation (common Asian ideals) had significantly negative attitudes toward psychological help-seeking. Hence, a trend of low help-seeking behavior by international students at campus counseling services has remained unchanged over several decades.

Regardless of the overall increase in international students in the U.S., training programs and campus counseling services have not evolved to cater to the needs of this emerging minority group (Yoon & Portman, 2004). Given the diversity among international students, theories and assessment instruments developed in the White, Western, urban United States may not be suitable for these students (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wang et al., 2012; Yeh & Inose, 2003). However, at present there is no multicultural theory of international students' mental health. Knowledge of generic issues in multicultural training are not sufficient in the specialized skills and knowledge that counselors need in their work with international students (Arthur, 1997; Jacob & Greggo, 2001). Yoon and Portman (2004) noted that, while every accredited counseling program includes coursework in multicultural counseling, there is a lack of specific training for counselors around working with international students. Given counselors' limited competency to work with international students and the inadequate emphasis on skills necessary to counsel this community, in addition to existing low utilization rate of counseling services by this community, there exists a significant mental health concern for international students in the U.S.

Given that international students typically don't access mental health services on campus due to various reasons, it is critical that researchers explore how these students are supporting their mental health. Knowledge of default strategies of coping with acculturative stress and psychological distress of the students could give counselors beneficial understanding of international students' cultural capitals, thereby significantly enhancing the effectiveness of counseling services counselors provide.

International Students' Cultural Capital

At present, counselors and counselor educators rely on disconnected studies of international students and variables that support a positive acculturative experience to support their mental health. These studies typically have a weak or missing theoretical orientation, and often rely on Western definitions of acculturation and well-being. For instance, several researchers have considered acculturation as moving towards normative U.S. American values (Berry, 1983; Berry, 1997; Sodowsky & Plake, 1991). A Western perspective on the ideal experience of acculturation severely compromises researchers' focus on the culturally unique strengths that international students may employ during distressful experiences. This section provides readers a critique and review of current literature on international students' strength variables. Given that research with this community is limited, studies including graduate and undergraduate student sample are included.

Although there is no multicultural theory to guide researchers in their studies on the cultural capital of international students, a few strength-oriented variables have been studied. Findings from these studies imply that international students potentially use

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unique cultural strengths to support their mental health in the face of challenges during study abroad, although a multicultural approach to explore the students' cultural capital was not the central purpose in most of these studies. Furthermore, these studies, even when they explored strength-oriented variables, an emphasis on social justice, and cultural sensitivity was weak, at best.

One of the most heavily researched strength-oriented variable is family. Some researchers (He & Hutson, 2018; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Poyrazli, 2015; Sato & Hodge, 2015) have found that in the midst of adversities and emotional distress international students seek the support of their family members. Despite the physical distance separating the international student and the family, students have reported that talking to their family members and sharing their concerns have provided immense reprieve to them. In a recent study He and Hutson (2018) found that familial ties provided the Chinese international students a strong sense of motivation to complete their education and succeed in the host country. The authors used the Appreciative Advising Inventory (He, Hutson, & Bloom, 2010), and found that most participants agreed with items indicating presence of familial support. These included "My family supports me", "I enjoy sharing my experiences with my family" and "Familial support strengthens my identity, motivation and commitment." The participants' strong agreement with these items, as indicated by their responses to the Likert-scale items, highlight the significant role families play in supporting the mental health of international students.

Family members also seemed to provide stability for international students experiencing acculturative stress, despite the physical distance separating them. To

explore the experiences of international students in cultural transition in Canada, Moores and Popadiuk (2011) interviewed students of mostly Asian and Latin American ethnicity. One participant shared, "when you go through these transitions sometimes you feel like you go into a labyrinth and then you don't find a way out. So when you don't find a way out that's [family] where you go." (p. 299). It is evident that international students draw immense support and motivation from their family members during the study abroad period (e.g., He & Hutson, 2018; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). These values on strong familial affinity could be due to the collectivistic culture found in most people of Color communities where values of interdependency and familial loyalty are fostered from a young age. Thus, addressing familial support with international students may prove critical in assessing their mental health concerns and coping strategies. The current individualistic approach to counseling may fail to incorporate the positive role of families that international students have discussed in the above-mentioned studies.

Another cultural capital that international students seem to depend on is friendships. Several researchers have explored the nature of friendships that international students gravitate towards, as well as the psychological benefits of having reliable friendship networks in the host country (e.g., Brown, 2009; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011a; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Williams & Johnson, 2011). Given that international students often leave behind their family members and close social ties when they travel, many have reported that friends become their substitute for family in the host countries. Wang and Hannes (2014) explored how Asian international graduate students made cultural adjustments in Belgium. Using photovoice methodology, they found that

participants made plans to cook and eat meals together to evade the negative effects of loneliness. Other participants reported inviting their friends to events in the community to celebrate with them. These findings were supported by Li and Zizzi (2018), who studied the role of physical activity in enhancing social adjustment among international graduate students in the U.S. The researchers found that the two participants in their study made weekly plans to play badminton and to build strong friendships with each other. During the course of the study, the researchers observed that the participants included increasingly more people in their friendship network, and often met at each other's' residence to cook and eat together after their game of badminton. Although their primary goal was physical activity, the researcher noted that time spent on socializing gradually exceeded time for badminton. This observation potentially highlights the vital role friendships play in maintaining the mental health and well-being of international students. The strong ties that international students form with one another could potentially explain the finding that friends were one of the most common sources of referral for campus counseling services among the international student community (Jenny, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003).

An interesting finding in the study by Li and Zizzi (2018) was that both participants engaged only in monocultural (friendships with students from the same country) and multicultural (friendship with other international students) friendships. When asked about their experience with bicultural friendship (friendship with U.S. Americans), participants shared instances of racism and discrimination by U.S. American students. They also shared that most U.S. American students were not interested in

understanding the participants' culture, and often avoided international students in group projects in classes. Thus, instead of relying on domestic students for friendship, the international students in the study approached other international students. By the end of the five-month data collection period, neither of them wanted to spend more time building bicultural friendships. The divide between international and domestic students' approach to bicultural friendships is especially important given that researchers have emphasized on international students' interaction with domestic students as a marker of acculturation (Sodowsky & Plake, 1991), and placed the responsibility for bicultural friendships on international students. It is possible that failure to consider influence of race relations and domestic students' ethnocentrism can adversely impact researchers' definitions of ideal acculturation and adjustment.

Researchers (Chai, Krägeloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2012; Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Krägeloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009) have also explored the role of spiritual and religious values for international students studying in New Zealand. Hsien-Chuan Hsu et al. (2009) compared the various facets of religious and spiritual beliefs between international students and domestic students in New Zealand. They found that, overall, international students scored significantly higher on *connection, meaning, wholeness, strength, peace,* and *faith* facets of religion and spirituality than domestic students. Chai et al. (2012) followed up on the initial findings with twice the sample size. They found that, specifically, Asian international students tended to rely on religious and spiritual values more than their European counterparts, during the study abroad period. They also found that, for Asian international students, religious coping significantly enhanced their

psychological and social quality of life and protected them from the damaging effects of high stress. International graduate students of Color in Kashyap's (2011) study shared similar sentiments. One of the participants, Nikita from India, shared that she overcame her loneliness in the U.S. by hanging pictures of various Hindu deities in her room. It is possible that during excessive acculturative stress, in addition to the pressure of graduate studies, students like Nikita rely on religious coping strategies to support their mental health. Given the emphasis on secular values in Western cultures, counselors may neglect to address the importance of religious coping for international students, especially for those from people of Color communities. However, religious and spiritual values appear to strongly support a better psychological well-being for international students.

International students' personality factors have also been explored to further understand the variables that contribute to positive acculturation process. McClure (2007) coined the term *advantaging* to describe international students' awareness of tangible benefits of studying abroad and using them effectively to have positive experiences in the host country. She studied international graduate students' cross-cultural adjustment experience in Singapore and found that participants in her study reported numerous advantages of studying abroad, including scholarship, enhanced career development opportunities, and access to advanced equipment, among others. McClure found that students intentionally recognized and discussed advantaging factors to cope with various stressors associated with cultural adjustment. An active approach to advantaging by international students indicates their efforts to recognize opportunities to succeed despite their experiences of distress and challenges associated with acculturation. These students

in the study identified material and cultural resources associated with studying abroad that could enhance their educational experiences. Erichsen and Bolliger (2011) also found support for advantaging in their study with international graduate students in traditional and online learning environments. The researchers observed that the participants had a strong sense of purpose in fulfilling their educational commitments, despite the presence of "acute academic and social isolation" (p. 317).

These studies indicate that the majority of international students, especially those from the global South, appear to employ a variety of successful cultural and personal resources to support a positive transition and mental health. However, current understanding of their cultural and personal strengths is incomplete at best. Most of the studies focusing on strengths-based understanding of international students include predominantly students of Color, as is evident in the studies discussed above. Although researchers have explored a few important variables, such as family, friendship, and religion, their studies lack a multicultural approach when exploring the experiences of international students of Color. The selected variables and the instruments used were mostly designed using Western standards and ideals of acculturation, an approach wherein minoritized individuals must adopt the values and behaviors of the dominant culture. Even when unique personality variables were explored (e.g., Arambewela & Hall, 2011; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Wang et al., 2012), there was little scope for international students of Color to share their experience of race relations, and other minoritized identities. For instance, Wang et al. (2012) identified that their definition of well-adjusted Chinese international students was those who consistently

displayed low levels of distress across the duration of the study. Given that several

international students of Asian origin report intense experiences of racism,

discrimination, and xenophobia (Choi, Lewis, Harwood, Mendenhall, & Huntt, 2017;

Sato & Hodge, 2015; Subanthore, 2011), the lack of a multicultural and social-justice

approach to define "well-adjusted" for Chinese international students in the U.S. seems

counterintuitive.

Applying the findings from these studies on international students in the U.S.

would suffer from two significant limitations. The majority of the studies exploring the

strength-variables and cultural capitals of international students were conducted outside

of the U.S. Given the unique challenges international students in the U.S. face, these

findings may not capture the unique context of political unrest, restrictive visa

regulations, and xenophobia in the U.S. Moreover, almost all the studies on international

students cited above, and in general, lack any multicultural lens to guide researchers in

their study. These studies rarely have a theoretical foundation to ground their research

questions and findings on. Consequently, even when researchers have explored strength-

variables such as family, multicultural friendships, religion, they have rarely explored the

underlying values of resilience, persistence, and ambition that inform their approach to

support their mental health despite adversities. For instance, in Kashyap's (2011) study,

Nikita used her faith to realign her goals to focus on her academics despite a trying

acculturation experience. Although the researcher noted the importance of religious

coping for the participant, a deeper exploration of a potential culture of grit and resilience

found in international students would have shed light into how cultures impact

international students' mental health and acculturation experiences (Pendse & Inman, 2017; Sam, 2001). A critical-theory approach to exploring the cultural capital of international graduate students could provide counselors and counselor educators a multicultural lens to recognize and integrate their cultural capitals when addressing this community's mental health concerns during acculturation while also challenging the oppressive use of Western standards of acculturation.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race theory started off as legal movement with the appointment of Lani Guiner as the assistant attorney general in 1993. In her analysis of the U.S. electoral system, Guiner concluded that there exist factors that predetermine winners and losers in an election (Bernal, 2002). This movement started as Critical Legal studies and transformed into Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory challenged the privilege associated with race, gender, and middle-class and systemic oppression of minority groups, including Persons of Color. One example of systemic oppression and marginalization of People of Color includes the contention that People of Color (e.g., Hispanics, Native Americans and African Americans) are intellectually inferior as compared to their White counterparts (Clay, 1993). Hernstein and Murray (1994) went to the extent of holding racial minorities responsible for existing social evils.

As defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1973), capital refers to the accumulated labor and advantages which over time gives certain communities advantages to make and reproduce profits that enable their progress in society. Thus, capital dictates who gains access to social mobility and who doesn't. Bourdieu (1973) identified three types of

capital:- economic (fiscal advantages), social (membership to privileged groups and societies), and cultural (assets such as education, style of speech, dressing, language, family systems, etc.). Bourdieu (1985) highlighted that cultural assets of only the upper and middle-class communities were considered valuable in a stratified French society. If one was not born into a family who already had access to socially valued cultural strengths and resources, chance of social mobility was drastically limited, Bourdieu observed. He further used this theory to explain why school children from lower economic classes faced significantly more barriers to succeeding in educational and social institutions favoring the cultural capital of middle and upper-class values. Bourdieu's theory was developed within a racially homogeneous society, to discuss the implications of classism. However, his theory fails to incorporate the compounding systemic difficulties that People of Color face, whose intersecting identities of race, class, religion, and gender may further impede their access to social mobility due to the impact of selective preferences for certain Cultural Capitals. Apple (1993) described the idea of selective preference of certain cultural capitals in his remarks below

"While there is a formal right for everyone to be represented in the debates over whose cultural capital, whose knowledge 'that,' 'how,' and 'to,' will be declared legitimate for transmission to future generations of students, it is still the case that ... a *selective tradition* operates in which only specific groups' knowledge becomes official knowledge. Thus, the freedom to help select the formal corpus of school knowledge is bound by power relations that have very real effects" (pp. 65-66)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses the intersecting identities of marginalized communities and aims to challenge the social institutions that further oppress them. Several theories have been proposed under the umbrella of CRT, and one of them is Tara Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth. Yosso (2005) developed this theory to challenge the dominant and exclusive interpretation of Bourdieu's (1973) theory of capital. Bourdieu had used the concept of cultural capital to critique the pattern of social and cultural reproduction of what was acceptable as cultural assets in a stratified society. Unfortunately, members of dominant ideologies have used his theory to assert that communities of Color are culturally poorer, and that their cultural poverty explained their inherently deficient behavior.

The study of cultural capital of socially marginalized groups, including the international student community, is especially important for several reasons. Firstly, dominant groups' ideologies of valuable cultural capital often dictate the norms in a stratified society like the U.S. American. For instance, in the current literature on international students, participants' English language proficiency has been explored extensively, and researchers claim that stronger English language skills predict higher acculturation scores (Andrade, 2006; Benzie, 2010; Johnson, 1988; Yeh & Inose, 2003). To associate students' healthy acculturation with learning the dominant group's language perpetuates a narrow, singular approach to an acculturative strategy (a cultural capital). International students in the U.S. come from over 200 countries around the world (IIE, 2016). These students have knowledge of an array of languages, and often display advanced skills of multilingualism. Dewaele and Van Oudenhoven (2009) found that

individuals who were dominant in more than one language scored significantly higher in openness to other cultures and cultural empathy, than those proficient in only one language. Yet, researchers have rarely explored how multilingual skills *enhances* international students' cultural experiences in the host country. Instead, these students are expected to conform to the dominant group's norms, neglecting their linguistic skills and the plethora of advantages associated with it. An unequitable approach to acculturation is captured well by Smart, Volet, and Ang (2000), who noted that there is an implicit assumption in much of the literature that effective cross-cultural interaction is dependent on the sojourner, or international student, adjusting to the host culture—an entirely one-sided process—and the related assumption that once the international student has adjusted, interaction and cross-cultural communication will occur. Current acculturation approaches ignore that cross cultural interaction is a two-way process, one that requires accommodations to be made by both sides.

The second reason to explore the cultural capital of international students is possibly an outcome of the first. Adhering to the dominant group's definitions of cultural capital not only place an additional burden on minoritized communities; it also limits our understanding of diversity in human behavior and potential. When researchers, for example, insist on measuring only English language skills, and view the use of native language as an impediment to acculturation, they fail to explore how multilingualism could *augment* a positive cross-cultural experience for international and domestic students. A prejudiced definition of cultural capital, and rejection of strengths of people of Color, robs counselors and counseling researchers of a fuller understanding of the

lived experience of acculturation of international students. The tendency to focus on dominant groups' construction of cultural capital is not unique to language-based concerns of international students.

Another influence frequently explored by researchers is international students' friendship with U.S. American students. As discussed earlier, researchers have commented that friendship with co-nationals at the cost of friendship with domestic U.S. American students was an impediment to smooth acculturation experience of international students (Hendrickson et al., 2011b; Zimmermann, 1995). Furthermore, the responsibility to initiate and maintain friendship has almost always been placed on the international students (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Kashyap, 2011; Li & Zizzi, 2018). However, a careful analysis of participants' experiences in several studies indicate that domestic students often knowingly avoided engaging with international students within and outside of classrooms (Kashyap, 2011; Sato & Hodge, 2015; S. Tatar, 2005). Students have shared that despite multiple attempts to engage domestic students in conversations and social activities, international students have rarely received a positive response from them (Kashyap, 2011; Li & Zizzi, 2018). Crawford (2000) explored how xenophobia in the U.S has impacted the domestic population's attitude towards international students, having little patience to understand their bilingual (or multilingual) culture, and maintaining a parochial attitude towards non-Native English speakers. Thus, although there has been a superficial exploration of a few strength-oriented variables, the majority of studies continue to neglect the deep-rooted impact of racism and xenophobia

on exploring the acculturative experiences of international students of Color, and the impact on their mental health.

Continuation of the current approach to acculturation and ignoring the cultural realities of the diverse international student community goes against the very spirit of multiculturalism, as defined in the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014). To address the shifts in the socio-political realities of international students, especially those who identify as People of Color, a social-justice approach to research is urgently needed. Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2017) identified five key themes that could serve as a basis for new research agenda in the Trump era. They are *policy environment; socio-political atmosphere (e.g., impact of government immigration policies, international diplomacy, travel restrictions); socio-political atmosphere (e.g., xenophobia, community support); continuum of violence and discrimination (e.g., hate crimes, discrimination, tokenism); degree of student activism and resistance (e.g., forms of political activism, resistance to discrimination); and the researcher positionality effect (e.g., researcher positionality, assumptions, biases).* These themes encourage researchers to boldly address the transient nature of acculturative experiences for the international student community and the cultural capitals they employ during these adversities.

Such an in-depth investigation of international students, especially international graduate students of Color (who experience multiple stressors due to their intersecting identities) and their cultural capital is lacking in current research. Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth, with its basic tenets of challenge to dominant ideology,

and commitment to social justice, possibly offers researchers a culturally appropriate inquiry into the acculturation experiences of international graduate students of Color.

Tara J. Yosso is a well-known scholar in the field of Critical Race Theory who explored the experiences of Students of Color in U.S. American schools. Yosso challenged the prevailing image of cultural impoverishment of communities of Color, by highlighting the unique cultural assets (Community Cultural Wealth) students of Color bring to classrooms. Yosso's work also brings attention to how intersecting identities of gender, race, immigration status, language and accent affect educational equity.

She identified six types of Community Cultural Wealth: **aspirational, social, familial, resistant, linguistic, and navigational. Aspirational** capital refers to an individual and community's ability to maintain hopes and dreams beyond their present situation, despite structural barriers. **Social** capital refers to social networks within one's community, friendships and interactions that helps one draw resources from each other to overcome challenges, while **familial** capital includes commitment to family, 'extended family,' one's community that provides model for caring, coping, and loving. **Resistant** capital involves fighting oppression through oppositional behavior. Relatedly, researchers have recognized five types of resistant capital (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001): transformational resistance (there is a critique of the injustice in the system, and a strong desire for social change to end inequality); conformist resistance (individuals using this strategy can identify the injustice in the system but choose not to directly critique it. Instead they focus on working within the system to challenge it); resilient resistance (individuals wish to change stereotypes about their community, but not by directly

challenging the inequality in institutions, but by employing other strategies; reactionary (defiant and acting and behavior, not directly aimed towards social justice); and self-defeating resistance (engaging behaviors that prove harmful to self, and perpetuate the cycle of oppression in the long run). **Linguistic** capital are the intellectual and social skills developed through the use of more than one language and the traditions associated with language, such as story-telling. In at least one study examining the impact of multilingualism on personality, Dewaele and Van Oudenhoven (2009) noted that individuals who were proficient in more than one language scored significantly higher in openness to other cultures, and cultural compassion, than those proficient in only one language. International students are rarely asked if and how they use their multilingual skills in overcoming acculturative stress and related mental health concerns. As discussed above, there is almost an exclusive focus on assessing English language skills as a marker of acculturation, reflective of dominant ideas on acculturation.

Navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) refers to successfully maneuvering through social institutions that are inherently designed to be disadvantageous to people of Color. Yosso's navigational capital is similar to Alva's (1991) work on exploring the protective factors that a cohort of domestic Mexican-American students in high school had that helped them succeed in school. This included a supportive a network of friends, a strong sense of academic responsibility, and a positive view of their intellectual ability. These high school students, despite risk factors such as ethnic minority status, family income, and low educational and occupational status of parents, succeeded academically. This success was linked to the protective factors mentioned above, which constituted this

group's 'navigational capital,' or, as Alva (1991) described, "academic invulnerability." There are some initial findings that support the presence of 'academic invulnerability' among international students (He & Hutson, 2018; Kashyap, 2011). However, in-depth exploration of navigational capital and its impact on international students' mental health and acculturative experiences is limited.

Thus, Yosso's theory of Community Cultural Wealth provides researchers a multicultural framework to explore the unique cultural capitals of people of Color. Knowledge about the types of capitals international graduate students of Color employ as they acculturate may provide counselors and counselor educators valuable insights into how this population supports their mental health in the face of extreme stress and precarious socio-political situation in the U.S.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Chapter One provided an introduction to the dissertation topic: how international graduate students of Color employ community cultural wealth to support their mental health during early acculturation in study abroad, and the rationale for this study. Chapter Two provided an in-depth critique of current literature on international students' mental health and Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth theory (Yosso, 2005), and highlighted the gap in existing empirical studies on the research topic. This chapter will provide detailed information on the methodology, research question, recruitment, and sampling strategy, and analyses for the data gathered in this study.

Research Design

Current literature on international students' multicultural strengths is sparse and fragmented (He & Hutson, 2018; Pedersen, 1991; Yakunina et al., 2013), with limited focus on multiculturalism and social justice in the research agenda. Most researchers have focused on a deficit-centric understanding of international students, often presenting a pathological and passive impression of this community (Yoon & Portman, 2004). Although many researchers (e.g., Heppner, 2006; Pedersen, 1991; Pendse & Inman, 2017; Yau, Sue, & Hayden, 1992) have called for a shift away from an Euro-centric understanding of the diverse international student community, a theoretical framework

acknowledging the cultural capital of international students is non-existent. Given the shortage of research from a strengths-based perspective, the current study, designed to explore the cultural strengths of international students of Color and their impact on students' mental health, will be conducted using a qualitative research method. Qualitative inquiry holds the potential to gather new insights and nuanced accounts of long unanswered problems. Qualitative inquirers focus on the meaning-making quality of human beings about their experiences by gathering participants' in-depth narratives (e.g., stories, conversation, rituals, and others) of a diverse range of experiences (McLeod, 2018).

One such qualitative method is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, 1996). The primary purpose of IPA is to investigate how participants make meaning of their experiences. According to this approach, people are viewed as interpretive beings who actively construe life events as well as objects and experiences in their lives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The three main principles of IPA are hermeneutics, idiography, and phenomenology (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2007). *Hermeneutics* refers to the theory of interpretation. A "unique characteristic of hermeneutics is its openly dialogical nature: the returning to the object of inquiry again and again, each time with an increased understanding and a more complete interpretive account" (Packer, 1985, p. 1091). Thus, the hermeneutic process, in theory, is seen as a never-ending endeavor to understand the richness of lived experiences. However, it is practically impossible to gather in-depth data of every individual's experience of a phenomenon. Unlike quantitative research methodology, generalizability of research

findings is not the primary purpose of qualitative research. Instead, the aim is to understand the particular and specific experiences of a small group before producing any general statements (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The emphasis on examining the fewer cases to understand specific characteristics of each participant is the hallmark of *idiography*. Researchers are encouraged to conduct multiple studies to aid in identifying generalizable characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation. However, generalization is not the primary purpose of IPA.

Phenomenology is the study of how people talk about and experience objects and events, rather than describing phenomena in an objective language, using predetermined categories, and scientific constructs. It involves researchers 'bracketing' their preconceived notions and allowing the phenomenon to speak for itself (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Thus, IPA acknowledges and embraces the interpretive nature of human experiences. Researchers using IPA attempt to gather data on participants' interpretation of life experiences, in as much detail as possible. Given the interpretive nature of human beings, it is inevitable that researchers too are interpreting the gathered data. Thus, IPA is a dual interpretation process (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Research Questions

In keeping with IPA methodology, there is only one broad research question for this study.

Research Question 1: *How do graduate international students of Color support their mental health during the early acculturation phase in their study abroad period?*

Research Question 1.1 *To what extent does Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth theory offer a potential theoretical framework to support a strengths-based understanding of graduate international students of Color's mental health?*

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) rejected the use of hypotheses in IPA studies since the focus is on an open, inductive approach to data collection. Having an exploratory approach in IPA has been found to give participants the freedom to share their meaning of the phenomenon, and not be limited by researchers' influences (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Participants

Based on the recommendations by Smith and Osborn (2007), IPA studies do not rely on large samples. As discussed before, the primary focus in IPA studies is not to generate universal findings, but instead focus on the detailed characteristics of the participants in the study. The goal is to begin with detailed analyses of a few case studies before proceeding to more general statements about the population of interest. In the past, IPA studies have been conducted with sample size ranging from one to fifteen (Smith & Osborn, 2007). However, the authors also suggest that "five or six has sometimes been recommended as a reasonable sample size for a student project using IPA" (pp. 56-57). Given that this is a doctoral dissertation, data from 8-9 participants will be gathered.

In IPA, homogenous samples are used, since sample sizes are usually small and the focus is on understanding the unique meaning making experiences of the participants concerned (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). For this study of international students of Color, only those students having F1 (student visa) or J1 (exchange scholar

visa) will be selected in order to avoid immigrant youth, refugee students, and other

sojourners in the study, whose experiences may be vastly different from that of

international students. Also, international students constitute 14% of all graduate students

in the U.S. (IIE, 2016). International graduate students typically face multiple stressors

but are less likely than their domestic counterparts to utilize counseling services (e.g.,

Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007). Thus, international graduate students of Color

seem to be a unique population that is exposed to a variety of challenges, ranging from

academic to socio-political.

Since international students typically experience more challenges and distress in

the early phases of acculturation (K. T. Wang et al., 2012), the focus in this study is on

the early transition period during study abroad. Given that the duration of most full-time

graduate programs ranges between 2-5 years, only those who have been in the U.S

between 1-2 years will be considered. Thus, the population for this study is international

graduate students who also identify as persons of Color who have been enrolled in a U.S

college or university between for at least one year but no more than two years.

Recruitment of Participants

For the purpose of recruitment, flyers (Appendix A) will be posted around the

UNCG campus and in the Greensboro community (e.g., coffeeshops, restaurants near

UNCG campus) to invite graduate international students of Color to participate in the

study. Copies of the flyer will also be posted on international student groups in social

media, such as Instagram and Facebook, to invite larger number of eligible students.

Additionally, given that international students have been found to have a strong

monocultural (friendship with same nationality peers) and multicultural (friendship with other international students) network, snowball sampling will also be used. Participants will be encouraged to invite other eligible students using a copy of the recruitment flyer, and by providing information about the study via email (Appendix B).

Flyers will provide information on the inclusion criteria for the study. Those who identify positively with the statement, "I identify as a graduate international student of Color in the U.S. and have been studying abroad in the U.S for at least 1 year, but not more than 2 years" will be considered eligible for the study. Students will not be screened based on gender, as most previous studies exploring the experiences of international students have included male and female participants, and not compared the experiences of female and male international students. Additionally, the rationale behind not limiting participation based on nationality and continent of origin is that international students of Color, as a group, tend to experience more discrimination, and systemic challenges than their White counterparts (Lee, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Interested individuals will be encouraged to contact the researcher via email information provided on the flyer. Individuals who contact the researcher via email will be verified for their eligibility in the study by the researcher by gathering information about their demographics (preferred pseudonym, age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and major), level of education (graduate or undergraduate), visa status (international student visa or otherwise), cultural identity (self-identify as persons of Color), and the number of years they have spent in the U.S. as a student.

Procedures

To ensure participant safety and inquirer's commitment to research ethics, an approval of the study from the university's Institutional Review Board first will be sought. IRB approved research procedures for recruitment and participant consent will be followed to invite potential participants to join the study. When possible, face-to-face interviews will be conducted to gather additional data regarding participant's non-verbal behavior as well. The location for the interview will be a quiet public/common space (e.g., private library room in UNCG) decided mutually by the interviewer and the interviewee. Due to the emotional nature of acculturation, participants will be provided a resource list of community and campus counselors (Appendix C) at the end of the interview to provide a platform to process their possible feelings and reactions post-interview if needed.

Interview Protocol

To guide the interview process, a semi-structured interview schedule will be used (post pilot study interview schedule is Appendix D), in line with the IPA approach (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). These questions were based on the current gaps in the literature and from critical race perspective. For instance, given that most researchers predominantly have emphasized "deficiencies" in international students' experiences (e.g., Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Girmay, 2017), the interview schedule includes questions focused on growth-oriented experiences and support networks that have positively impacted acculturation for the participants. As recommended by feminist scholars (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007) and in IPA (Smith et al., 2009), the interview

questions were organized to keep more descriptive and factual questions (such as demographics, educational experience in home country) first and then progressively move to more reflective and possibly emotional questions (What are some positive/successful situations you had as an international student?). This approach is intentional to allow the interviewer to build rapport before exploring more challenging experiences with the students.

The interview schedule will be submitted to the IRB for review. A semi-structured interview schedule allows researchers to use a template to explore relevant topics in a study. Interviewing allows the researcher and the interviewee to engage in meaningful dialogue whereby follow-up questions can be used effectively to probe interesting and relevant phenomenon disclosed by the latter. Developing interview schedules provides researchers a virtual map for the interview. These virtual maps can be especially useful if participants feel stuck in their responses during the interview (Smith et al., 2009). In the current study, participants will not be provided the interview schedule ahead of time to reduce chances of rehearsed and watered-down versions of their authentic responses. Some of the questions from the interview schedule include the following: "What were your initial reactions to the U.S. American culture and behavior?" "How do you think your early transition period affected your or other graduate international students' mood and well-being? Can you give an example?" and "Looking back, what do you think you would do differently to help you maintain your well-being as an international graduate student?" An attempt to balance strength-based and challenge-oriented questions was made to try to ensure participants are provided an

opportunity share a holistic experience of acculturation in the U.S. The inquirer

anticipates the interview to last between 50-60 minutes per person. At the beginning of

the interview, students will be reminded to only refer to themselves using their preferred

pseudonym.

A follow up will be conducted post the interview. The individual participant will

be contacted two to three weeks post initial interview via their preferred means (email or

phone) to schedule a follow up interview (face to face, email or phone, depending on

their preference) to share any additional insights and perspective regarding their

experiences as an international graduate student of Color. This optional participation is

expected to take 20 to 30 minutes. This section will also be transcribed and analyzed with

the corresponding participant's main interview

Interviews will be transcribed by professional transcription services (e.g.,

https://www.rev.com, https://verbalink.com/). Before data analysis begins, the researcher

will review the transcripts and delete any information that might identity the participant

(e.g., if participants accidentally speak their names, this will be replace with their

preferred pseudonym).

Data Analysis

Typically, data is analyzed by a single coder in IPA. However, to increase coder

reliability, and achiever greater consensus on themes, two coders will be analyzing the

transcripts in this dissertation study. Before data analysis, both coders and the auditor will

bracket their personal beliefs and values associated with the research topic and target

population. Although bracketing is an ongoing process in research, initial bracketing is

especially important before analyzing the data. Data will be analyzed according the steps described Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009).

Step 1. Reading and re-reading: This step involves the coders reading and re-reading of one interview transcript to immerse themselves in the data. In this step, the coders record their own recollections of the interview experience or some of the most striking observations of the transcript in a separate "analysis notebook" in order to bracket them off for the time being.

Step 2. Initial noting: In this step, the coders remain open-minded and note any comments on the first transcript. These comments are typically descriptive summaries of a participant's responses (e.g., key events as disclosed by the interviewee, emotions experienced), although the comments may be linguistic (e.g., comments around the use of language, fluency, laughter, or repetition) or deconstructive (e.g., simplifying participant's complex use of jargon) in nature. These comments are typically made on the left margin of the transcript. As coders annotate the transcript, they are likely to observe similarities, contradictions, and differences in what the person is saying (Smith et al., 2009). Coders attempt to engage in in-depth analysis of each line of the first transcript, by checking for significant responses by the participants.

Step 3. Developing emergent themes: In this step, the coders look for emergent themes to merge similar and related themes under a larger, abstract category. Themes are typically phrases which capture the essence of the transcript and reflect participant's experiences. Here, coders primarily work with the initial notes and comments developed in step 2. The goal here is to reduce the volume of detail while also maintaining the

complexity and uniqueness of participant's voice. However, given the *interpretive* nature of data analysis in IPA, themes will reflect participant's original thoughts as well as coders' interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, emergent themes connect a range of interpretations linking participant's and coders' understandings.

Step 4. Searching for connections across emergent themes: In this step, coders identify how the emergent themes in the first interview transcript fit together. A recommendation for identifying connections among the themes by Smith et al. (2009) involves typing the list of themes, and cutting each theme into a separate piece. Using a large space, the coders will spatially represent the themes. Themes that are related and represent similar understandings are to be placed next to each other to identify a super-ordinate theme, while those that are in opposition will be placed at the opposite end of a "spectrum." Through repeated manipulation of the emergent themes, coders identify a continuum of connections in the themes.
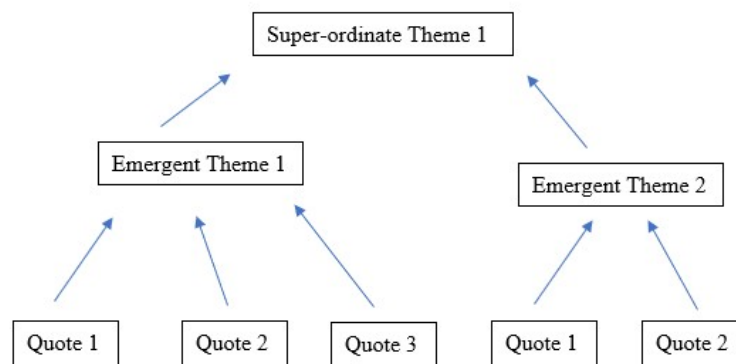
Figure 2. Simplified Depiction of Coding in IPA

Step 5. Moving to the next case: The first four steps in the data analysis involves working with one transcript. In IPA, each case is treated as an independent case to do justice to each participant's voice. Hence, coders bracket their personal beliefs and values associated with the research topic and target population developed in the first transcript before proceeding to the next case can be of immense value. The bracketing process, given that it is ongoing, is efficient when recorded or documented in a single notebook or journal per coder/auditor. Then, steps 1-4 are followed for all other interview transcripts, separately. Coders are encouraged to allow new themes to emerge with each case (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 6. Looking for patterns across cases: In this stage, attempts are made to identify patterns across cases. Super-ordinate themes from each case are laid out to identify connections and patterns. This may involve further super-ordination of the themes. A table of the final list of super-ordinate themes cutting across cases is developed by the primary researcher, with descriptions of nested themes. These depict the final list of themes identified in the study that cut across cases and yet reflect the uniqueness of each participant's experience.

IPA (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007) was designed keeping a single coder in mind. One individual (typically also the interviewer) completed the data analyses, as described in Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), Smith et al. (2009), and Smith and Osborn (2007). However, in this study, two coders will analyze each transcript independently to improve the rigor and consistency of the data analyses process. Then, convergent super-ordinate (step 4) themes (identified by both coders independently) will

be identified for the auditor's review, while differences in themes will be discussed in-depth by both coders to arrive at a consensus. Once a final list of super-ordinate themes is identified for each transcript, it will be sent to the auditor, along with the transcript with feedback. In situations where consensus on super-ordinate themes appears more challenging to achieve, support from the auditor will be sought, since the auditor will be familiar with the transcript and coding process for the study. The final list of super-ordinate themes identified across all transcripts will then be sent to the auditor for final feedback and review process.

Trustworthiness

My approach to the process of research and inquiry is heavily influenced by critical-interpretivist paradigms, and the values on which they are founded. As an international graduate student, and as a feminist inquirer, the critical theory paradigm offers me a framework to look at existing institutions and structures, and examine how they impact my daily life, for the better or worse. Also, as various identities, such as political, cultural, sexual, economic, religious and many more, shape our lives, valuing an individual's unique take on reality is integral to interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm offers me an opportunity to understand constructions that individuals "initially hold, aiming towards consensus but still open to new interpretations as transformations and sophistications improve" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). Thus, a critical-interpretivist paradigm allows me to understand, challenge, and re-interpret socially oppressive structures that specifically impact the lives of international students in colleges and universities in the U.S. Adopting this paradigm also significantly impacts

how I view research. Research in the Western world has been heavily influenced by positivist ideas, where researchers must remain as passive, disinterested observers of their data in order to not confound the process of inquiry. A critical-interpretivist paradigm challenges the myth of separation of researcher and the researched. Current research on graduate international students of Color is mostly restricted to their experiences of distress associated with acculturation (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Subanthore, 2011; S. Tatar, 2005). A critical-interpretivist paradigm allows inquirers to shift the deficit narrative, as maintained by scholars in the Western world, towards an inclusive, multicultural approach to understanding the mental health of graduate international students of Color in the U.S.

Current research practices in general, and in the international student literature in particular, are grounded in the principles of positivism and objectivism. Although such principles may be of profound value when investigating natural phenomenon, human experiences are informed by multiple identities, realities, and social institutions. Thus, researchers in social sciences must acknowledge and embrace the subjectivity in exploring human experiences. Michelle Fine (1994) rejected the false sense of neutrality that researchers adopt, and advocated for a greater recognition, acceptance, potentially skillful use of the relationship between the researcher and the participants (co-researchers). She argued that "…rupturing narratives allow us to hear the uppity voices of informants and researchers who speak against structures, representations, and practices of domination. In these texts, researchers are working the hyphen, reconciling the slippery constructions of Self and Other and the contexts of oppression in which both are

invented" (Fine, 1994, p. 78). The hyphen describes a demystification of the researcher, and instead encourages a greater exploration of how and why researchers present themselves the way they do with their participants. A more human relationship is called for in the process of inquiry. Thus, the persistence of deficit-centric research of international student community is potentially an outcome of excessively positivist research that ignores the voices and lived experiences of the participants.

The values described above inform my paradigm for my research with graduate international students of Color on their acculturation experiences in the U.S. However, as I assert my presence in the inquiry and interpret my experiences and that of others, it is important I explore my own positionality. "The call for positionality is an assertion that knowledge is dependent upon a complex web of cultural values, beliefs, experiences, and ascribed social positions. Thus, who you are (as knower), is intimately connected to your socialization into a matrix of group locations (including gender, race, class, and sexuality)" (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2009, p. 446). As a female, international graduate student of Color, I have found myself engaging in several "strategies" to survive the cross-cultural experiences during study abroad. My experience of this has been mixed, with heights of acknowledgement of my hard work and intelligence in the U.S. classrooms, and sinking lows of discrimination and stereotyping in public spaces. Thus, I am eager to see how other graduate international students of Color navigate through study abroad experiences, and support their mental health using their cultural resources, since it usually doesn't find any mention in esteemed journals.

Even as I own my more minoritized identities, I admit that I am also privileged in several ways. To remain ignorant of the privilege I have and use every day would be an injustice to my research, and more importantly my conscience. What I strive for in this research goes beyond a theoretical understanding of oppressive studies of international student community. I realize I must grapple with sources of oppression that lie within and outside of me as I engage in this quest to document the lived experiences of these students. As an upper-middle class Brahmin (an upper caste in India), English-speaking, and college educated individual, I have enjoyed multiple cultural capitals that are viewed more favorably in educational institutions in the West, giving me an advantage to succeed in this education system. My peers, under the blanket identity of international graduate students of Color, will come from varied identities that could potentially be marginalized in more ways than I have experienced. Consequently, it is critical that, during each interview, I engage with each participant with humility, compassion, and a strong sense of commitment for social justice that is inclusive, equitable, and transformative. Bracketing and documenting my values and biases associated with research will be an ongoing process, to examine how the coders' and auditor's biases may impact the data analysis.

Member Checking and Auditing

To ensure the data analyses results in interpretations and findings that are built on the primary data from interviews, the researcher will engage in member checking as recommended by Smith and Osborn (2007). Two lists, one of themes based on the participant's interview and another based on master themes gathered from all the

interviews, will be sent to each member via email. The transcript of the interview will also be provided to each participant. These measures provide a platform for participants to check for inconsistencies and provide any feedback regarding corrections and possible misinterpretations. Participants will be encouraged to share any feedback regarding the accurate depiction of their experiences in the analyses. They also will be asked to state whether there is any identifiable information in the interview transcripts that compromises their anonymity.

In qualitative research, an auditor often plays in a critical role in identifying instances of misinterpretation or undue influence of one's biases. In the present study, an auditor will be part of the research team to provide necessary feedback. The auditor will be an experienced qualitative researcher. The auditor will also bracket her biases and values associated with the research agenda as will the other coders. As part of data analysis, the auditor will review individual transcripts (post step 4) and corresponding super-ordinate themes, and provide feedback regarding undue impact of coders' values and instances of interpretation of participants' responses along the way.

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

1. Your life before you came to the U.S.
   - Describe your family support system.
   - How was your educational experience in your home country?
   - Growing up in your community, in what ways were your culture, religion, values, etc., important/relevant for you? How did your culture, religion and values shape your life experiences?
   - What did you think of the U.S. before you came here?
   - What were some of your reasons for wanting to come for higher education in the U.S.?
   - Who supported/did not support you in your decision to come to the U.S.?
2. What were your initial reactions to the culture and behavior of U.S. Americans?

- What were some of your feelings when you experienced the new culture here? How did you handle those feelings?
- How did you learn (more about American culture) to adjust here?

3. Who and what supported you in adjusting to American culture, especially with your educational activities and social life (e.g., ethnic groups, faculty members, international students office)?
    - How did those persons support you?
    - What did they offer that helped you feel supported?
    - How supportive has the international community been? Explain.
    - What has been your experience supporting other international students during their transition? Describe 1-2 examples.

4. Describe 1-2 particularly stressful/overwhelming situations you have experienced as an international graduate student.
    - When did these events happen?
    - What are some strategies you used to overcome that situation?
    - Who did you reach out to, to help you?
    - How supportive were your community, culture, family or religion during those times? An example or two?
    - What was it like to be an international graduate student, experiencing these challenging situations abroad?
    - What did you feel/think about yourself during that situation? What did your family and friends feel about that situation?
    - What were some resources (within campus and community) that you used to maintain your success and well-being?

5. What were some positive/successful situations you had as an international student? Please share 1-2.
    - When did these events happen?
    - What are some strategies you used to overcome that situation?
    - Who did you reach out to, to help you?
    - How supportive were your community, culture, family or religion during those times? An example or two?
    - What was it like to be an international graduate student, experiencing these challenging situations abroad?
    - What did you feel/think about yourself during that situation? What did your family and friends feel about that situation?
    - What were some resources (within campus and community), if any, that you used to maintain your success and well-being?

6. What has been your experience sharing your culture with Americans and other international students (community, students, teachers)?

- How do you share your culture with others? What do you do? How do persons respond when you share your culture? Does the response vary across groups of people in any ways?
- How multicultural and diverse is/are your friendships/friendship circle?
- How have your friendship with other international and/or American students changed/not changed your views about your own culture?

7. How do you think your early transition period affected your mood and well-being? In what ways did these differ or are similar to that of other graduate international students?
     - What do you know about campus counseling services?
     - What are some reasons you would/would not access the counseling services on campus?
     - What are some benefits of reaching out to friends and family and other support networks instead of going to counseling services? Disadvantages?
     - What do you think campus counseling services could do to support international graduate students like yourself?

8. Looking back, what do you think you would do differently to help you maintain your well-being as an international graduate student during your early acculturation period?
     - What advice would you offer to incoming international graduate students?
     - What advantages and disadvantages does one have in being a graduate international student?
     - How would you handle your cultural transition differently?

9. During the cultural transition process, have you learned or grown any in way?
     - How have you changed due to the study abroad experience?
     - What are some things you have earned about your own identity and culture since coming to the U.S.?

10. Other thoughts you would like to share?

Pilot Study

Purpose

The purpose of the pilot study was to test the procedures described above and check the clarity and appropriateness of the wording in the recruitment flyer and semi-

structured interview schedule. Thus, the threefold purpose of the pilot study was to a) assess the clarity and attractiveness of the recruitment message via written and verbal messages, b) assess the clarity and intelligibility of the semi-structure interview schedule, and c) estimate the approximate time needed to complete an individual interview. The researcher sought to gather data from participants and incorporate relevant feedback to further strengthen the main study.

Research Questions

There were three questions for the pilot study:

Research Question 1: Are the recruitment messages via flyer, email, and verbal communication clear and attractive for participants in the study?

Research Question 2: Is the interview schedule clear and understandable, according to the participants?

Research Question 3: How long does it take to complete the interview?

Participants

The researcher checked with the IRB if an approval was needed, given that direct quotes from the pilot study participants will not be published or used in this dissertation study, with the response that the pilot study will not require IRB review. The purpose of the pilot study was to gain feedback on the main study, especially in terms of

- attractiveness and clarity of the flyer, email and verbal communication
- clarity and understandability of the interview questions from the schedule, and
- the duration of the interview

Two international graduate students of Color, one from a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) major and another from an education background was invited. These students were known to the researcher through friendship and had expressed interest in the research topic. One student identified as female and another as male, and both identified as young adults. Because the purpose of the study was to test the process, procedures, and semi-structured interview questions, the participants were not required to meet the full requirements (both have stayed more than 2 years in the U.S) in order to participate in the pilot study.

Procedures

Upon their interest in the study, the participants were invited for the interview and an appointment was set with them individually. One individual chose to meet in a University library private room, while the other preferred to meet in the participant's home. Prior to the interview, both participants read the flyer, email invitation to participate in the study, in-person and social media recruitment script. Participants' consent was sought once again, using a draft consent form, as a way of receiving feedback on the document before proceeding to the interview (Appendix E).

Both interviews were in-person. The first interview took place in the participant's apartment. The researcher used the semi-structure interview schedule to begin the interview. As the interview progressed, the participant opened up more, sharing vulnerable experiences. This interview lasted a little over 2 hours, with the participant's permission. At the end of the first hour the researcher checked with the participant on the timing, and she expressed her desire to continue with the interview. The second interview

was conducted in a UNCG library private room. This interview lasted 1 hour 15 minutes.

Both interviews were audio recorded on the researcher's laptop with each participant's

verbal consent. The interviews were recorded for the researcher to identify and review

questions that seemed unclear or too complicated for the participants. The recordings will

be deleted after 30 days. At the conclusion of the interviews, both participants were

invited to share feedback related to the pilot research questions and any other suggestions

to improvise the study. This feedback occurred directly after the interviews, and was

done individually and independently of each other, not together in a group format.

Feedback from the Pilot Study

Both participants independently shared that the recruitment email, verbal

communication, and flyer were clear and attractive. Both of them had reactions to the

length of the consent form with participant 1 sharing "wow that's a long one!" The

researcher explained that the informed consent included valuable information on the risks

and benefits of participating in the study, along with details on the voluntary nature of the

study. Once the explanation of IRB process and the intention of informed consent was

explained, the participants seemed more reassured. Participant 2 responded to the

importance of informed consent as "Yes I imagine people being misused in the study and

facing risks. So, this is good."

Their response to the informed consent and recruitment email indicated that the

participants were not necessarily reading the documents in detail. The male participant

from an education background asked if I could explain it to him verbally. On being asked

for his rationale for the same, he shared that his reading ability in English was slower

than Arabic and that it would be easier to hear me explain. Thus, the interviewer (in this case the researcher) may have to verbally explain the consent form and rely more on interpersonal networks for participant recruitment since the student shared he didn't read emails that weren't from his professors.

Throughout the interviews both participants asked clarifying questions, especially for the main questions (versus the probes). On seeking feedback on the clarity of the questions, the participants shared the following: although most international graduate students would be able to understand the questions, the "psychological nature of the interview questions needed more time to think," and that "the concrete examples of what support system, for example, means helped me think about what you're asking." Additionally, simplifying the questions was other specific feedback the researcher received.

The duration of the interview was the third pilot study question. The first interview was of 2 hours and 5 minutes, while the second interview was 1 hour 15 minutes. This means the average interview time for the two participants was 100 minutes. Participant 1 shared that she wanted to share more experiences because she felt very strongly about the injustices she experienced as a minoritized international woman. Additionally, she shared that since she knew the interviewer (researcher) very well, she felt more inclined to share and that others may not provide as much details for the interview to extend up to 2 hours. Participant 2 from the education background shared that his initial reaction to an hour-long interview was "Wow! What are we going to talk for that long about?" However, once the interview was complete he felt that the time

period felt appropriate. He shared that the appropriate time for the interview was 60 to 90 minutes, and that an incentive such as gift card could be provided to increase participation. The second participant shared that it was necessary to extend the interview to 90 minutes since it took him "20-30 minutes to get into the flow of the topic."

Adjustments to the Full Study

Based on the feedback and review of the audio recordings of the two interviews, the researcher simplified some questions to facilitate understanding for the participants, especially for those who come from non-English speaking backgrounds. Additionally, more colloquial terms were used, resulting in changes such as the following: (original) "Looking back, what do you think you would do differently to help you maintain your well-being as an international graduate student during your early acculturation period?" was changed to "Looking back, what would you do differently to take care of yourself." This change was made based on participant 1's comment that "take care" communicated "normal things we do to be healthy" while "well-being" "sounded more scientific." "Early acculturation period" was dropped since most participants were not familiar with the term acculturation. Also, since the participants are expected to be in the early acculturation period (less than two years as an international graduate student in the U.S.), adding this word created more confusion for the participants. Thus, a revised interview schedule is provided in Appendix D.

Other changes included anticipated duration of the interview. The interviewer expected the interview to be approximately 60 minutes. Given the very limited information that was gained in 60 minutes and the time needed to build meaningful

rapport, the interview duration was changed "60-90 minutes" in relevant documents

Given that the flyer and the recruitment email, and in-person recruitment script seemed

clear, no changes were made to those.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In Chapter One, the researcher provided an outline of current research on mental health of international graduate students of Color and delineated the rationale for the importance of this study in counseling. Tara Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth was also provided as a possible framework to further understand the mental health experiences and coping strategies of international graduate students of Color from a strengths-based perspective. In Chapter Two, the investigator provided a critique of current literature addressing the mental health and coping strategies of international students in general, and specifically international graduate students of Color.

A thorough literature review was provided on studies addressing the psychological well-being of this population and a clear research gap - dearth of multicultural and asset-based studies to understand the mental health experiences of international graduate students of Color - was highlighted. A background of Critical Race Theory and Tara Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth was also discussed. In Chapter Three, the researcher described the necessary steps of the qualitative study to gather data on how international graduate students of Color support their mental health during the early acculturation phase of studying abroad. The researcher also explored the "fit" of Yosso's (2005) theory in providing a conceptual framework to explain this

population's mental health coping strategies. The results of this qualitative study are presented in Chapter Four.

Research Questions

There were two research questions for this qualitative study.

Research Question 1: *How do international graduate students of Color support their mental health during the early acculturation phase in their study abroad period?*

Research Question 1.1 *To what extent does Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth theory offer a potential theoretical framework to support a strengths-based understanding of international graduate students of Color's mental health?*

Participants

For recruitment of participants for this study, the researcher used convenience and snowball sampling. Recruitment flyers (Appendix A) were posted around the UNCG campus and in the Greensboro community (e.g., coffeeshops, restaurants near UNCG campus) to invite international graduate students of Color to participate in the study. Copies of the flyer were also be posted on social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, to invite larger number of eligible students. Additionally, given that international students have been found to have a strong monocultural (friendship with same nationality peers) and multicultural (friendship with other international students) network, snowball sampling was also be used. Participants were encouraged to invite other eligible students using a copy of the recruitment flyer and by providing information about the study via email (Appendix B). A total of 23 participants expressed interest in the study. Of these, 12 were not eligible for the study due to failure to meet criteria (e.g., number of years in

the U.S. and visa status). Two other participants did not respond to the email response or the follow-up. No reasons were disclosed. One participant was not available within the time frame for the study. Eight participants were eligible and completed the semi-structured interview.

All eight participants met the inclusion criteria:

- 18+ older,

- International student in a graduate program,

- Have lived in the U.S for at least 1 year but not longer than 2 years, and

- Identify as a person of Color.

Participants' mean age was 30 with standard deviation of 9.92 years. All participants were international graduate students and identified as persons of Color. Four students were from non-STEM background (MBA, Special Education, Communication and Speech Disorders, and Counseling Psychology). The remaining four were from STEM majors (Nanoscience and Nanotechnology, Biomedical Engineering, Internal Medicine, Computer Science). Four students were pursuing their master's degree while four were on track to complete a doctoral program. Data on the nationality of the participants were also gathered. Three participants identified as Indians, two were Chinese, one Indonesian, one British, and one Brazilian. However, at least a couple of participants identified with more than one culture, such as Indian-Ugandan or Indian-Chinese, as their cultural heritage. All participants for this study identified as females and persons of Color, representing a unique section of the international graduate students on U.S. college campuses. The participants for this study came from various universities in

the area. Four students were affiliated with The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, two with Wake Forest University, one with the Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanotechnology, and one from Kentucky State University. Seven students learned of this study via email recruitment sent from the International Programs Center and the Piedmont International Friends and one student from social media post.

Procedures and Results

To conduct this research study on the lived experiences of international graduate students of Color and how they support their mental health during acculturation phase, the researcher employed interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), as described by Jonathan Smith and his colleagues (Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Preparation for Semi-Structured Interviews

To prepare for the study interviews, the research completed a comprehensive review of the literature on the topic of international students and their mental health. A limited use of multicultural and strengths-based approach to understand the mental health experiences of international students and their coping strategies was identified. The researcher sought to address this gap in the literature through semi-structure interviews of international graduate students of Color (a unique population due to its intersecting identities). Ten semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D) were generated. The study was approved by IRB after minor modifications. Information about the study was disseminated through social media and email recruitment, and eight interviews were

completed. The duration of the interviews ranged from 65 minutes to 2.5 hours. No participant expressed desire for a follow-up interview.

Analysis

The analysis team comprised of three individuals - two coders and an auditor. The researcher served as the primary coder. The secondary coder is a doctoral student from the School of Education who had training in qualitative research. The auditor provided feedback on the emergent and super-ordinate themes (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Each interview was transcribed and independently coded by the two coders. Both coders followed the recommendations by Smith et al. (2009). The transcribed interviews were read thoroughly to become familiar with the data. Initial remarks and comments are noted in the margin. In the next step, similarities and differences in the comments were noted, and similar experiences were merged under a common emergent theme. The goal here was to reduce the volume of the detail while also maintaining the uniqueness of the participant's voice. Similar emergent themes were clustered together to construct super-ordinate themes. Once the coders independently completed this process for a transcript, they discussed the similarities and differences in their list of super-ordinate and emergent themes. Through dialogue and discussion, a consensual list was developed and submitted to the auditor for feedback. The auditor's feedback helped the coders identify over-looked phenomena and monitor their projections on interpretations of participants' experiences. The same procedure was followed for the remaining seven participants.

After coding the individual interviews, a grand theme list was developed by the primary coder, with feedback from the auditor. This list reflected the overarching themes

in the mental health experiences of international students of Color and their preferred coping strategies. Every effort was made to ensure that the grand themes remained grounded in the primary data. The list of grand themes and individual themes were sent to each participant for feedback and corrections. Each participant was given four days to report back any request for modifications. Three participants asked for a change in their pseudonym, and one participant gave feedback on the name of a subtheme. Subtheme "Home Country and Influences" was changed "Injustices in Home Country" to reflect the overall content under subtheme. No other changes/ recommendations were offered.

Findings

The themes discussed below describe the lived experiences on international graduate students of Color. The nine grand themes identified common challenges faced by this population and the strategies they employ/ed to support their mental health.

Grand Theme 1: Acceptance and Interactions with the American Society

In this section, participants' experience and critique of the American society is provided. Participants shared a wide range of observations and their personal experiences that provided insight into their understanding of the dominant culture of U.S. society.

Grand Theme 1.1: Adverse Experiences. The first subtheme includes the "Adverse Experiences" that the participants reported. These included instances of harassment and religious prejudice. A.Z shared her experiences of sexual harassment that "terrified" her and made her feel concerned about her safety:

> That was one time I was on my gym clothes and I went to the grocery store and I was walking home and this guy on this red pickup, he was saying that I was beautiful and he wanted my number and he wanted to talk with me and it's scary

because I live really close to the grocery store and he was following me on his car. Gosh, I was terrified.

She went on to share how she avoided going to her apartment for a while and stayed in the grocery store until the man left the area. Other adverse experiences reflected ethnocentrism and possibly xenophobia. M.F, a Catholic international student shared how she was taken aback by a fellow parent's bigoted comments on religion:

> I don't know how it came up in conversation, but basically it came up. She basically asked me what religion was I and I'd said I was Catholic and she said, "Oh, I thought you might be Hindu, but I'm so glad you are Catholic." And I said, why? "It would be really difficult for me if you are Hindu, if you believed in all those gods and you didn't believe in Jesus and you weren't Christian, that would really be difficult for me.

Religion appeared to be a strong factor influencing social interactions for community members in the area. Jay, a Hindu, shared how during her travel in the city bus she was approached by a stranger with an evangelistic message: "I just felt it. I see that some people are very strong in their religions and they used to insist that Christianity is the best. Some people started talking that Christianity and Jesus is great and He is the only God."

Prejudice was evident in the behavior of campus staff as well. Cheryl sought support from career services to identify resources to aid her partner to join her in the U.S. She shared that she intended the meeting to be a request for resources and references. However, she was met with an unhelpful response:

> I think she said something to me like, why don't you just quit your PhD and go live with him? And that really hit me. And I went home and I cried of course. And

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I considered it, I was like, if this is the way I'm going to be treated in this campus, do I want to stay or do I want this kind of environment?

Grand Theme 1.2: Warmth and Welcome. Despite the adverse and prejudiced experiences some participants experienced, most members shared instances of being welcomed to the U.S. society. For Jay, her host family proved to be pivotal in her positive adjustment into the U.S.

> And even though I don't know them, I was able to adjust with them and I stayed in their house for one week and they supported. They showed me several shops and the restaurants in Greensboro, they showed me the university campus and they showed me the bus routes and everything. So they were, they're still helpful to me and they are still treating me as their niece. I called them as Uncle and Auntie and they are still helping.

The host family's support helped Jay integrate into the local community: "And the friends and the host family, everyone who supported me. Really I'm very much grateful to them. So I was feeling excited and slowly belonging to the community."

The politeness of Southern culture also communicated acceptance and comfort to the international students in the study. TL, a Chinese student shared how she was pleasantly surprised to be greeted on the streets, something uncommon in her region in China: "I've felt like people are really nice here. They smile to strangers and they just so enthusiastic and say hello to everybody. That's a really warm environment for me. I really like it." The politeness and warmth were evident in public offices in the community for M.F:

> These big Black nurses who were just so lovely and so friendly and so warm and so interested in our background that we ended up chatting to them for ages. And

my daughter, who normally hates vaccinations, didn't even notice she had about four and I came away going. That was such a wonderful experience. I said, it is the most heartwarming experience we've had since coming to America.

Fani shared that as a Muslim woman she felt affirmed and supported when a local community member supported her choice to wear hijab: "one time a woman say to me when I was in a cashier line, she just, uh, told me that, oh, I support you. And then I just wasn't sure and she said that supported me wearing the hijab. It means a lot for me."

Grand Theme 1.3: Difficulty in American Friendships. Participants also shared that for the most part, intimate friendships with American students were challenging. Various reasons were cited, including busy schedules and individualism. Fani, a participant from Indonesia shared that she was used to much more intimate and dependable friendships in her home country. She shared how the culture of seeking "appointments" in friendships was new to her: "But here when I have friends, and I trust them. And then like a moment that I need a help, they say I'm sorry I'm busy. And can make appointment like next week. Like, I mean what the hell is that? Like, you know, I thought you were my friend"

Language barriers often compounded the cultural differences in building strong friendships with Americans, according to TL.

> To be honest, is difficult. It's not just as the same as to make Chinese friend. To make American friends is different to make Chinese. I don't know whether you think so, but it's true because you can speak Chinese, your own, your, your original language. That can express your feeling really well. But if you speak to American, maybe it's just different. You cannot express your deeper feeling.

Limited sense of curiosity to learn about other cultures was also cited as a barrier to friendships with Americans. One participant shared how American students typically approached her only for work related issues. It is possible, according to A.Z, that increased competitiveness in the STEM fields hinders close relationships among the cohort members.

> Usually people that don't like the immigrants and international students, they won't talk a lot, don't talk with me and just do their thing. Which I think is a loss because this is a country with a bunch of culture. They are like only talking with you when it's work related or when it's on their interest.. They are not curious about like your history, where you came from, your family, like the roots and stuff, but they are different, but I know some people in my program that are like that, that are really closed up, don't talk with anyone and just see each other as competitors.

Grand Theme 1.4: International Students' Notions about Americans.
Participants also shared their notions about U.S. Americans prior to coming to the States. For the most part, media played an important role in portraying ideas about American lifestyle and culture for Cheryl: "I definitely thought, and like I definitely had this idea of the American life, the American dream, you know, all those things that are guided by media and watching friends and you know, sitcoms."

Participants also felt disappointed by their assumptions about the U.S. Cheryl shared how she had assumed life in the U.S to be must better than her life in India. She believed that the American society would be a lot more harmonious than what she had witnessed in India.

> So I think, you know, I just had this idea of everything being like the, you know, housewife, what's that? What's that show called? But modern family, like just, just

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relaxed and here everyone's fine and there's no hatred. No xenophobia and everything's perfect and that's really developed country.

M.F, on the other hand disclosed that she wasn't very eager to come to the U.S. She admitted that popular portrayal of the South as a conservative region had adversely influenced her assumptions.

I had, I had, I had preconceived ideas about Americans and America and really wasn't looking forward to coming, to be honest. Um, and especially coming to the south where you've got the stereotypical, you know, southern Republican, Conservative Religious Bible belts, racist or that sort of stuff that I knew was just generalizations and that everywhere you go, everybody's different. But you know, that is, that is what is out there.

Grand Theme 1.5: Infrastructure and Administration in the U.S. Participants in the study also had varying responses regarding the infrastructure and support from university administration in their transition into the U.S. Transportation, in particular proved to be a big challenge for Cheryl.

And like public transport. And so I think living in Lexington, you, you kind of expect it to be like a city, but it's not like almost sometimes feels so, so much more rural than you expect a city to be. And like if you define yourself as a look, second largest city in Kentucky, then I guess I just guess my definitions of city are very different. There's a public transport is almost minimal and um, you know, very basic things, which I just expected the us to be more on top of.

Living in smaller cities further compounded the public transportation issue for the participants, including Fani.

The development itself, I thought that all of America is like a, like a big city, like, you know, good transportation system. But I think it depends and it depends on the state or the very place you live in. For example, in Greensboro we don't really

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have a good transportation system. I mean they have but there's no train and like it is a little bit hard if you want to go to the research triangle area

Grand Theme 2: Higher Education in the U.S.

In this section, participants' experiences in U.S. higher education is discussed. Individuals shared their reasons for choosing U.S. for higher education, their experience of transitioning into a new education system, and how their success in academics became an important source of pride.

Grand Theme 2.1: Reasons for Studying in the U.S. Participants' reasons for choosing the U.S. revolved around the high standards and reputation of a degree from an American education institution. For instance, Cheryl shared that pursuing her PhD in psychology from the U.S. meant she would be at the center of major developments in the field.

> Obviously, APA is American Psychological Association, not Indian psychological, you know, um, so it's almost like going to where it all, where the hub is going to be. Center of psychology in the modern world was really important to me. It's almost like when you want to get trained, you want to get trained from the best. The idea that I had was that being in the United States where, you know, all the ACA, APA, all these boards, you know, organizations are formed and they're so powerful in the field that what better than to get an education from an APA accredited program, which then can pave the way to kind of go anywhere in the world.

Cheryl understood that education from the U.S. was also associated with freedom in professional development, and ability to work anywhere in the world:

> I feel like almost having that stamp of approval that you have been trained within the APA guidelines, so therefore now you are ready to be unleashed into the

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world and then work, um, you know, anywhere. Yeah. And I think that freedom is something that I really wanted that, that confidence.

Fani agreed with Cheryl, saying, "I know that the education system here is, this is one of the best, especially for the MBA program and like if you get your degree here it will be recognized everywhere."

Higher education in the U.S. also provided other lucrative factors for international students, including funding and infrastructure for Jay's research aspirations:

> In India I was not able to receive scholarships and enough funding to continue with my research and in a small place, we don't have every facility on campus. So I thought about USA when I went through the websites and searched for the universities, I see that the university provides all the facilities inside the campus and they support with scholarships, so that was interesting.

Grand Theme 2.2: Transition into a New Education System. Participants also discussed the barriers and challenges the faced as they transitioned into a new system of coursework and expectations. For M.F, a non-traditional student, adjusting to technological advances in education was one of the most challenging components of graduate education:

> I've never seen people working simultaneously on a google doc and like canvas, I mean, your lectures, your PowerPoints, they're already there and you know, I didn't realize you were expected to read them before the lecture and download them and print them and then go to the lecture with them. Then write on them, you know. It's posted on canvas, they don't actually tell you that you've gotten the assignment. Oh you have to know to check canvas and it's like this checking canvas every few hours. I'm like oh check my emails and canvas every few hours. I can't do that but I have to. So I have to have a smartphone.

Studying into the U.S. also meant becoming familiar with new rules of hierarchy within the classrooms. K.S. reflected on the differing rules of power and hierarchy between China and the U.S.: "Here the students and professors are in a pretty equal position... but in China where we are educated to be respectful to teachers, parents."

Cultural differences in expected classroom behavior was evident TL's experience too. She reflected on the more dialogical nature of American education and its merits:

> Can I just say like America is more extraverts? I don't know because in China we don't really like asking question and answering our feeling in class, but it's okay in the United States. Yeah, and there is one more difficult is that in China we don't really get used to asking questions, and respond your feeling, but in my major what most of thing we need to do in class is to reflect, to talk, reflect, and talk. Students talk more than teacher and I know that it's a good thing.

The differing expectations was reflected in the balance between coursework and research in graduate programs for K.S.:

> I'm not sure if that's really important because I felt the graduate students here don't really care much about their GPA and it looks like they care more about their research and research needs, practice skills, and that's what Chinese students lack.

Grand Theme 2.3: Academic Success. Participants in the study were also asked to share their experience of success as an international student. For most participants, including A.Z, it was closely related to their academic achievement:

> I scored 80 on my neuroanatomy exam, I felt awesome. Despite what my advisor would say, I felt that I answer all their questions. I felt confident on my project and also like first poster presentation that where we'd have to talk in English.

Jay, a doctoral student in STEM agreed with A.Z:

Actually in our first semester we need to take a math course and it was really challenging for everyone. When I succeeded in that, I really felt happy and confident. That's given me a lot of confidence that I could survive here and that was the positive situation.

Another participant, Bansal, discussed how her graduation would give her a sense of accomplishment:

It is a sort of an accomplishment, a feeling that "yes, you did this and you reach the end of the line finally, this is what you gain." I think I'm not still there because I'm here to graduate so I haven't felt the accomplishment. Of course, I've seen the stepping stones to it. So small stepping stones have been really nice to know.

Grand Theme 3: Adverse Mental Health Experiences

Stressful experiences often adversely affected international graduate students' mental health. A wide range of stressors were reported by the participants that impacted their sense of well-being. These ranged from school related stressors (e.g., language barriers in classrooms) to socio-political (e.g., xenophobia and racism).

Grand Theme 3.1: Language Related Stress. Participants discussed how their language barriers adversely inhibited their full engagement in American classrooms and society. Often, the language barriers resulted in painful experiences of inadequacy for TL.

Even though the teacher said it is okay, you take a time to respond. It is okay to ask if you need, but you just still feel like I'm a little, dumb, you know, it's just feel like less than others. It's not that smart. I don't know actually just because the language barrier but just made you feel like it's your intelligent barrier. It's a really hard time for me and there is a time I even feel. When to talk about it to my

instructors I usually cry. Yeah. I mean I really want to catch up in. I really want to get involved in class actually, but I just feel really hard. It's really difficult because for me it's really easy for me to have conversation in just pair but in groups, it's not easy. There's a lot of pressure on you.

This student went on to share how there was an implicit pressure to verbally engage in the class. Her status as an ESL speaker made her situation even more challenging.

So when I first have UNCG class, I actually felt really pressure because it's difficult to get involved in whole American class. Actually in most of my graduate class I just have maybe just have one Asian in my class in most of my class and I've felt it's really hard to catch up with them like they speak really fast and back and forth after I understand what teachers said and I need to still need to think really fast to understand what students are saying because it is so fast.

For A.Z, the frustration with language barrier often bordered on a feeling of being overwhelmed with the extensive influence of English.

I felt overwhelmed in the beginning because I had classes in English of course. And of course the grocery store, the staff speak English. I turn on the TV, the news, they are in English. I tried to, I just talk for a minute and like hear something on my language that I don't have to work too much to understand. Nope, that's not possible in English. Like I'm 100 percent of our time is in English.

Grand Theme 3.2: Challenges in Building a Community. Participants also shared their difficulty in building a strong a community of support system. Experiences of isolation and loneliness were common for Jay, especially in the initial few months of coming to the U.S.

First thing, we don't know anyone. We need to start building some relationships. We need to start finding out who will be better, who will be helping us, and things like that. We need to start making friends. Actually that phase is a difficult place. And we need to search for people, we need to find some people who helps us or who guides us and we need someone to talk. Also, the first two months I thought though we talk with few peoples, we cannot make a, a very close relationship within two months.

Cultural differences in the definitions of friendship resulted possible confusion and misunderstanding of expectations in friendship for Fani.

You know, you talk to someone a few times, and you share. And I thought that this person is my best friend, you know, whenever I need them, they will take the time for me. For me, it is like there are moments when I really need someone to talk.. so I don't know how a person define a friendship here.

Isolation was also quite common among the participants. The limited presence of intimate relationships in the U.S. and the desire to not inconvenience their families and friends back home prevented them from disclosing their distress to others. Bansal, a master's student from India disclosed how she never truly revealed her stressors to her family, despite being in regular contact with them.

My family was always there. They always used to keep asking you if I'm okay. but only I knew what I, how I was doing. So they don't really know what I was going through, apart from my coursework because they had an idea of what my career and my educational coursework. So they always knew I'm stressed, that a certain part of me is stressed about that, but I don't think they really knew my, my emotional side. So even so they were always there. I knew it, but I don't think they knew what I was going through.

Bansal's reasons for keeping her worries private was a common one among international students in the U.S.

When you come here, you don't want to disturb your friends and close people back there so that they don't get disturbed about your situation. So I kind of held back that as well. So whatever was going through with me, with roommate issues slash coursework or schoolwork, I didn't really share with them. Because I never wanted them to know what I'm going through because they'll get tensed and because they also have a lot of things going on in their life.

However, not all participants kept their distress away from their families. A.Z, a doctoral student, was intentional about seeking support from her mother.

It was hard in the beginning when I moved here, my mom's, like I think like a week with me was sleeping on skype. like the skype was on all like the whole night and I shut it off when I was about to come to lab because it was hard being completely alone. Now it's much easier.

Grand Theme 3.3: Violence and Microaggressions. Most participants shared that they were concerned and anxious about their safety in the U.S. For K.S., the prevalence of violence and crime was a major concern.

That time I came here, there was an event about a Chinese girl, she was believed to be murdered by a guy here. That's really shocked me. And so that's what I was mainly worried about. So before I came here, obviously I was worried about the gun issue here. I'm not sure if here is as safe as my own country and it's a developed country, but in China the gun isn't a problem. So that's, I guess that's what I was worried about.

K.S. was not alone in her fears about gun violence. The frequency of school shooting adversely impacted Cheryl's desire to stay in the U.S. post-graduation.

I don't really want to live in a country where I have to be concerned that my child will go to school and get shot. And I know that doesn't happen every day, but it just needs to happen once. So, for example, even just about a week or two weeks before the Florida or shooting, there was one in Kentucky which was about 45 minutes away from where I live and it wasn't a huge one as much as the Florida

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one got press. It was two students who got killed, but they're still two students who got one of those students could have been my child.

The shift in the political climate after 2016 elections was very evident for international students. As faculty members reached out in support, the fear of uncertainty further aggravated A.Z's anxiety.

> I'm scared when trump was elected, they send a bunch of emails, they send emails. Our professor sent emails that if we don't feel safe we could call them and wait for them. They said they are always open for us. Some of my friends texted me, Oh, if you want a ride to go to your apartment. I can give her a ride at night. Now I am scared. I was not before, but now I am, but nothing happened just from being an immigrant.

For Cheryl, it also meant facing the possibility of deportation.

> I think like my reaction to the elections was a very strong part of my reaction when I first moved here where I just felt, I definitely felt like the, when he got, when trump got elected, um, one of the fears being an international student was being deported or um, you know, being, not just deported but also experiencing feelings of insecurity and like lack of safety.

Microaggressions and racism was also common in the participants' experiences. For TL, it was evident that several of her Chinese friends experienced differential treatment because of their heritage.

> I always kind of hear my friend talks about it. Can I just share my friends is view? As she went to Orlando. Yeah. And uh, she, yeah, she said she always be recognized, be recognized as a Korean or Japanese. And then if she say she is a Chinese and then she felt like others will give you a not really good response. Like, oh, like, oh Chinese like that (makes a facial expression of judgement). Maybe have a negative reaction.

Grand Theme 3.4: Financial Concerns. Graduate students also experienced

financial stress, especially in the initial months of their education. This inhibited their

social life and wellbeing. Jay, a doctoral student from India, shared how she was unable

to enjoy anything due to financial stress looming over her mind:

> Since I'm going to stay here for four years, I need to understand the U.S. money and slowly I got adjusted to this. I spent very little and I hid in my room. I do not want to go anywhere outside. I do not want to spend much or I was not able to enjoy anything.

> For A.Z, her stipend did not begin until her second year in the PhD program.

> And then it was also a thing when I came here because phd students, they don't receive stipends in their first year. At least international ones. They don't do, they don't at Wake…. On top of having classes and I also, I just need to this new life I have to find a lab that I like and that has money to support me. So that was kind of like a lot of going on because my parents said that they only had money to support me here for a year and I was also again trying to be the living as cheap as I could. So I was living at a family house where only rented a room. I didn't have any of my own furniture. I only had like my things. I have like a budget that I had to expend on a month and save as much money as it could.

The financial stress was partly attributed to exchange rate for the U.S. dollar. The

higher cost of living in the U.S. resulted in Jay scrutinizing every purchase:

> The money, uh, in India is 72 rupees, which is equal to $1 here. And when I go for purchasing some utility or home groceries first I ask, "do I need to be spending all these money?" That was the question which came in.

Grand Theme 3.5: Graduate School Related Stress. The unique stress of being

in graduate school was also evident in the participants' responses. A.Z shared:

It's kind of hard to not let that get into my personal life. Like when I get home it's hard to shut off from everything that I went through the day. So today was a very particular rocky day because tomorrow I'm going to a conference and I just printed on my poster like the day before the conference. So it was like a kind of rocky and we had our differences and yeah.

For Fani, her lower scores in midterm exams meant her Fulbright scholarship could be at stake.

All of my midterm exam. All of them are pretty bad score really. I always met him in during the office hours and it's really helped me to have less stress with my, with my, uh, first semester because, you know, like, um, as a, as a Fulbright they will evaluate all of your performance, just really afraid that I will get a C. and in Grad school we only have the opportunity to get only two C.

For STEM students such as K.S., it meant finding a balance and direction in her research.

So it's more about my research. So when I came here, the. So when we came here, all my classmates started to work as soon as they enter the program on a research project. I was not for sure. I spent a lot of time trying to find a suitable topic to do my research. And that is time consuming. And when you consider that, work from the class like I have to pass exams, and some presentations I was in, that will bring me some pressure, so not maybe about the class but it's more about my own research part.

For A.Z, however, it was the strained relationship with her advisor.

I think the most recent one was in March that I did my proposal that was, um, ongoing one year situation because my advisor is a workaholic and also communication is not one of his best skills. So due to lack of communication between us and him being crazy, I had to postpone my proposals for March. So that was stressful.

Grand Theme 3.6: Mental Health Symptoms. Participants in the study shared experiences of psychological distress and symptoms, including suicidal ideation. A.Z experienced intense suicidal ideation due to excessive stress in her life.

> I was like, I cannot handle this anymore. I don't know who else to talk to or go to. I'm ending this and then everything will be fine. At that point I emailed my counselor was like, I thought about this and like I tried to calm myself down. I went to the bathroom. I was like praying for those thoughts to leave my mind. I thank God that I didn't have access to the roof.

A.Z's stress also resulted in panic attacks as she approached burn out.

> And that night was terrible. I felt that was kind of like panic attacks and that was very hard. And the other, I think rock bottom was during my first year when that was a year and a half in the program and it was my first year on this current lab. I was working almost every weekend, Saturday and Sunday. And I was like, on this loop of working, I was missing classes so I could do work.

Fani too experienced a stress induced adverse response.

> So sometime a couple of months ago, I got into this weird situation couple of months ago, that I cannot breathe. I felt like I cannot move my body. I thought I got a stroke. Then when I come to the hospital, the ER doctor just told me that I was stressed. So I mean those kind of thing that sometimes you don't know, like, you know, the level of stress, we are not aware.

For Bansal, it was her sleep. She disclosed that her quality and duration of sleep had declined significantly over the last few months.

> So after coming here (to the U.S.), I'm not sleeping as good as I used to do back in India. I mean hardly five hours I sleep. A friend told me once, she said you don't sleep enough because you think a lot. That's what she told me. That's why you're not able to sleep nice. And I twist and turn a lot when I'm sleeping. I'm not sleeping good sleep. It's not a five hour of good sleep either.

Grand Theme 4: Home Country and Influences

Participants shared extensively about their home country and its influence on their experience in the U.S. For instance, sharing their culture with other international students and Americans was very important for the participants. Participants also chose innovative ways to remain connected wot their cultural roots. The cross-cultural education experience also helped the participants reflect on the injustices in their home country.

Grand Theme 4.1: Remaining Connected to Roots. Participants found creative ways to remain loyal to their "home culture." These experiences reflect how participants retained some practices as a possible anchoring experience in the face of rapid changes in the life of an international student.

> I don't want to lose my Brazilian culture over just because I'm living here. So I have some YouTube channels from Brazil that I like to watch and I watch those overlap lunch so I can chill. I like when it's carnival, I find some live videos and I watch it. It is a big holiday in Brazil.

For Jay, it meant retaining her Indian culture and respecting her parents' expectations.

> I met so many other international people over there and while talking to them I understood the social life here. As I said, I believe in my culture and values. Although I understand the American culture, I still follow my culture. So we don't go to pubs. My parents don't allow me to go for any night parties. So I still don't go out at night, and I try to return home by nine. So my parents want me to follow those things.

Grand Themes 4.2: Sharing Culture. International students in the study were eager to share their culture with the domestic and international community. Jay chose to share local Indian food with her host family.

> Actually they were really excited and they loved it a lot. They said that "it's really like very yummy." They're praising me a lot for you and they are praising and me even now they want me to come and cook for them one day.

Bansal agreed that food was one of the best way of sharing her culture.

> Food is the best way. Everybody loves food. I'm a big foodie myself, so I like exploring different cuisines and all, and so did they. They were all very open to it and of course they also had an idea about what Indian food is.. so they don't mind exploring that aspect.

A.Z disclosed that she had been intentional about sharing only positive aspects of Brazilian culture.

> I only try to show them like the nice things, not like the dictatorship that happened in Brazil or like slavery that happened, but just like, more nice, like music or things that usually people would know. Like when they had the Olympics I was here so I'll be like, oh this is a very famous song. Just stuff like that. It just, I think made me feel safer to show what I really want to show and what I really like from Brazil.

Grand Theme 4.3: Injustices in Home Country. Participants also reflected on their home culture and country as they contrasted it with their experiences in the U.S. Students from China reflected on the socio-political system back. TL shared:

> China is different than India and United States, you know? So it's impossible for me to fight injustice, right? It's, it's not okay to say anything bad about

government and the President in China, you know. Maybe that way shaped most of Chinese people.

K.S. agreed with Tl on the limited presence of human rights.

So many countries say that in China, people really don't have their basic rights. And our governments have always argue about that. But honestly, what other countries have said is the truth. We don't have that much rights.

For Cheryl, living in India meant feeling unsafe with the police force, particularly

as a woman.

And I guess here I trust the police 100000%. Um, and I guess like when we talk about police, so yeah, we were actually talking about this yesterday. Me and my friends, my roommates from Bangladesh and they were talking about how they, they don't trust the police, but they're never afraid of the police. Like they are not afraid to be molested or raped or attacked by the police. And that just makes me sad because like I definitely do hear stories where in India there's a, you know, like a woman gets raped, she goes to the police station and then they raped her again.

Grand Theme 5: Acculturation

Participants also shared their experiences of acculturating into the U.S. society,

including culture shock and learning American norms.

Grand Theme 5.1: Shades of Culture Shock. Participants experienced culture

shock in a myriad of ways. While some denied a difficult transition, others' experiences

were challenging. For Bansal it was a complex combination of various feelings.

First few months I was scared. First few weeks I would say, I never used to even go out of the house apart from my classes in school because I was really scared of how people behave here at night or what's the culture here. I was scared to step

out of the house. What if I'm not able to cope up with the situation? So in the back of my mind I always had fear.

She shared that she also experienced excitement and openness to new experiences.

I was very, I was very excited when I came here. I wanted to explore out everybody. I wanted a new culture, new diversity. That was the one thing I came for. I wanted to explore the other side of the world so I will know how people are, you know. So I was very excited to see them, meet them and I was always this bubbly person around, you know, talking to people and I really enjoyed it.

However, having lived in several countries before, M.F found the transition to be relatively smooth: "There are a lot of similarities between being in the UK and being in America. So it wasn't, for me, it wasn't such a huge culture shock"

Grand Theme 5.2: Learning American Norms. Participants found innovative strategies to learn the American dialect and norms in order to better acculturate into the into the U.S. society.

I learn things really fast after I saw others, how others do, then I will just imitate that. Just. Yeah, like, yeah, you can see I already say "like," right. I would never say "like," or I felt like I learned this American style that I learned from how others speaking. I mean when they say like, because they can stop to think about it. It's a good trick. Praising, like, Oh, I like your outfit because I always maybe heard from others then I learned how to, uh, actually, when you praise others not only make others happy, actually you also feel happy, that's what I think. Yeah. Because I don't know, just like, but praising is a good thing. That's what I learned in the United States. They really like praising others.

Cheryl learned that code-switching to her "white brain" might work to her advantage, especially as a non-native speaker.

So I'm a really good code switcher. Um, so I will own that. My accent changes depending on who I'm speaking with, not on purpose. Like I swear if I could stick to one accent I would because that just be easier. But genuinely speaking, like physically, I'm not able to maintain one accent when speaking to different kinds of people. But when I'm speaking to my American friends, I definitely have an American accent.

Bansal picked up soft skills that can provide her a competitive edge in the work place.

Since I know their work ethics I think now I know when to do the right thing and when to put something in a particular way. So, people really appreciate email here. You know they have a trend here. Back in India it's usually a phone call. So I think now I know how to approach a person better way, how to write a good email.

Grand Theme 6: Coping Strategies

International students in the study identified multiple coping strategies to support their mental health in the face of challenges. Common support systems included relying on their ethnic community, developing multicultural friendships (friendships with other international students) and seeking support from academic institutions.

Grand Theme 6.1: Support from Ethnic Community. Chinese and Indian students in the study shared that they sought support from co-nationals, especially during the times of festivities. For Bansal, support from her Indian friends was helpful during the Diwali festival.

I think that's when the ethnic group helped I feel because we all came together and celebrated Diwali in a really nice way. Everybody stayed back that night and we all chatted. Played games and ate food. Was a nice good day I would say. So it worked, but still obviously some part of me would miss home, but it was a good alternative I would say.

TL shared that the Chinese community around her created an increased sense of belonging.

> I didn't feel depressed when I come to the United States because I came with a group of Chinese students and we went along really well. We traveled a lot and like to release your stress, you can hang out with a group of friends. And have some fun because they can get what you mean. Yeah. Maybe some jokes. So they bring you happy and cheery and bright. A sense like you don't have family here. Then they can give you that feeling.

Jay found support from her Indian friends in her initial days when she experienced a lot of loneliness.

> I just moved with some people and started talking with them and they were Indians, it was helpful. I stayed with them during nights when I'm lonely. Yeah, the Indians were by my side. Whenever you're feeling lonely or depressed, come here and stay with the Indian community, they said.

Grand Theme 6.2: Multicultural Friendships. Participants also leaned on friendships with students from other nationalities to navigate through their study abroad experiences. For instance, TL felt comfortable with her community of international friends due to a mutual language barrier in English.

> Maybe because of the language barrier. It's not others just language barrier. Like international, like they also have a language barrier. Even though you don't speak I'm like, even though I don't speak Indian still, they don't speak Chinese so that it's easy to make friends. That's what I think.

K.S.'s campus did not have large presence of Chinese international students. However, she found support from other students of Southeast Asian heritage.

I have a classmate, he's American but, his parents is from Malaysia, Asian country and um, I don't remember. So there was one time I, so when I was in a group and others are talking and I feel embarrassed to get involved, I feel difficult to get involved, he would start to talk with me to try to help me get involved. Also, he would message me after class and tell me if I'm time I need help, like I need a ride or anything, just let him know because he knows how difficult it was for his parents when they first came here.

Cheryl supported other international students in settling down and offered car rides for grocery shopping.

I mean, small things where as an international student you don't have a great credit history. Again, therefore you probably don't own a car, you know, you're learning to drive on the wrong side of the road. So I think just, I now own a car. So helping other international students like, Hey, you know, if you need a ride somewhere, just tell me those are smaller things that I would, um, try to help people with or if they need to go to an Asian store or connect them with, um, you know, Asians stores.

Grand Theme 6.3: Faith

For some participants relying on their faith as a "foundation" provided them with the strength to cope with stressors. When Fani struggled with building a community, she leaned on her religious beliefs and sought the strength from her faith.

I believe that God knows which one's better for me and not what I want but what I need. So I think at the spiritual level also like you know, like when you're alone and I just kept asking myself that uh, you said you believe in God. So if you believe in God you never feel alone because you have him whenever you go. No matter I don't have family or friends that I would talk to the God, like you know, He will give you everything, you know.

Although A.Z was not very religious, she found relief in praying with her mother on a regular basis.

I'm not very religious, but my mom had this ongoing thing that she, for example, she prays every Sunday night and she always did that. Like since, I can remember we used to do all the four of us together, but then my father stopped doing it and my brother stop it. And then I was like on and off. But then when I moved here, said mom, that would be nice for us to continue doing that. When I was on, I'm here, so kind of like every Sunday nights we should praise in Brazil a night prayer. At the same time, I feel that it's nice because we are doing the same thing at the same time, so that's nice.

M.F shared that she had always felt "God's presence" in her life, and that helped her remain strong and navigate through challenges, including studying abroad.

It's always there in the background. I do believe, I do believe that, you know, God's looking out for me. I do. I mean, I know it's totally irrational and it's totally unscientific and it doesn't make any sense whatsoever, but I do. I just believe there is somebody and something out there that watches over me.

Grand Theme 6.4: Institutional and Administrative Support. Jay reached out to the international programs center on campus for support during her initial months of loneliness.

So, the International Programs Center was helpful to me before I come here, and they had given me the link of the international student group who are providing students with their host family. So, these were helpful resources and through the internet the international student center used to send email to everyone and they used to encourage us to participate in different things.

Jay also found support from her department executive assistant as a new international student.

When I contacted the, my university in my joint school of Nanoscience, uh, the executive assistant, she had emailed me the bus routes and everything I'm asking them for help. They are, as they were responding me as soon as possible and they

helped me a lot. It gave me the support that I could come here and I could receive that support from everyone.

Bansal too sought the support of her department. She shared that she had to complete her pre-requisite courses before starting the graduate program. However, with her faculty members' support, she felt she was set up to succeed.

> For coursework I think I was constantly in touch with my professors so they kind of knew my situation because they have been seeing such students over a period of time. So they were really helpful. I would say they were really helpful to me. They helped me with every inch of homework or assignments or exams or anything for that matter. I would say my, the Dean of my department is really helpful to me. Still is.

Grand Theme 6.5: Personal Resourcefulness and Attitudes. Participants also shared strategies stemming from their personal resourcefulness and attitudes. These were unique mindsets that the participants adopted that provided them with the resilience and strength to persist as international students.

Once A.Z realized that she needed to find a better work-life balance, she was intentional about finding activities on campus and in her personal life to help her relax.

> There is the GSA that is the graduate school association and they do some events and whenever I can I'm available. I tried to go to their events so they're are very nice. Two years ago they scheduled, there's a theme park, they organized a trip there. They organize the science of March in Washington for us to go. I really like to take baths and then like make a massage on my face with lotion and drink some tea and watch something nice on tv, like just try to relax or like read a nice book, try to do stuff that are not lab related there.

As a non-traditional student, M.F had to catch up with technological changes and shifts in the education system in addition to adjusting in a new country. Her sense of initiative was very evident in her response.

> Ask a lot of questions, made a lot of mistakes and try to avail myself of every workshop that was going. So, I made very good friends with the librarian, and she's lovely and she's great. So, you know, making friends with the librarian and then know you can go to her and have a one to one and she helped with my first couple of lit reviews. Um, she walked me through them and helped me and then, you know, talking to the other doc students, you know, how do you sort out all your references and filed them and how to do this, that and the other. So, it's just, you have to, you have to ask people.

Grand Theme 7: Campus Counseling Services

Students in the study were also asked about their use of campus counseling services and potential barriers to seeking mental health support.

Grand Themes 7.1: Limited Knowledge about the Counseling Center. Several participants shared that they were not provided with sufficient information about the campus counseling center, which impacted their use of the services. TL shared:

> Like I don't, I don't usually receive any email from counseling office. Maybe you guys can send some email to ask whether if you have something need that I can help let us know and send your office location. You know, I've been here maybe more than a year. I don't even know where the counseling office is.

Bansal agreed with TL on the need for publicity and the help university accountable for poor marketing.

> I didn't know what this counseling thing. I think they should probably make it more popular for people should know it and I'm not somebody who was ignorant about it. I knew a lot of things going around and I knew most of the things. I

should not say it, but partly it is a university fault they did not reach out enough to the students to access that service.

In addition, many students were also not aware of the reasons to seek counseling, including Jay.

I don't know much about the campus counseling for services. I just seen it in the website and when I came here I just know that there is a campus counseling, but I did not know much. I think that many do not know much about what counseling and career counseling can do for the international students. It is my personal opinion.

Grand Theme 7.2: Stigma and Other Reasons Against Seeking Counseling.

Cultural stigma and not feeling helped were some common reasons against seeking counseling for the participants in the study. Bansal shared that counseling was not common in India, and that had somehow impacted her help-seeking behavior too.

I could have thought about it. I'm not saying I would not have. I'm not sure if I would have gone because somewhere back in my mind also.. it's injected, you know "it's not a good thing to do." That's what I said, my home country is not really very supportive of it doing that, so I'm not sure if I have done it, but I might have.

Fani agreed with Bansal on the role of cultural stigma.

Yeah, at that time I didn't felt like I need to go to counseling. But I know that there is a counseling center on campus.. I don't know.. It is not common in Indonesia. I know I need to change it.. but it is kind of hard to change my perception.. like it is not common in my culture.

M.F shared that at times the barrier is within the student when it came to seeking counseling services.

I think you can, you can publicize till you're blue in the face. But until something, But they're ready themselves to recognize that they need to go and that they feel comfortable enough going. Yeah. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know how you can do it. The students have got to, want to come, you know, they've got to, they've got to recognize the need in themselves and feel comfortable coming here.

K.S. sought counseling from the center on her campus but did not find the process to be very helpful.

So when I was there she asked me. Oh, so she is mostly playing the role of the listener to learn what I was experiencing. Can I say actually I don't feel that helped? So when I talk with my parents and friends I already got some, some comfort part. So when I went to the counseling service I was actually looking more for the actual advice instead of someone just listening to you.

The time bound nature of counseling was another deterrent for K.S.

In a counseling center, the people there maybe professional, they don't really know about you and your situation. You have to explain everything. And what I don't like is, every session is was an hour. So you're just introduced something but the time is out. That's what I hated most about.

However, for at least one student, campus counseling proved to very helpful. A.Z shared that she started her counseling in the very early stages of her stay in the U.S.:"You don't know anyone but I want to talk about what I think, what I want and what I'm thinking about. So that helped a lot. It was good. It was very helpful. Very helpful"

Grand Theme 7.3: Recommendations to the Counseling Center. Several recommendations were provided by participants in the study to improve services by campus counseling center. Fani, who had to be hospitalized for her stress response,

shared that critical mental health information should be shared early on for international

students.

> Sometimes you don't know, like, you know, the level of stress, we are not aware. Now I think I can recognize it right now, so I can avoid it. But I think not all students may be able to notice it. Maybe giving some information during orientation can be helpful. I think it's really important.

Bansal shared that the university must take greater responsibility to help

international students access counseling and explain that their university fees and

insurance may cover for campus counseling services.

> Because even if they're talking with the health insurance, they just talk about that. They never talk about the mental insurance. I mean if it's available, just make sure you talk about it. You just talk about the financial aspect of it and I need to pay my insurance and get all these things fixed. I can get all these things fixed. What about my mental health?

Given the most common stressors faced by TL revolved around English language

proficiency, her recommendations to counseling center included opportunities to practice

English: "When I first came to here, I will really want to get involved to other cultures.

So I really want to, uh, have American friends or international friends to practice my

English. I mean newcomers... They really need that support."

Grand Theme 8: Growth and Self-Development

Participants shared their experiences of growth and development in the

interviews. Common areas of growth included an increase in confidence, professional

development, and courage.

Grand Theme 8.1: Academic and Professional Development. Given the

primary purpose of studying abroad, education, it was not uncommon among participants

to discuss their professional and academic development with pride.

> I went to APA this year and I got to do my first, uh, what's it called? Seminar. Not
> a seminar but like talk, oh sorry. Yeah, like a, yeah, it take a verbal seminar, like a
> 60 minute seminar where you have to be um, speakers who speak about the same
> subject or same research interest. And I think that was kind of a win because um, I
> got to brag about going to APA, which is theoretically the biggest international
> conference in psychology, at least for our field.

Fani shared that she competed in a competition for students in her major. Winning

with her team was one of her highlights of being in the U.S.

> We won a business competition. Three of us, me, MBA friend, and one
> international student from Greece, we just register to the compensation and then
> the company assigned us as a group. It amazing that you can meet people from
> somewhere and then just work on a project together and you can get success. Uh,
> so yeah. And then like, uh, it proved to that I can do everything with hard work
> and nothing is impossible.

For Bansal, it was doing well in her coursework that gave her the confidence that

she could succeed.

> Of course, how I was doing in my coursework. I was doing really well and I was
> keeping up with the coursework. So, there was that was sense of confidence and
> giving me sort of confidence to move ahead, "maybe it's not that bad. I can do it. I
> can reach the end of the line.

Grand Theme 8.2: Independence and Confidence. Participants shared that as

they struggled through the challenges of acculturation, they also built confidence and a

sense of self-reliance. Fani shared that she was pushing herself and growing out of her comfort zone.

> I never thought I can live without my family because like I grow up in a family, wherever I go I am surrounded by people that I know, but now I feel like if I don't have a friend I can manage by myself. I don't have transportation and just I walk where I can. And if I don't have friends who help me, I can just figure it out by myself and I become more confident because I know more about myself now.

For Jay, it was learning to overcome her financial hardships and becoming independent: "I learned to be more independent. We were in a family together all the time. So, when I started coming here and learning how to manage the home, utilities, and how to manage my expenditure."

Bansal shared that she grew to develop mental toughness and stronger faith within herself.

> It changes you as a person, you are more flexible. I just think the more independent you are, you are yourself basically. You can do anything. It shapes you in a way that now you don't fear that I cannot conquer this. At least you are so prepared that if something comes up I can deal with it. And of course, now I'm very strong, mentally strong. I would say that I'm not really scared of anything. I can say, you know, I already, I'm very prepared that okay, I can handle this. I'll be okay. We can handle because we can manage the situation and you'll see how to go through this.

For Bansal, her confidence further transformed into courage and fearlessness: "You're not afraid. Back in India, I don't think so I would do it. I would be afraid. I said initially, yeah, it was cautious. I think now I'm not really because I know I can handle situations."

Grand Theme 9: Familial Cohesiveness

Although familial support was a key part of the theme of "Familial Cohesiveness," the impact of family on the participants' life was more widespread. Several participants shared how their parents had supported them emotionally, financially, and through networking.

Grand Theme 9.1: Financial Support. Participants recognized that parents' financial support was critical for pursuing higher education in the U.S.

> I mean they support me financially since I was born. Just gave me a feeling that my mom, our mom just give us a feeling that you don't need to worry anything about money like that, so we just get used to not worry anything about money and then like you can just be concentrate on your study, be happy, be healthy. So is a really big support.

K.S. recognized that, although it may not be common in the U.S. for parents to support higher education, it is a common practice in China.

> I think they are pretty supportive. So they are pretty positive about. I pursue a master's degree here and they pay for my tuition and everything cause it's common thing.. is that like in the US, the students may earn their own money to pay for the education. In China your parents pay for their children.

Parents often supported their children's higher education to ensure that the latter could focus on their education and build a meaningful career, according to Cheryl.

> So in financially and my parents have always been supportive of my education. So as long as they felt that it was, um, worth going to. Like for example, in India, private schools are not that, um, coveted, it's more a, you should go to public universities because those are the ones that are better. So my parents always pushed me to do the best that I can be. Um, and then once I would get into one of

the better institutes, um, then they don't care about the finances, then it's all, you know, their support.

Grand Theme 9.2: Relationship with Mother. Interestingly, at least four participants shared a close connection with their mothers. The participants' gender identity as females may or may not have impacted this similarity. K.S. found relief from stress in her mother's comforting words.

> I always told my mom and tell her okay, I am now under pressure again, please say something to comfort me and sometimes that works. She, she is amazing. She should always find some way to make you relax. That I don't know. Maybe that's because she's a teacher (laughs). She always does a great job and make me come back to the right. She's my best friend.

When A.Z felt alone in the initial days as a graduate student in the U.S., she asked her mother to stay on a video call throughout the night.

> Initially sometimes during the day I talked with my mom, by just text because we have a Whatsapp and I don't know if you know that, but we, I usually talk with my mom during the day sometimes though there and it's about, it was hard in the beginning when I moved here, my mom's, like I think like a week with me was sleeping on skype. like the skype was on all like the whole night and I shut it off when I was about to come to lab because it was hard being completely alone.

When Cheryl came to the U.S. as an international student, her mother joined her in the U.S. as a scholar at Harvard. Although they were in different cities, Cheryl found support in the shared experience.

> She was a visiting scholar at Harvard, so she was also expected, experiencing, you know what it's like kind of what it's like to be an international student in the US. I think it was really nice for us to kind of communally bitch about what's

happening. Um, so that was really good to have my mother know what it's like to experience it.

Grand Theme 9.3: Family as a resource when Studying Abroad. For several participants, their immediate and extended family proved to be an important ally during the study abroad experience. These family members provided a smoother transition or, as Bansal described, a bridge between the two cultures.

> So, I'm really close to my cousin. He also came here for master's and went through the same process that I am going to right now. So, he had his own ups and downs during his master life. So, I knew what probably I have to be going through and I was pretty prepared for that as well because of him, because I saw US was pretty much in his light, his vision, his perspective. And of course my relatives were here, so they built a bridge between that. So, I never felt like I didn't know this. I always knew what was going to happen.

As a vegetarian, Jay reached out to her aunt for support. Her aunt provided her with various strategies to adjust into the U.S. and manage her dietary preference within the options available in the country.

> Before coming to Greensboro, I went to Phoenix for two weeks and I stayed there. My aunt explained to me the cultural, um, steps over here and she explained me how to adjust with the cultural diversity and she showed me the shopping centers and she explained me how to shop and she also made me to adjust with the American foods.

A.Z's great grandparents helped her transition into the U.S. and helped her move into her new city.

> I was two weeks in July at my great grandparents in Connecticut and they helped me buy a lot of things that I couldn't bring from Brazil, like pots and pans and stuff and when they moved me here to Winston.

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Summary

Overall, participants' common sources of challenges seemed to be around language barriers, transitioning into a new education system, and financial challenges along the way. However, they found various support systems and strategies to have a positive acculturation experience. Their observations of the American society and interactions with domestic students provide us with critical information on opportunities for reforming intercultural cultural engagement and providing better infrastructure within and outside of campus.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In Chapter One, the researcher provided an overview of the literature available on the experiences of international students and their mental health. A research study on understanding their strategies to support their mental health was proposed. In Chapter Two, the researcher provided a comprehensive review of current literature on international students' mental health. The focus was narrowed down further to explore the coping strategies of international graduate students of Color, given the gap in the literature. A multicultural-feminist lens was explored to understand their experiences. The researcher outlined the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in Chapter Three and presented the results of the study in Chapter Four. In this chapter, the researcher presents conclusions, discussion, and implications of the results, including an examination of how the results "fit" with the theory of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). Limitations of the study, implications for counselors, and suggestions for future research also are included.

Research Questions

At present, there exists a gap in understanding the mental health stressors and coping strategies of international students from multicultural and social justice perspectives. Researchers have predominantly focused on the limitations and challenges

in the experiences of this community, with little focus on their cultural strengths and resilience to overcome distress when studying abroad. Hence, this research addresses this longstanding gap in the counseling literature. Qualitative methodology was deemed to be most appropriate, given the limited research on this area. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007) focuses on the lived experiences of the participants in great detail, with a focus on small, relatively homogenous sample.

Two research questions were identified.

Research Question 1: *How do international graduate students of Color support their mental health during the early acculturation phase in their study abroad period?*

Research Question 1.1 *To what extent does Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth theory offer a potential theoretical framework to support a strengths-based understanding of international graduate students of Color's mental health?*

Eight individuals were interviewed. The researcher and the second coder identified themes for each individual participant, with feedback and consultation support from the auditor. The individual themes were further analyzed to generate super-ordinate themes. A total of nine super-ordinate themes emerged from the analysis: *Acceptance and Interactions with the American Society, Higher Education in the US, Adverse Mental Health Experiences, Home Country and Influences, Acculturation, Coping Strategies, Campus Counseling Services, Familial Cohesiveness, and Growth and Self-Development.*

Discussion of Results

In this section, each super-ordinate theme is analyzed in light of the research questions posed for this study, and then analyzed in the context of scholarly work discussed in Chapter Two. The themes are also examined for their potential for Cultural Capitals as discussed by Tara Yosso (2005) in her theory of Community Cultural Wealth.

Acceptance and Interactions with the American Society

In this super-ordinate theme, participants shared their interactions with American community and the impact the local community had in supporting their transition. Participants in this study disclosed several positive and negative experiences in their interactions with community members. A deep understanding of their interactions with local community members may be important to understand how the latter can be oriented to demonstrate warmth and support for international students at educational institutions. Among the participants in this study, several positive and affirming experiences were observed. These included support from host families, local community members, and even public health officials.

Jay, a participant from India, displayed how she leveraged the support of her host family to support her during periods of loneliness and isolation. This participant in particular faced challenges in building a strong community of people. In her initial months in the U.S., she suffered from her solitude. However, through networking and proactive search for support, she identified an important resource within the American community- host family. The host family provided her with transportation support to visit various grocery stores and help her acculturate into the society. Jay became very close to

them, and shared that she would visit them quite often during the week. The family also seemed to be quite interested in her well-being. Host families are usually a very common source support, especially in rural and semi-urban educational institutions. Interestingly, few research studies have explored the effectiveness of host families in supporting international students in the U.S. The researcher has personally benefited from supportive host families during her graduate school work in Kansas.

Unfortunately, participants also faced challenges and adverse experiences in their interactions with the community. Prejudice was often an underlying factor. M.F, a Catholic participant, had travelled to various countries before coming to North Carolina for her doctoral education. Having been exposed to a variety of cultures and cultural harmony, she was shocked to receive openly bigoted comments from a fellow parent. The parent had communicated a potential difficulty in being friends with M.F, had the latter not been a Christian.

It is plausible that the rural location of the participants' educational intuitions had an impact too. Cheryl, a doctoral student in rural Kentucky reached out to the campus career services in search of support to help her partner transition into the U.S. However, she was met with prejudice and possible xenophobia.

The participant went on to share that she felt humiliated and "othered" during this incident, eventually breaking down to her clinical supervisor. Experiences of xenophobia and cultural prejudice threaten the mental health and quality of study abroad experiences of international students (Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; Lee, 2007; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013). When exposed to marginalizing experiences

multiple times, these incidents can potentially increase the stress and isolation that international students experience.

In some ways, M.F foresaw such situations.

> I had preconceived ideas about Americans and America and really wasn't looking forward to coming, to be honest. Especially coming to the South where you've got the stereotypical, you know, southern Republican, Conservative Religious Bible belts, racist or that sort of stuff that I knew was just generalizations and that everywhere you go, everybody's different. But you know, that is, that is what is out there.

Berry (1983, 1997) has discussed the importance of the host society in supporting a positive acculturation experience for this population. In his theory of acculturation, he indicated it was important to consider the nature of the larger society that international students are immersing into (Berry, 1983; Berry, 1997). Domestic culture, policies and other socio-political trends such as xenophobia can adversely influence acculturation. Subanthore (2011), a graduate student in Oklahoma, shared how the hostility of the local community had driven him to stay at home and purchase necessary groceries only late into the night. He disclosed that the post 9/11 period had aggravated resentment towards international students of Color, consequently impacting his quality of life as an international graduate student of Color in the U.S.

Given that M.F and Cheryl also identify as women of Color, they and potentially other students in the study may have been more vulnerable to incidents of discrimination. For instance, Lee and Rice (2007) found that students of Color, mostly from the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Latin America, and India, suffered more frequent and intense forms of intolerance than their White counterparts. The authors defined the deliberate

targeting of international students of Color as incidents of *neo-racism* (Balibar, Wallerstein, & Wallerstein, 1991)*,* wherein racist acts are often indirect, and usually displayed via microaggression.

It must be noted, however, that the participants also experienced support and welcome from the community. For instance, Jay's deliberate search for a local community support resulted in a long-term relationship with the host family. She referred the host family couple as "Auntie" and "Uncle," indicating closeness and safety. Acceptance and safety in the local community is critical for the wellbeing of these students, and the participants in this study expressed gratitude to members who embraced their presence. Fani, a Muslim student from India feared her status as a minority in the U.S.

> One thing that's making me worry is the, the election, the way the American President received Muslims and all. Like I read in the news that so many bad things happen to them. That's worrying me before I came here.

However, she had several positive experiences, including the one described below. These instances increased her confidence in her identity as a community member.

> One time a woman say to me when I was in a cashier line, she just, uh, told me that, oh, I support you. And then I just wasn't sure and she said that supported me wearing the hijab. It means a lot for me.

It should be noted that both Jay and Fani identify as a racial and religious minority in the local community. Yet they received affirming support and acceptance of their culture and religious identity. Within the campus, however, the interactions took a

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different turn. Several participants shared that building meaningful and strong friendships with American students proved to be a challenge. American culture of individualism, busy schedules, and limited interest in international students' life were the most common barriers. Fani shared that she was used to deeper and stronger friendships in Indonesia. The "appointment culture" in the U.S. felt new and uneasy to her, wherein her American friends would give her an "appointment" for getting together. At A.Z's campus, there were not many international students, and the domestic students were typically not interested in her unique culture and practices. Although she was eager to share her cultural practices and diverse perspectives, her colleagues were not interested. Given that participants, including Fani and A.Z. come from highly collectivistic culture, they are used to more intimate friendships. A new culture of individualism and busier peers in the U.S. may have left these participants feeling uncertain.

> Usually people that don't like the immigrants and international students, they won't talk a lot, don't talk with me and just do their the thing. Which I think is a loss because this is a country with a bunch of culture. They are like only talking with you when it's work related or when it's on their interest. They are not curious about like your history, where you came from, your family, like the roots and stuff, but they are different, but I know some people in my program that are like that, that are really closed up, don't talk with anyone and just see each other as competitors.

Researchers have explored domestic students' attitudes towards international students, with similar conclusions as A.Z. In a study with Japanese exchange students (a minority community in the U.S), the researchers explored their academic and social challenges (Sato & Hodge, 2015). One participant shared how American students would typically ignore or avoid international students in group projects. Even when assigned in

groups by instructors, the Japanese students would feel isolated, partially due to language barriers, but also due to "lack of interest" on domestic students' part. Li and Zizzi (2018) explored the social adjustment and friendship development of international students. She interviewed two participants, from Thailand and Indonesia, and explored their friendship with various cultural groups. When asked about their involvement with bicultural friendships (friendship with U.S. Americans), participants shared instances of bigotry and discrimination by U.S. students. They also shared that most U.S. American students were not eager to understand the participants' culture, and often ignored international students in group projects. At present, it is unclear what factors drive curiosity and engagement among some community members that create meaningful relationships with international graduate students of Color, while many American college students remain predominantly disinterested or unavailable for close friendships.

As we understand the participants' engagement with the larger American society, it may be helpful to consider the positive *and* the negative interactions. Counseling literature has typically focused on incidents of prejudice and "othering." Although these findings are critical in advocating for a systemic change, understating affirming experiences may help mental health counselors guide students to build a strong local community, and hold community members accountable for the integration of international students.

Higher Education in the U.S.

In this super-ordinate theme, the participants discussed their reasons for studying in the U.S. and their experiences in higher education as an international graduate student

of Color. Although their reasons for studying in the U.S. may not be directly related to their mental health experiences and the posed research questions, it is worth exploring them, given the increased competition in the international education market. The most common reason for participants choosing to study in the U.S. was the high standard and prestige associated with American education. For specialized topics such as Psychology, American education and career development stood for excellence. Cheryl, a doctoral student in Psychology shared her desire to study at "Center of Psychology in the modern world." Cheryl shared that getting her higher education from the U.S. meant having a stamp of high educational standard that would give her the freedom to work anywhere in the world. Jay, a doctoral student in the Nanoscience program knew that education in the U.S. meant access to state-of-the-art technology and financial support.

> In India I was not able to receive scholarships and enough funding to continue with my research and in a small place, we don't have every facility on campus. So I thought about USA when I went through the websites and searched for the universities, I see that the university provides all the facilities inside the campus and they support with scholarships, so that was interesting.

It is worth noting that all participants, except M.F, held the American educational system to a high standard. It is possible that M.F's global exposure and her primary education in the U.K. influenced her assessment. The difference in the opinions of students from the global South (India, China, Indonesia and Brazil) as compared to M.F (the U.K) may explain the disproportionately higher presence of international students from some of these countries (IIE, 2016). The prestige associated with American education reflects a growing desire to climb the social ladder around the world, especially

in South East Asian countries. Waters (2006) studied the cultural capital of international students from Hong Kong and international student mobility in a progressively globalized world. She noted that students whose parents displayed more urban middle-class ideals were more likely to aim to study abroad. Middle-class decision-making strategies, such as investment in higher education and traveling overseas, facilitates social reproduction of the cultural capital. The researcher shares how parents from the middle-class in South-East Asian countries have placed a huge value on gaining education degrees from the 'modernized' West. Similarly, Ong (1999) wrote, "Indeed, for many middle-class Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, the ultimate symbolic capital necessary for global mobility is the American college degree" (p. 90). The United States, however, may not have this competitive edge for long. With increased awareness on the importance of multiculturalism and creating a more inclusive environment for international students, other study abroad destination countries have been quick to innovate their services. Researchers in the U.K. for instance, have called for a strengths-based perspective for international students and shunning of "paternalistic, deficit-centric" perspective of adaptation and academic performance of international students (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014).

Participants also shared their experience of transitioning into a new education system. A culture of dialogical and reflective learning combined with incorporation of technology in education meant bracing for a vastly new system of learning. For students from more traditional learning cultures such as China, the student-centric approach to

learning felt new. TL highlighted how the distribution of power in American classrooms and reflection-based education was unexpected for her.

> Can I just say like America is more extraverts? I don't know because in China we don't really like asking question and answering our feeling in class, but it's okay in the United States. Yeah, and there is one more difficult is that in China we don't really get used to asking questions, and respond your feeling, but in my major what most of thing we need to do in class is to reflect, to talk, reflect, and talk. Students talk more than teacher and I know that it's a good thing.

Several researchers have noted the cultural distance between Western education and South-East Asian norms of respect and humility. Mukminin and McMahon (2013), in their study of Indonesian international graduate students, found that these students were repeatedly forced to meet White, Western expectations of classroom behaviors, which differed vastly from their own cultural upbringing and values. One student in the study, shared, "I am not sure if it is cultural or if it is just me. I felt reluctant to get advice… I am not used to communication with professors" (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013, p. 9). This student disclosed a common cultural practice in most South-East Asian countries, that of maintaining a respectful distance between student and teacher. However, when viewed from Western cultural perspective, these and other students are often conceptualized as passive, and even "unintelligent" (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Bourne, 1975; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006).

Transitioning into the U.S. education system also meant embracing the strong role of technology. M.F, a non-traditional graduate student, had to face the overwhelming development in technology and its role in learning.

> Google Doc and like CANVAS, I mean, your lectures, your PowerPoints, they're already there and you know, I didn't realize you were expected to read them before the lecture and download them and print them and then go to the lecture with them. They don't actually tell you that you've gotten the assignment. You have to know to check CANVAS and it's like this checking CANVAS every few hours. I'm like oh check my emails and canvas every few hours. I can't do that but I have to. So I have to have a smartphone.

M.F used her SMART phone and incorporated other uses of technology to succeed in the classroom. However, not all students may be able to afford and/or use technology effectively. This may put them at further disadvantage in succeeding in their academics. At present, however, no researcher has focused on the role of technology and its impact on international students' transition experience into the U.S. education system.

Perhaps because of the status involved with American education, and their ambitions, participants shared how academic achievement constitute some of their most positive and affirming experiences in the U.S. A.Z's score on her neuroanatomy exam boosted her confidence.

> I scored 80 on my neuroanatomy exam, I felt awesome. Despite what my advisor would say, I felt that I answer all their questions. I felt confident on my project and also like first poster presentation that where we'd have to talk in English.

Bansal, a graduate student from India viewed her education in the U.S. as a journey, with her graduation being the "finish line." She shared her dream of graduating and her experience of achieving important milestones along this journey. All participants in the study reflected on the importance of doing well in their academics, and almost all of them unanimously described their high scores in exams as their highlight of study abroad experience. The relief of adjusting to a new educational system, overcoming

language barriers, in addition to managing financial challenges, made their academic excellence a truly memorable and empowering experience. Given the high stakes involved in study abroad, including costs, time away from family, and psychological distress during acculturation, it is of little surprise that Fani, M.F and Bansal were quick to identify their test scores as an importance source of confidence. The participants' desire to succeed despite institutional barriers demonstrates resilience and ambition. Tara Yosso (2005) discussed these values as potential cultural capitals that often go unacknowledged in dominant cultures. The cultural capital of ambition and resilience will be discussed in detail in a later section.

Interestingly, K.S. and TL had some difficulty in identifying a response to the interview question "When did feel positive/successful as an international student? Please share 1-2 experiences." Both of them independently mentioned that they didn't identify as successful, and shared they felt they had a long way to go before becoming successful.

He and Hutson (2018) noted this characteristic in their study on Chinese international students' experience in the U.S. The researchers noted that participants struggled to identify as successful, possibly due to a strong culture of humility and modesty.

Adverse Mental Health Experiences

Almost all participants shared stories of distress and strain to their mental health. The causes for their psychological distress varied, ranging from graduate school workload to microaggressions they endured. It is critical we examine not only the incidents of adverse mental health experiences, but also how these individual participants

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made meaning of these incidents. For most participants, English was not their dominant language. These individuals came from multilingual background, with fluency in Tamil, Hindi, Portuguese, Mandarin, and Indonesian.

However, the exclusively monolingual approach to American education set them at a great disadvantage, often causing acute distress, and self-doubt. This was true for TL.

> Even though the teacher said it is okay, you take a time to respond. It is okay to ask if you need, but you just still feel like I'm a little, dumb, you know, it's just feel like less than others. It's not that smart. I don't know actually just because the language barrier but just made you feel like it's your intelligent barrier. It's a really hard time for me and there is a time I even feel. When to talk about it to my instructors I usually cry. Yeah. I mean I really want to catch up in. I really want to get involved in class actually, but I just feel really hard. It's really difficult because for me it's really easy for me to have conversation in just pair but in groups, it's not easy. There's a lot of pressure on you.

In TL's situation, the instructor proved to be an ally, supporting her in transition into expressing in English. However, not all instructors understand the adverse impact of monolingual education. In one study of neo-racism, a student with English as her additional language (EAL) shared her experience in U.S classroom (Lee & Rice 2007): "I know the first time I can't understand [because] my English is not too good. But if I ask questions the professor will say, 'I don't understand' and so that makes me very embarrassed. I don't ask questions anymore" (p. 394). In this example, the instructor had communicated to the student that they are the source of problem, and that they need to "fix" their English, or remain quiet in classroom.

The pervasive influence of English extends beyond classrooms. International students in the study reported being overwhelmed with English as the preferred language. A.Z with Portuguese as her first language felt flooded with the English.

> I felt overwhelmed in the beginning because I had classes in English of course. And of course the grocery store, the staff speak English. I turn on the TV, the news, they are in English. I tried to, I just talk for a minute and like hear something on my language that I don't have to work too much to understand. Nope, that's not possible in English. Like I'm 100 percent of our time is in English.

The negative impact of poor English skills appears to be acute. Recently, a faculty member at Duke University, North Carolina, came under scrutiny after her email to Chinese students telling them to speak only in English in and outside of classrooms came to light. Per her email, she shared that the faculty "were disappointed that these students were not taking the opportunity to improve their English." Two other faculty members sought the photos of first and second year students in the Biostatsistics program so they could "remember them if the students ever interviewed for an internship or asked to work with them for a master's project" (Mervosh, 2019).

In fact, in a study of Taiwanese international students in the U.S., depression among the participants was linked with low English language skills. English fluency mediated the effects of acculturation level on depression for men and women in the study. In at least one additional study, English language fluency was a predictor of international students' acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Given that international students in the U.S. come from over 200 countries, with diverse linguistic backgrounds, it is possible that tens of thousands of international students endure the harsh impact of the

dominant role of English language skills in the nature of the larger society (Berry, 1983, 1987) in the U.S.

In addition to language barriers, challenges in building a strong community created further distress for some participants. Fani, who came from a strong collectivistic community in Indonesia, was shocked to discover the more individualistic approach to relationships in the U.S.

> You know, you talk to someone a few times, and you share. And I thought that this person is my best friend, you know, whenever I need them, they will take the time for me. For me, it is like there are moments when I really need someone to talk.. so I don't know how a person define a friendship here.

A.Z too was used to closer ties with her community, and struggled in the initial months of her stay in the U.S. Loneliness and isolation felt stressful, and she leaned on her mother to keep her company.

> It was hard in the beginning when I moved here, my mom's, like I think like a week with me was sleeping on skype. like the skype was on all like the whole night and I shut it off when I was about to come to lab because it was hard being completely alone. Now it's much easier.

International students, particularly those from collectivistic cultures, struggle to make meaning of the more individualistic social fabric in the U.S. Their expectations of friendships and intimacy in relationships can leave them confused, as was the case for Fani. It is evident that participants in this study experienced both personal loneliness (loss of contact and connection with families) and social loneliness (loss of networks) (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).

Participants also shared experiences of microaggressions and xenophobia, with emphasis on violence and crime. K.S. shared her feeling of apprehension in her initial days.

> That time I came here, there was an event about a Chinese girl, she was believed to be murdered by a guy here. That's really shocked me. And so that's what I was mainly worried about. So before I came here, obviously I was worried about the gun issue here. I'm not sure if here is as safe as my own country and it's a developed country, but in China the gun isn't a problem.

The gun violence and recent school shootings in Florida had a huge impact on Cheryl's perceived safety in her city.

> I don't really want to live in a country where I have to be concerned that my child will go to school and get shot. And I know that doesn't happen every day, but it just needs to happen once. So, for example, even just about a week or two weeks before the Florida or shooting, there was one in Kentucky which was about 45 minutes away from where I live and it wasn't a huge one as much as the Florida one got press. It was two students who got killed, but they're still two students who got one of those students could have been my child.

Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2017) explored the experiences of international students and identified five critical themes that may serve as a basis for new research agenda in the Trump era. Two of the five themes included *socio-political atmosphere (e.g., xenophobia, community support)* and *continuum of violence and discrimination (e.g., hate crimes, discrimination, tokenism).* Often socio-political changes are not considered when exploring international students' mental health experiences. With the advent of neo-racism, as defined by Lee and Rice (2007), it is critical that mental health counselors working with international students of Color recognize the influence of

larger systemic issues on students' psychological well-being. These systemic changes and the negative influence of neo-racism can show up as microaggressions as well, as was the case of TL's friend.

> I always kind of hear my friend talks about it. As she went to Orlando, she said she always be recognized as a Korean or Japanese. And then if she say she is a Chinese and then she felt like others will give you a not really good response. Like, oh, like, oh Chinese like that (makes a facial expression of judgement). Maybe have a negative reaction.

Although instances of microaggressions may seem minor and isolated, they are a reflection of a larger socio-political shift in the U.S. climate. For the second year in a row, international student applications to U.S. graduate schools have declined. Zhou and Okahana (2019) attributed the decline to the anti-immigration moves by the current administration, including a temporary travel ban on some predominantly Muslim countries, and stricter rules governing the H1B visa. As discussed above, Cheryl's experience of prejudice at the career center may be a result of growing intolerance in the country.

However, it must be noted that some participants, including TL, K.S., and Bansal, did not experience direct and overt forms of racism. It is likely that their honeymoon phase as international students may have led to minimizing and ignoring some subtle prejudiced remarks. In fact, a pattern of experiencing a honeymoon phase and then having increased recognition of injustices around them was found by Erichsen and Bolliger (2011). The researchers found that in their study of international students' experiences, the participants shared more affirming experiences of feeling accepted and

respected in the first year of their graduate study than in the subsequent second and third year. This result possibly highlighted a honey-moon phase in acculturation, wherein students don't "see" and "hear" the microaggressions at first, or possibly choose to focus on the positive aspects of their transition as a way to manage their other challenges. Thus, it becomes critical that campus counselors proactively consider the socio-political reality and examine their clients' experiences from a macro-level of policy and visa regulations.

Graduate school pressure, and the increased expectations of work can also impact students' mental health. This was particularly evident in the experiences of participants from STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) backgrounds. A.Z faced a rocky and disturbing relationship with her advisor, who attempted to impose his "workaholic culture" on her. A.Z. noted that her advisor did not approve of her taking time off during weekends. However, she attempted to resist the workaholic culture common in several STEM departments.

> It's kind of hard to not let that get into my personal life. Like when I get home it's hard to shut off from everything that I went through the day. So today was a very particular rocky day because tomorrow I'm going to a conference and I just printed on my poster like the day before the conference. So it was like a kind of rocky and we had our differences.

With emphasis on research and her coursework, K.S. was unsure how to prioritize her academic work. Her Chinese culture of securing good grades, as opposed to focusing more on research and lab work, increased her stress levels.

> So it's more about my research. So when I came here, the. So when we came here, all my classmates started to work as soon as they enter the program on a research project. I was not for sure. I spent a lot of time trying to find a suitable topic to do

my research. And that is time consuming. And when you consider that, work from the class like I have to pass exams, and some presentations I was in, that will bring me some pressure, so not maybe about the class but it's more about my own research part.

The impact of stress on international graduate students' well-being has been explored by Ogunsanya, Bamgbade, Thach, Sudhapalli, and Rascati (2018). They explored the determinants of health-related quality of life of international graduate students in the U.S. It was found that the quality of the mental health of international graduate students was much lower as compared to the U.S. average population. Given that over 10% of all graduate students in the U.S. are international students, it is vital that we consider the interacting impact of being a graduate student during study-abroad on the well-being of this community.

Often, international students in the U.S. rely solely on graduate assistantships and scholarships to support their stay in the U.S. Unfortunately, university policies and information systems are often unaware of the extent of dependency on the monthly stipend and fail to recognize the covert stress associated with financial challenges. A.Z shared how the unique policy at her institutions on stipends meant international students did not receive any financial aid in their first year of graduate school. It meant that she undertakes additional lab work to secure her financial status.

And then it was also a thing when I came here because PhD students, they don't receive stipends in their first year. At least international ones. They don't do, they don't at Wake…. On top of having classes and I also, I just need to this new life I have to find a lab that I like and that has money to support me. So that was kind of like a lot of going on because my parents said that they only had money to support me here for a year and I was also again trying to be the living as cheap as I could. So I was living at a family house where only rented a room. I didn't have any of

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my own furniture. I only had like my things. I have like a budget that I had to expend on a month and save as much money as it could.

Following China, India sends the maximum number of international students to the U.S. Unfortunately, due to the unfavorable exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the Indian Rupee, many students face hardships in the initial months. Jay shared her experience of "hiding in room" knowing she would have to spend her money if she stepped out.

Jay's comments indicated how pervasive the effect of financial stress was in her life. However, to ignore the responsibility of universities in providing accurate information and providing consultations on budgeting would further marginalize the students.

The multiple sources of systemic stress, in addition to the challenge of acculturating into a new country, often resulted in severe mental health symptoms. Fani experienced a severe stress response that resulted in emergency hospitalization.

> So sometime a couple of months ago, I got into this weird situation couple of months ago, that I cannot breathe. I felt like I cannot move my body. I thought I got a stroke. Then when I come to the hospital, the ER doctor just told me that I was stressed. So I mean those kind of thing that sometimes you don't know, like, you know, the level of stress, we are not aware.

At times, the mental health symptoms developed into more chronic conditions, such as reduced sleep quality. Bansal shared that ever since she came to the U.S., the quality and duration of her sleep were never optimal.

So after coming here (to the U.S.), I'm not sleeping as good as I used to do back in India. I mean hardly five hours I sleep. A friend told me once, she said you don't sleep enough because you think a lot. That's what she told me. That's why you're not able to sleep nice. And I twist and turn a lot when I'm sleeping. I'm not sleeping good sleep. It's not a five hour of good sleep either.

When such symptoms persist, it is plausible they create extreme distress and reduced hopefulness. A.Z. disclosed her thoughts of wanting to kill herself, after prolonged exposure to stress.

I was like, I cannot handle this anymore. I don't know who else to talk to or go to. I'm ending this and then everything will be fine. At that point I emailed my counselor. I thought about this and I tried to calm myself down. I went to the bathroom. I was praying for those thoughts to leave my mind. I thank God that I didn't have access to the roof.

Sümer, Poyrazli, and Grahame (2008) found that various factors, including age and social support predicted international students' experience of depression and anxiety. Given that this study focused on the experiences of international students during the early acculturation phase, it is highly probable that factors such as limited social support exacerbated their distress. It is worth noting that international students who identify as Latinx, as did A.Z., were found to have higher rates of depression as compared to their Asian counterparts. Several factors, including Asians' tendency to minimize their mental health concerns (Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008) can impact the difference in rates. Current measures of assessing and treating international students' distress focus on the individual's experience, almost always ignoring the role of other stakeholders, including advisors, roommates, university officials, and faculty. For instance, when examined in isolation, A.Z.'s distress appears to be an isolated case. However, when viewed within

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the framework of her identity as a graduate student in a STEM program, it is obvious that others, including K.S., experience intense stress as a result of their lab work. The individualistic approach to assessing distress is evident in the current measures used to assess this population's well-being. For instance, to measure acculturative stress, in a study exploring the mental health symptoms of Korean international students (Lee et al., 2004b), the measure used by the researchers was *Index of Life* (Yang & Clum, 1994); it included items such as "I worry about my financial situation." Individualistic statements such as these ignore the responsibility of social institutions in supporting the mental health of international graduate students of Color.

Home Country and Influences

As international students navigate through the host country, they also become distant observers and critics of their home country. For instance, participants in the study shared how they have come to see injustices in their country more clearly. Cheryl (from India) shared how she had come to trust the police in the U.S. way more than she trusted the police system back in India. Given that recent incidents of police brutality have predominantly targeted racial minorities, it is interesting that Cheryl felt confident and safe with the U.S. police system. This could also reflect an instance of cultural relativism, wherein individuals evaluate and make meaning of another culture with their home culture as a reference point.

> And I guess here I trust the police 100000%. Um, and I guess like when we talk about police, so yeah, we were actually talking about this yesterday. Me and my friends, my roommates from Bangladesh and they were talking about how they, they don't trust the police, but they're never afraid of the police. Like they are not afraid to be molested or raped or attacked by the police. And that just makes me

sad because like I definitely do hear stories where in India there's a, you know, like a woman gets raped, she goes to the police station and then they raped her again.

The Chinese participants in the study also commented on the pervasive influence of current socio-political system on their everyday life. K.S. described how access to fundamental human rights may be denied in China, adversely influencing quality of life.

So many countries say that in China, people really don't have their basic rights. And our governments have always argue about that. But honestly, what other countries have said is the truth. We don't have that much rights.

The critique of Chinese international students hold a unique value. With strong values of collectivism, several Chinese students have come under scrutiny for criticizing their home country abroad. In 2017, a Chinese international student gave the valedictorian speech at the University of Maryland. She drew parallels between the pollution in China and restrictions on freedom of speech in the country. She received strong backlash from the Chinese community within and outside of the campus, eventually withdrawing her speech (Phillips, 2017). A common fear of being misunderstood and misrepresented abroad is prevalent across international students, especially among Chinese students.

However, a feminist lens demands we don't stamp a single story in our understanding of this community's critique of their home country. It is perhaps this hesitation and fear of being stereotyped that A.Z. filtered what she shared about her culture with others.

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I only try to show them like the nice things, not like the dictatorship that happened in Brazil or like slavery that happened, but just like, more nice, like music or things that usually people would know. Like when they had the Olympics I was here so I'll be like, oh this is a very famous song. Just stuff like that. It just, I think made me feel safer to show what I really want to show and what I really like from Brazil.

Mental health counselors may have to be especially sensitive with some students as they reflect on their experiences in their home countries.

Perhaps what is more critical in the research findings are international students' desire to remain connected to their roots and share their culture with domestic and other international students. Remaining connected with their home culture through music, faith, or other cultural practices are some ways of retaining and even resisting the dominant culture. A.Z., overwhelmed with the use of English in the U.S., chose to listen to Brazilian YouTube channels.

I don't want to lose my Brazilian culture over just because I'm living here. So I have some YouTube channels from Brazil that I like to watch and I watch those overlap lunch so I can chill. I like when it's carnival, I find some live videos and I watch it. It is a big holiday in Brazil.

It is highly probable that A.Z. was coping with cultural loneliness, triggered by the absence of a close network of preferred cultural and/or linguistic environment (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). She sought the support of technology and attempted to solve her problem in a creative way.

Resisting the dominant American culture and retaining her cultural practices was an important strategy to remain connected to Indian culture for Jay.

I met so many other international people over there and while talking to them I understood the social life here. As I said, I believe in my culture and values. Although I understand the American culture, I still follow my culture. So we don't go to pubs. My parents don't allow me to go for any night parties. So I still don't go out at night, and I try to return home by nine. So my parents want me to follow those things.

Several participants, including Bansal, described instances of sharing their culture, particularly through food, with domestic and other international students in the community.

Food is the best way. Everybody loves food. I'm a big foodie myself, so I like exploring different cuisines and all, and so did they. They were all very open to it and of course they also had an idea about what Indian food is.. so they don't mind exploring that aspect.

Researchers have explored international students' desire to share their culture and conduct mini-presentations of their heritage for the benefit of domestic and other international students in the community. In a study that explored international students' willingness to share their culture during study abroad experiences, Urban & Palmer (2014) noted that several international students reported that they were willing to give mini lectures, teach their native language, show relevant cultural films, and so on. Although Urban and Palmer (2014) focused on this population's readiness to share their culture within the classroom, it is evident from Bansal's experience that international students of Color are interested in sharing their cultural heritage. Fostering and promoting such intercultural dialogue may further increase feelings of acceptance and appreciation for international students on college campuses.

Acculturation

Participants also described their experience of acculturation and learning American norms. They adopted creative and unique ways to blend with the American community. Some of these strategies were used to enhance their career prospects. Bansal shared her experience of discovering the importance of an email.

> Since I know their work ethics I think now I know when to do the right thing and when to put something in a particular way. So, people really appreciate email here. You know they have a trend here. Back in India it's usually a phone call. So I think now I know how to approach a person better way, how to write a good email.

For Cheryl it meant switching on her "White brain."

> So I'm a really good code switcher. So I will own that. My accent changes depending on who I'm speaking with, not on purpose. I swear if I could stick to one accent I would, because that'd just be easier. But genuinely speaking, like physically, I'm not able to maintain one accent when speaking to different kinds of people. But when I'm speaking to my American friends, I definitely have an American accent.

Cheryl's strategy of code-switching may serve her well as a minority, but also reflects the implicit measures students of Color take to blend in with the majority - a larger systemic issue. Beoku-Betts (2004) studied the experiences of graduate women of Color from Africa who were international students in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. These women narrated experiences of White professors persuading them to sign up for remedial classes and faulting them for their accents, despite their strong academic achievements. In addition to the role of race and gender, she also drew attention to ''the colonial experience and the marginal position of their societies in the global economic

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system'' (p. 132) embedded in the prejudiced notions of their home culture exhibited by people in the host countries.

Coping Strategies

The main focus of this study was to explore the unique coping strategies of international graduate students of Color. A wide range of strategies were identified by these students, providing insight into their approach to supporting their mental health.

Support from ethnic groups was important to many students. Although students like A.Z. and Fani did not have many individuals from their country in the community, other participants from Indian and China leveraged this resource effectively. Bansal described how she experienced isolation and homesickness in the initial months of being an international student. Her homesickness heightened during the annual festival of Diwali, a religious festival marked by time spent with family and friends. However, the Indian community on campus came to her rescue.

> I think that's when the ethnic group helped I feel because we all came together and celebrated Diwali in a really nice way. Everybody stayed back that night and we all chatted. Played games and ate food. Was a nice good day I would say. So it worked, but still obviously some part of me would miss home, but it was a good alternative.

A similar situation happened with Jay, who experienced extreme loneliness in the initial months.

> I just moved with some people and started talking with them and they were Indians, it was helpful. I stayed with them during nights when I'm lonely. Yeah, the Indians were by my side. Whenever you're feeling lonely or depressed, come here and stay with the Indian community, they said.

Several researchers have emphasized on the importance of co-national support in the well-being of international students in the U.S. (He & Hutson, 2018; Pedersen, 1991; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009; Yakunina et al., 2013). The importance of co-national support was felt understood by TL. She realized that given the strong Chinese community, and her group of Chinese friends, she felt she had recreated a sense of family in the U.S.

> I didn't feel depressed when I come to the United States because I came with a group of Chinese students and we went along really well. We traveled a lot and like to release your stress, you can hang out with a group of friends. And have some fun because they can get what you mean. Yeah. Maybe some jokes. So they bring you happy and cheery and bright. A sense like you don't have family here. Then they can give you that feeling.

International students in the study also reached out to other international friends to build community. With English as a common language "barrier," many international students were drawn to each other. TL described how the common concern of English language, helped her transcend cultural differences present in friendships with other international students.

> Maybe because of the language barrier. It's not others just language barrier. Like international, like they also have a language barrier. Even though you don't speak I'm like, even though I don't speak Indian still, they don't speak Chinese so that it's easy to make friends. That's what I think.

A community of international students meant helping one another using their unique strengths and capitals. Cheryl was keenly aware of the difficulties in securing car

loans as an international student, and the transportation difficulties in navigating through the city. She used her resources as a car owner to support other international students.

> I mean, small things where as an international student you don't have a great credit history. Again, therefore you probably don't own a car, you know, you're learning to drive on the wrong side of the road. So I think just, I now own a car. So helping other international students like, Hey, you know, if you need a ride somewhere, just tell me those are smaller things that I would, um, try to help people with or if they need to go to an Asian store or connect them with, um, you know, Asians stores.

Other researchers have described the support of monocultural and multicultural friendships in the well-being of international students. An interesting finding in the study by Li and Zizzi (2018) was that both participants built only monocultural (friendships with students from the same country) and multicultural (friendships with other international students) friendships. Their reasons for avoiding connections with Americans were predominantly due to limited interest and instances of racism when interacting with domestic students. Thus, instead of depending on domestic students for social interactions, the international students in the study reached out to other international students.

The divide between international and domestic students' approach to bicultural friendships is vital, given that researchers have focused on international students' interaction with domestic students as a marker of acculturation (Sodowsky & Plake, 1991), and placed the responsibility for bicultural friendships almost exclusively on international students. As is evident in the participants' comments, influence of race

relations, possible disinterest in other cultures, and busy schedules hindered meaningful engagement with American students on campus.

Religion was found to be another important coping strategy. In the midst of challenges and rapid changes in their environment, at least a couple of participants sought refuge in their spiritual beliefs. Fani found out that her initial plans of bringing her family members to the U.S. would no longer be viable. Faced with pre-existing concern of difficulty of isolation, Fani faced a daunting challenge of staying away from her spouse and children for a year longer than she had originally planned. She sought shelter in her faith as a Muslim.

> I believe that God knows which one's better for me and not what I want but what I need. So I think at the spiritual level also like you know, like when you're alone and I just kept asking myself that uh, you said you believe in God. So if you believe in God you never feel alone because you have him whenever you go. No matter I don't have family or friends that I would talk to the God, like you know, He will give you everything, you know.

Although A.Z. didn't identify as a religious individual, she used religious prayers to ground herself and remain connected to her mother.

> I'm not very religious, but my mom had this ongoing thing that she, for example, she prays every Sunday night and she always did that. Like since, I can remember we used to do all the four of us together, but then my father stopped doing it and my brother stop it. And then I was like on and off. But then when I moved here, said mom, that would be nice for us to continue doing that. When I was on, I'm here, so kind of like every Sunday nights we should praise in Brazil a night prayer. At the same time, I feel that it's nice because we are doing the same thing at the same time, so that's nice.

Chai, Krägeloh, Shepherd, & Billington (2012) found that, compared to European students, Asian students were more likely to lean on their spirituality as a coping mechanism during study abroad. Additionally, for Asian international students religious coping remarkably enhanced their psychological and social well-being and protected them from the harmful effects of high stress.

It is plausible that during periods of rapid changes and distress, international students lean on spiritual beliefs and values to ground them. Exploring these and offering a safe space to process faith as a coping mechanism can enhance counselors' multicultural competence in working with international students.

Although various researchers have explored personality types (e.g., Arambewela & Hall, 2011; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Wang et al., 2012), some unique characteristics and attitudes were also discussed as coping strategies in this study. Resourcefulness was evident in inventive ways. M.F was quick to realize that, as a non-traditional student, she may require additional support to succeed as a student. She identified multiple resources and leaned on them to set herself up for success.

> Ask a lot of questions, made a lot of mistakes and try to avail myself of every workshop that was going. So, I made very good friends with the librarian, and she's lovely and she's great. So, you know, making friends with the librarian and then know you can go to her and have a one to one and she helped with my first couple of lit reviews. Um, she walked me through them and helped me and then, you know, talking to the other doc students, you know, how do you sort out all your references and filed them and how to do this, that and the other. So, it's just, you have to, you have to ask people.

Fani built herself new strategies to keep herself engaged. She discovered her new love for hiking and the gym, and used those activities when she felt overwhelmed with

loneliness. A.Z. too decided to reach out to alternative support systems when her American cohort wasn't very warm.

> There is the GSA that is the graduate school association and they do some events and whenever I can I'm available. I tried to go to their events so they're are very nice. Two years ago they scheduled, there's a theme park, they organized a trip there. They organize the science of March in Washington for us to go.

Bansal realized that a lot was at stake for her in her first semester. She had to complete the prerequisite courses before she could begin her graduate studies. Hence, high grades were necessary. She reached out to various faculty members and planned her academic work effectively.

> For coursework I think I was constantly in touch with my professors so they kind of knew my situation because they have been seeing such students over a period of time. So they were really helpful. I would say they were really helpful to me. They helped me with every inch of homework or assignments or exams or anything for that matter. I would say my, the Dean of my department is really helpful to me. Still is.

She displayed no hesitation in claiming her approach to seeking help: "I wanted the best possible exposure slash help wherever I can. Yeah. If they're available, why not? You used them and exploited them for that matter."

McClure (2007) coined a term, *advantaging,* to describe an individual's tendency to utilize available resources to enhance their chances of success and well-being. McClure found that students were intentional and strategic in identifying resources to cope with various stressors associated with cultural adjustment. A proactive approach to advantaging by international students reflected their efforts to identify opportunities to

succeed despite their experiences of distress and challenges associated with cultural

transition. Tara Yosso (2005) named this as "navigational capital" as discussed below.

Campus Counseling Services

One of the biggest research areas in the field of international student mental

health remains their use of campus counseling services. In this research, the participants'

use of campus counseling services was explored, as well as the reasons guiding this

choice. Suggestions to improve the quality of service were also provided by the

participants.

The biggest drawback of the campus counseling center for participants was the

lack of publicity and promotion of counseling services. Participants disclosed that,

although they had been on campus for almost two years, they were not aware of even the

location of the clinic, let alone the nature of the services they provided. Bansal was clear

in holding the university partly responsible for the lack of sufficient publicity.

> I didn't know what this counseling thing. I think they should probably make it
> more popular for people should know it and I'm not somebody who was ignorant
> about it. I knew a lot of things going around and I knew most of the things. I
> should not say it, but partly it is a university fault they did not reach out enough to
> the students to access that service.

Bansal was not the only participant to identify the gap in campus counseling

service. Jay shared that several international students could benefit from mental health

counseling, but had little idea about the campus counseling services.

> I don't know much about the campus counseling for services. I just seen it in the
> website and when I came here I just know that there is a campus counseling, but I
> did not know much. I think that many do not know much about what counseling

and career counseling can do for the international students. It is my personal opinion.

It is then a matter of little surprise that less than 2% of international students access campus counseling service (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004; Yi, Lin, Jenny, & Kishimoto, 2003). Campus counseling centers are a common presence in American education institutions. However, for international students this is a novel service, typically not available in education institutions in their home countries. Hence, increased responsibility lies in the hand of campus counseling centers and international program offices to sufficiently promote the service among international graduate students of Color.

Several barriers, including stigma prevented individuals from seeking counseling services, even when they became aware of the provision. For instance, Bansal admitted that although she had limited knowledge about counseling services, she was aware that cultural stigma associated with mental illness would have adversely impacted her help-seeking behavior.

> I could have thought about it. I'm not saying I would not have. I'm not sure if I would have gone because somewhere back in my mind also.. it's injected, you know "it's not a good thing to do." That's what I said, my home country is not really very supportive of it doing that, so I'm not sure if I have done it, but I might have.

Fani, who experienced an acute stress response that resulted in emergency hospitalization, felt there was little need for her to seek service.

> Yeah, at that time I didn't felt like I need to go to counseling. But I know that there is a counseling center on campus.. I don't know.. It is not common in Indonesia. I know I need to change it.. but it is kind of hard to change my perception.. like it is not common in my culture.

Yoon and Jespen (2008) found that, compared to U.S. students, Asian international students had lowered self-perceived need for counseling, indicating that counseling centers may have to incorporate innovative measures to highlight the relevance of counseling among this community.

Zhai (2002) explored the help-seeking behaviors of international graduate students in the U.S. In their interviews, participants disclosed that they preferred to seek the help of family and friends over campus counseling services to overcome their psychological distress, as was the case in this study. Based on the participants' experiences, Zhai (2002) suggested that campus counseling centers design culturally sensitive outreach programs to invite international students. Dadfar and Friedlander (1982) analyzed the psychological help-seeking behavior of international students based on their continent of origin and previous counseling experience. They found that international students from Western countries (European and Latin American) had higher chances of seeking psychological services compared to those of African, Asian, and Middle-Eastern origin.

It is highly plausible that international students may not know what kind of presenting issues merit counseling support. Although it may be common knowledge in Western countries to seek counseling for maintaining mental health, it may be less apparent for students from other cultures. Thus, a key step to improving the help seeking

behavior of international students would be to improve publicity and provide information on typical concerns meriting counseling.

A feminist perspective, as taken in this dissertation study, explores how systemic concerns further marginalizes an individual and holds them responsible for the failure of social institutions.

Limited multicultural competence of counselors further compounds the concern of international students' help-seeking behavior. Yoon and Portman (2004) declared over a decade ago that even accredited counseling programs in the U.S. did not train counselors to effectively work with international students. Researchers have repeatedly found that Asian students benefit from more directive and advice-centric counseling, as opposed to an indirect and dialogical style. Zhang and Dixon (2001) found that Asian international students in their study preferred "culturally sensitive" counselors as opposed to "culturally neutral." Yoon and Jespen (2008) noted that Asian students preferred a more directive and advise based approach to counseling, compared to their U.S. counterparts, who may prefer more listening and dialogical approach. However, few counselors have recognized this cultural difference and incorporated it into their practice. K.S., a graduate student from China decided to seek counseling at her campus. However, the experience proved to be of little help.

> So when I was there she asked me. Oh, so she is mostly playing the role of the listener to learn what I was experiencing. Can I say actually I don't feel that helped? So when I talk with my parents and friends I already got some, some comfort part. So when I went to the counseling service I was actually looking more for the actual advice instead of someone just listening to you.

Of the eight participants in the study, two students sought out campus counseling services, and only one found it to be helpful. A.Z. described her counseling experience as "very helpful." Her counselor gave her multiple strategies to manage her stress, including stress balls, which proved to be effective for her.

Most participants' recommendations to the counseling center revolved around increased publicity and greater accountability of university and counseling officials to the international students. Bansal's comments capture the overall sentiments of the participants in the study.

> Because even if they're talking with the health insurance, they just talk about that. They never talk about the mental insurance. I mean if it's available, just make sure you talk about it. You just talk about the financial aspect of it and I need to pay my insurance and get all these things fixed. I can get all these things fixed. What about my mental health?

Familial Cohesiveness

Several researchers have highlighted the important role of families in international students' mental health. Families often serve as a source of inspiration and support for international students abroad as they navigate through multiple challenges. He and Hutson (2018) highlighted the important role played by families in Chinese international students' academic success, as they persisted to succeed in schools despite language barriers and new education system. In this study, participants shared similar sentiments. Parents' financial support and the participants' close relationships with their respective mothers were most salient.

Several participants talked about the critical role played by parents in providing financial security to them. Cheryl disclosed how her "privilege" of quality education was supported by her parents' financial resources. The parents' emphasis on students' academic development and happiness was evident in her comments.

> So in financially and my parents have always been supportive of my education. So as long as they felt that it was, um, worth going to. Like for example, in India, private schools are not that, um, coveted, it's more a, you should go to public universities because those are the ones that are better. So my parents always pushed me to do the best that I can be. Um, and then once I would get into one of the better institutes, um, then they don't care about the finances, then it's all, you know, their support.

K.S. realized that although it was expensive to support study abroad, her Chinese parents prioritized her growth and development. She acknowledges that it was typical in Chinese families to support a child's higher education.

> I think they are pretty supportive. Um, yes. So they are pretty positive about. I pursue a master's degree here and they pay for my tuition and everything cause it's common thing.. is that like in the US, the students may earn their own money to pay for the education. In China your parents pay for their children.

An unexpected relationship was highlighted by almost all participants in the study: their relationship with their mothers. Several factors, including participants' gender and their home culture's gender norms, could have impacted this finding. K.S., a graduate student in a STEM field, often faced the pressure of managing her lab and academic work simultaneously. She sought support from her mother, who she referred to as her "best friend."

I always told my mom and tell her okay, I am now under pressure again, please say something to comfort me and sometimes that works. She, she is amazing. She should always find some way to make you relax. That I don't know. Maybe that's because she's a teacher (laughs). She always does a great job and make me come back to the right. She's my best friend.

Cheryl's mother happened to be a visiting scholar at Harvard when she started her higher education in the U.S. This further strengthened their relationship, while adding another layer of support for Cheryl as an international graduate student of Color.

She was a visiting scholar at Harvard, so she was also expected, experiencing, you know what it's like kind of what it's like to be an international student in the US. I think it was really nice for us to kind of communally bitch about what's happening. Um, so that was really good to have my mother know what it's like to experience it.

Immediate and extended family also showed up as a resource while studying abroad. Participants shared stories of immediate and extended family members offering support. Bansal's cousin was already an international student in the U.S. when she decided to study abroad. She sought his support in planning for her stay, and felt prepared for the possible challenges she may face as an international student.

He also came here for master's and went through the same process that I am going to right now. So, he had his own ups and downs during his master life. So, I knew what probably I have to be going through and I was pretty prepared for that as well because of him, because I saw US was pretty much in his light, his vision, his perspective. And of course my relatives were here, so they made a.. they built a bridge between that. So, I never felt like I didn't know this. I always knew what was going to happen.

Jay's aunt in the U.S. helped her adjust to the U.S. society and taught how to shop for groceries. Given that it was Jay's first experience in the U.S., her aunt also taught her about American cuisine, and how to navigate it as a vegetarian.

> Before coming to Greensboro, I went to Phoenix for two weeks and I stayed there. My aunt explained to me the cultural, um, steps over here and she explained me how to adjust with the cultural diversity and she showed me the shopping centers and she explained me how to shop and she also made me to adjust with the American foods.

Thus, international graduate students of Color in the study found unique ways to support themselves, using family as a resource. An asset-based understanding of family in the lives of international students can improve counselors' understanding of coping strategies of this population.

Growth and Self-Development

A study abroad experience is inherently growth-oriented, with individuals living in a new culture and engaging with communities from unique backgrounds. However, there has been little to no focus on factors such as growth and resilience when exploring the mental health experiences of international students, particularly international students of Color. As Pendse and Inman (2017) noted, "existing research on international students seemed to focus on adjustment problems and psychological distress, with little attention to the coping and resiliency factors of these students" (p. 31). Similarly, in an analysis of the literature about international students in the U.K., Lillyman and Bennett (2014) highlighted the need for a strengths-based understanding of international students, and the shunning of a "paternalistic" (p. 64) and "deficit" (p. 63) view of them.

Several experiences of personal and professional growth were noted in this study. Given the primary focus of international students, educational and professional growth stood out for several participants. Cheryl, keenly aware of the importance of conferences and professional development, recollected her first educational presentation at American Psychological Association Annual Conference.

> I went to APA this year and I got to do my first, uh, what's it called? Like a 60 minute seminar where you speak about a subject or research interest. And I think that was kind of a win because I got to brag about going to APA, which is theoretically the biggest international conference in psychology, at least for our field.

Fani shared her team's victory at a business competition as an important milestone for her that affirmed her confidence.

> We won a business competition. Three of us, me, MBA friend, and one international student from Greece, we just register to the compensation and then the company assigned us as a group. It amazing that you can meet people from somewhere and then just work on a project together and you can get success. And then like it proved to me that I can do everything with hard work and nothing is impossible.

The boost in participants' self-confidence and worth is important when understanding their mental health experiences. An obsessive focus on their distress, and using a pathologizing approach to analyzing their experiences, "flattens" their growth, and reduces the community to a single stereotype. Counselors can help international students of Color build their resilience by giving value to positive and growth-oriented experiences.

Participants' growth in their personal values and worth was evident throughout their narrative. Bansal disclosed that her experience as an international student taught her that she could do anything. A growth in her resilience meant she developed the self-esteem to "conquer anything."

> It changes you as a person, you are more flexible. I just think the more independent you are, you are yourself basically. You can do anything. It shapes you in a way that now you don't fear that I cannot conquer this. At least you are so prepared that if something comes up I can deal with it. And of course, now I'm very strong, mentally strong. I would say that I'm not really scared of anything. I can say, you know, I already, I'm very prepared that okay, I can handle this. I'll be okay. We can handle because we can manage the situation and you'll see how to go through this.

In many ways, this study provides readers a rich narrative of various challenging and growth-oriented experiences of the participants. The unique stories of support from families, faith, and their own resourcefulness indicates an intentional use of strategies to support their mental health. In the next section, Tara Yosso's (2005) Theory of Community Cultural Wealth is used as a lens to identify various cultural capitals employed by the participants. Below, a summary table of each participant's country, education major category and overall analysis is provided. It offers readers an individual profile of each participant, while maintaining an overarching outlook towards analyzing themes.

Table 1. Summary of Participants

Name	Country	STEM vs Non-STEM	Overall analysis
Bansal	India	STEM	For Bansal, it is evident that her family was one of her biggest strengths and "capitals" as an international student. She shared multiple times how her immediate and extended family provided support through multiple ways, including emotional support and encouragement, helping acculturate into the U.S. by being a "bridge," and sharing their personal experiences as international students. Bansal appeared to leverage the family strengths to prepare herself for the acculturation. However, she did experience setback, including apprehension, loneliness, and homesickness. Over a period of time, she built her unique support system of predominantly American and Indian friends in the community and effectively used faculty members' support to succeed in school. She also shared her ambitions to succeed in the academic setting. It must be noted that as Bansal reflected on the general Indian attitude towards mental health counseling, she recognized how she too may be carrying those biases. She admitted that she might not go for counseling due to stigma in her home culture.
Jay	India	STEM	Jay's journey as an international student has a strong theme of growth and development. She shared how she had grown in confidence and independence in multiple ways, including how to manage a household independently. Initially, the U.S. was an unknown and new place for her, about which she knew only a little.

			But she grew to learn how to manage her expenses and her life in the U.S. and build a community of supportive Americans. It seems that she faced two big challenges - finance and loneliness. She discussed how in the initial days she did not have enough money and "hid" herself in the room, not able to enjoy anything, possibly due to expenses involved in entertainment and recreation. In many ways, Jay's story is also of the "search for people." She shared how her initial months were very lonely until she began to build a community for herself. It is important to note that she had a very strong relationship with her host family who were interested in her culture. They offered her support as she acculturated into the dominant American society
TL	China	Non-STEM	TL shared her experience as a Chinese international student. Her experience in the U.S. was dominated by her language concerns, which showed up in the interview too. She described multiple instances in and outside of classroom where language barriers became "intelligent barriers" and pushed her to feel "dumb." Both the coders felt there were moments in the interview when TL's thoughts weren't fully clear, possibly due to limited English vocabulary. It is possible that the limited freedom of speech in China also impacted her desire/ability to share her more critical thoughts.
A.Z	Brazil	STEM	A.Z. used a metaphor in the interview. She talked about how being an international graduate student felt like trying to catch up with a train,

			and how one eventually catches it. Her experiences reflected the factors that enhanced (e.g., family) and impede (e.g., advisor) her ability to eventually catch the train. The coders felt that she brushing off the adverse experiences and sounded determined to catch the train.
Fani	Indonesia	Non-STEM	In the coder's discussions of Fani's interview, predominant themes of persistence and optimistic growth came up. Fani shared how initially she attempted to build a strong community and in some ways recreate her Indonesia culture of togetherness and intimate relationships in the U.S. She met with some disappointments or dead ends when she had to learn the American culture of "appointments" and "time is precious." She also dealt with the stress of being away from her immediate and extended family and shared her state of dejection when they couldn't join her in the U.S., per their plans. She also indirectly shared her resourcefulness - use of applications to find bus routes, using bikes for shorter distance, reaching out to professors after lower grades, and using gym to change her mood. Towards the end of the interview she shared how she had become her own resource in some ways, relying on hiking, music, gym, and her faith to support her mental health. The word "resilience" and/or "persistence" kept coming to the coders.
K.S.	China	STEM	K.S.'s experience in the U.S. as an international student was influenced strongly by the Chinese culture and socio-political situation. Ranging from

			her classroom participation and verbal engagement to her comfort in challenging authority figures, these experiences appeared to be guided by modern-day Chinese culture and politics. She also shared that Chinese are typically not as "outgoing" as Americans and are usually "shy." Her concerns with English language further compounded her comfort in socializing. K.S., however, found her own community of Americans, international students, and immigrants. She went on to help other students of East Asian descent who experienced difficulty adjusting to typical American classrooms. She described her journey as one marked by growth and change. For instance, she shared that she isn't as shy as she used to be and is in the journey of finding her own way. She believes she can handle any adversity.
M.F	U.K	Non-STEM	In many ways, M.F's story tells a blunt commentary and critique on the American society. She played with paradoxical ideas such as the warmth and support she received in the Greensboro community while also encountering instances of narrow-mindedness. She provided a detailed analysis on American consumerism, and influence of faith in the local schools, which may not have been so directly available in the other participants' voices. She acknowledged that she is more of an outlier or not a typical international student due to her age, presence of two children, and her past travel experiences. She shared multiple instances of resourcefulness, such as reaching out to librarian and attending workshops on campus. She also talked of the acculturation process with a

			strong matter of fact/pragmatic tone, wherein adjusting to new cultures and countries is more the norm than exception for her. She shared multiple times that "you get on with it". Overall, she provided a very unique take on being a graduate international student of Color in the U.S.
Cheryl	India	Non-STEM	Cheryl's interview quite clearly brought out a passion for social justice. She identified multiple instances of injustices aimed towards her and others in India and the U.S. She used her sense of agency to highlight instances of microaggression and seek action to counter. The desire to challenge injustices was evident in her action against the career consultant on campus. She also highlighted strong emotions that were stirred up in the face of injustices - anger, disappointment, and grief. She shared that microaggressions and prejudice is inevitable if one was an international student in the U.S. Her claimed identity as a global citizen shaped what appear to core values of open-mindedness, respecting the other, and understanding intersectionality. Her strategy of code-switching as a "self-protection" technique was also an interesting finding. She shared that her accent is one key way of code-switching and avoiding the label of "that Indian woman." Overall, Cheryl's perspectives of social justice and commentary on the U.S. were strongly influenced by her education and major.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges the critical influence of race and other cultural identities in social experiences. Stemming from the critical legal studies, Professor Lani Guiner is associated with the scholarship on Critical Race Theory. Critical Race theory highlights the necessary role of including minority voices and admitting the pervasive influence of White social institutions in the lives of minority groups. As Barnes (1990) noted,

> Minority perspectives make explicit the need for fundamental change in the ways we think and construct knowledge.... Exposing how minority cultural viewpoints differ from white cultural viewpoints requires a delineation of the complex set of social interactions through which minority consciousness has developed. Distinguishing the consciousness of racial minorities requires acknowledgement of the feelings and intangible modes of perception unique to those who have historically been socially, structurally, and intellectually marginalized in the United States. (p. 1864)

CRT offers insights, perspectives, strategies, and andragogy that direct our efforts to identify, evaluate, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of social institutions, including education, that maintain oppressed and marginalized racial positions in and out of the classroom (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993).

Cultural Capital is one such construct that deserves to be analyzed through the lens of CRT to understand how it may reproduce social injustices. Pierre Bourdieu (1973) defined capital as the collection of labor and privileges which over time give certain groups the edge to make and reproduce profits that facilitate their progress in society. Thus, capital dictates who gains access to social mobility and who doesn't. He went on to

define three types of capital: economic (fiscal advantages), social (membership to privileged groups and societies), and cultural (assets such as education, style of speech, dressing, language, family systems, etc.). The focus of this dissertation is cultural capital.

Thus, groups who dominate the definitions of acceptable cultural capitals tend to reproduce their privilege over the course of time, thereby highlighting the myth of meritocracy. Tara Yosso (2005) called out on the oppressive definitions and recognition of cultural capitals that are shaped by White, Western, individualistic norms. These definitions are used to further oppress marginalized groups and deny them the opportunity to climb up the social ladder.

In her work with racial minority students, Yosso (2005) identified six unique cultural capitals that help individuals from minoritized groups succeed in White and Western social institutions despite the structural barriers.

Yosso's (2005) six types of capital include the following: aspirational (an individual and community's ability to maintain hopes and dreams, beyond their present situation, despite structural barriers); social (social networks within one's community, friendships and interactions that helps one draw resources from each other to overcome challenges); familial (commitment to family, 'extended family,' one's community that provides model for caring, coping, and loving); resistant (fighting oppression through oppositional behavior); linguistic (intellectual and social skills developed through the use of more than one language and the traditions associated with language, such as story-telling); and navigational capital (successfully maneuvering through social institutions that are inherently designed to be disadvantageous to people of color). Yosso's

communities of wealth theory directly answers the gap in the literature, that of an excessively focused perspective on adopting a paternalistic viewpoint of international students (Walker, 1997). There is an exclusive and problematic focus on the struggles they (Others) face in adapting to a new academic system, losing sight of the positive and strengths-based experiences reported by international students (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014).

Yosso's (2005) theory also challenges the idea and assumption that adjustment must be made by the minoritized community to the oppressive macro-structures (education system). As Perurucci and Hu (1995) noted, researchers tend to fail to consider the inadequacies of host society that marginalize international students. These inadequacies "must be opposed and changed, rather than accommodated" (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 387). Although Yosso's theory was developed for examining the cultural wealth of people of color, especially those within the U.S society, it can be applied to understand the experiences of international students of color in the U.S college classrooms to achieve a strengths-based perspective.

In this section, the researcher explores the possible cultural capitals employed by international graduate students of Color in the study.

Aspirational Capital

Tara Yosso (2005) defined aspirational capital as a conglomeration of assets that maintains a community's hopes and dreams to succeed despite institutional barriers. International students in this study presented themselves as high-achieving and ambitious individuals who recognized the injustices in the American social system, and yet

persisted to succeed. Several participants, including Jay, Cheryl, Bansal, and Fani, described their dream to succeed in school and professional organizations in the U.S. who said,

> We won a business competition. Three of us, me, MBA friend, and one international student from Greece, we just register to the compensation and then the company assigned us as a group. It amazing that you can meet people from somewhere and then just work on a project together and you can get success.

Jay's comment of increased self-belief and self-efficacy associated with her professional identity demonstrates her aspiration to continue to grow and develop: "I started believing that even I could survive. And it gives me a confidence that we can survive in our career and even succeed in our career."

Given the collectivistic nature of most People of Color communities, it is important to recognize the collective effort of families and community in helping individuals succeed and realize their ambitions. Parents invested heavily in their children's education, encouraging them to focus on their career growth and being the "best." Cheryl's family decisions reflected the values ambition and aspiration, according to her.

> So my parents have always been supportive of my education. So as long as they felt that it was worth going to.. For example, in India, private schools are not that coveted, it's more you should go to public universities because those are the ones that are better. So my parents always pushed me to do the best that I can be. And then once I would get into one of the better institutes, then they don't care about the finances, then it's all, you know, their support.

It is important to recognize the collective influence of aspiration in the participants' stories. Individuals were keenly aware of their family's and personal investment in their education to secure a safe future. He and Hutson (2018), when exploring Chinese students' use of strengths to leverage their success in host countries, found that participants showed strong dedication and goal-driven behavior to complete their studies successfully. All participants shared their immediate and long-term educational goals and explicitly shared their aim to take teachers' feedback into consideration and do well in their coursework.

Social Capital

In Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Theory, she defined social capital as social contacts and networks that individuals use to navigate through social institutions. Participants in this study typically relied on friends from their own country and other international students. They identified commonalities in their struggles and used it innovatively to build a strong and dependable community in a foreign country. TL, an international graduate student from China, said,

> I didn't feel depressed when I come to the United States because I came with a group of Chinese students and we went along really well. We traveled a lot and like to release your stress, you can hang out with a group of friends. And have some fun because they can get what you mean. Maybe some jokes. So they bring you happy and cheery and bright. A sense like you don't have family here. Then they can give you that feeling.

Participants in the study also helped each other out, knowing that they were away from their respective families and needed each other's support to survive in a new country. TL continued her support from Chinese students: "Like if we are sick then my

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friend will come to my room and cook some things for me and help me to get better from the sickness so that I will also help them."

Participants built strong relationships with other racial minorities as well and learned to look out for each other. K.S., a graduate student from China, had the following to say:

> I have a classmate, he's American but, his parents is from Malaysia, Asian country. So there was one time we were in a group and others are talking and I feel embarrassed to get involved, I feel difficult to get involved. He would start to talk with me to try to help me get involved. Also, he would message me after class and tell me if I'm fine and if I need help, like I need a ride or anything, just let him know because he knows how difficult it was for his parents when they first came here.

A shared understanding of struggles due to being racial minorities and new to the U.S. helped these students lean on each other. An interesting finding in the study was almost all students had a strong opinion on the limited public transportation system in the U.S. Students struggled to access local and international grocery stores due to lack of private transportation. However, participants who did own their vehicles realized the challenges, and reported that they would frequently offer transportation support to other international students.

M.F, who joined the graduate school as a non-traditional student and a single parent of two daughters in the U.S. used her experience of struggles to guide other non-traditional students on campus in their struggles as a parent and international student on a budget.

There's a Nigerian student. So she started the same time as me. She came over with her three kids and left her husband in, in Nigeria. So we're in very, very similar situations. But just things like, so her kids have gone into public school and she gets his long list of stuff that she's supposed to get for her kids and so she goes to staples to buy it all. We're like, no, you don't go to Staples. Staples is really expensive. Just go to Walmart or go to the dollar store or you know.

Although international students also attempted to build social network with domestic students, their efforts were often met with disinterest and, at times, even racism. Such responses further highlight the need for a Critical Race Theory to understand why international students should not be the only party held responsible for intercultural engagement on campus. CRT encourages introspection on larger race relations in the society, and views campus social life as a reflection of it. This viewpoint was evident in Crawford's (2000) research, wherein domestic students maintained a stigmatizing attitude towards international students, stemming from xenophobia in the larger society. Thus, the participants' social capital indicates their creative ways to build dependable social networks to navigate through a new country.

Familial Capital

Participants' use of their family support was evident throughout the study. Familial capital (Yosso, 2005) refers to family members an individual seeks support from to improve their chances of success in the society. Luis Moll's (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) concept of "funds of knowledge" refers to culturally accumulated resources that were essential for household functioning and individual well-being. Moll and colleagues attempted to study how household members among working class Mexican communities used their funds of knowledge in dealing with challenging social

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and economic situations. They were particularly interested in how families developed social networks that connected them with their social environments (most importantly with other families), and how these social relationships allowed the development and exchange of resources, including information, competencies, and labor, that enhanced the households' ability to prosper (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). In this example, the researchers attempted to carry the strengths of their students' familial capital into classroom learning experience.

The most obvious use of familial capital was the participants' use of family members as a resource to support their higher education. Jay's uncle was a higher education consultant. He used his knowledge of American education to identify universities with advanced infrastructure and scholarship opportunities for his niece: "They were also trying to search for universities. My uncle is an admission consultant and he was searching for me the best universities where I will get good scholarships and I will get every facilities for my research."

Post her undergraduate education, Cheryl considered the option of going to the U.K. for her master's. However, considering the unfavorable immigration policy in the U.K., she wasn't very sure. Her mother identified individuals who would be able to provide her with accurate information and help her make an informed decision.

> There was a one-week period where I had to decide between taking a scholarship in the UK and going there or studying at one of the better institutes in the, in India for psychology. My mom like literally found people in her life who had studied in UK. She made me meet them. She sort of made me speak to different people about the people who studied in my institute in India versus the institutes in the UK- what are the job prospects, what are the prospects of staying in the foreign

country so that I could have a better life. So I think that is really one sent me an example of how they really supported my education.

Thus, it is evident that immediate *and* extended family members supported participants in their desire to study abroad.

Resistance Capital

Resistance Capital (Yosso, 2005) refers to the legacy of the drive for social justice and equality in society that People of Color groups have fought for. It involves identifying unique attempts to challenge the status quo and resist blind adoption of dominant norms.

Participants in the study did not deter from critiquing the American society. Cheryl had high hopes for the America she had grown up believing. She admitted that she had imagined the U.S. to be more developed in its infrastructure and open-mindedness, than the country was in reality. This impacted her strongly.

> Just before coming to the U S I met my current partner and he's European and then so I went to visit him in Europe and I just got to know a lot more about Europe and, or at least he's from Austria. So I got to know more about Austria. And I think that really, really messed up my perception of the US because, you know, I came from this, like I have this, this partner who was telling me about their social system where they have free healthcare and free insurance and free education. So I was definitely disappointed with the US.

The campus counseling center was criticized for not reaching out to students, especially international students. Bansal, for instance, recognized that the graduate school "was filled with international students," yet the counseling center rarely acknowledged their stress and conducted any outreach programs. Participants also used this opportunity

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to give various recommendations to the center, including the need for staff from racial minority backgrounds and better publicity. These instances reflect a strong sense of agency and voice among the participants, a perspective rarely highlighted by many counseling researchers.

Participants also shared instances of wanting to retain their home culture, especially in the face of access to wide range of new cultural practices. A.Z was determined to remain connected to her roots, especially her Portuguese language: "So when I was walking to school I was listening to some Brazilian podcasts, listening to some Brazilian music and that helped."

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) refers to the innovative use of multilingualism to navigate through social institutions. In this study, although participants were from multilingual backgrounds, excessive focus English language use resulted in little to no recognition of this unique asset among the participants. However, participants used their awareness of multilingualism to remain connected with members of their own and other countries. TL's comments on English language capture this experience well.

> To make Chinese. I don't know whether you think so, but it's true because you can speak Chinese, your own, your, your original language. That can express your feeling really well. But if you speak to American, maybe it's just different. You cannot express your deeper feeling. Like international, like they also have a language barrier. Even though you don't speak I'm like, even though I don't speak Indian still, they don't speak Chinese so that it's easy to make friends. That's what I think.

In other words, opportunities for linguistic capital were most limited, due to the strong monolingual culture of American education.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) refers to unique skills and abilities used to navigate through social institutions. Personal attitudes of resilience were evident throughout the participants' stories. Most participants shared their positive attitude that helped them to persist and continue, despite multiple barriers to their success. A.Z. used her analogy of a running train to describe her experiences as an international graduate student of Color.

> I felt that it was like a train going by and I was just like jumping on the train, trying to catch up. Eventually you catch it. You just have to wait, like you're going to catch it, don't worry. Yeah, it's not easy, but it's doable.

Bansal also engaged in positive self-talk to remain determined and focussed on her education: "So, there was that was sense of confidence and giving me sort of confidence to move ahead, "maybe it's not that bad. I can do it. I can reach the end of the line."

Given that she claimed to be unaware of campus counseling services, Bansal used various individuals' support to set herself up for success as an international student. Her intentional and careful approach seeking help is described below.

> So what I think is one person cannot help you in the same every situation. There are different people in different situations because your roommate would help you in your house, your fellow classmate will help you with your coursework, your professors would help you in a certain way. So I think there are different phases, different situations where there are different people who come up and help you.

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Similar to Bansal, other students also reached out to various university staff to ask for additional support. Jay, for instance, reached out to her department secretary to enquire about local bus services, knowing she wouldn't have a personal vehicle.

> When I contacted the, my university in my joint school of Nanoscience, uh, the executive assistant, she had emailed me the bus routes and everything I'm asking them for help. They are, as they were responding me as soon as possible and they helped me a lot. It gave me the support that I could come here and I could receive that support from everyone.

Thus, in many ways international graduate students of Color employed various strategies to support their mental health during study abroad. Although only one member claimed to truly benefit from professional counseling, others found innovative ways to sustain themselves. Almost none of these capitals have been formally recognized in research or in practice with international students in general. Hence, there is a greater need to explore international students' mental health from a culturally sensitive and asset-based approach.

Limitations of the Study

There are a few important limitations in this study that need consideration. In qualitative research, there is a possibility that coders project their own values and biases onto the primary data while analyzing the interviews. Although the research study involved two coders and one auditor to enhance trustworthiness, it still left some scope for undue influences to impact data analysis. Secondly, a very specific population within the international student community was considered for this study. Only individuals who identified as international graduate students of Color were eligible for this study. Given

the size of the sample being considered for this study, only a fraction of the target population was represented in the dissertation. Although, no measures were taken to prefer a gender over another, all participants in the study identified as Women of Color. In addition to this, the research team (two coders and an auditor) also identified as Women. Despite the diversity of experiences, nationality, age, and education majors among the participants, a homogenous sample along the lines of gender provides us with only very specific insights, mostly applicable only to women. For instance, an emergent theme of "Close relationships with mother" may or may not be applicable for international students of other genders.

The language barrier of using only English for data collection was evident. This was true especially in some situations wherein it appeared participants' freedom to describe complex emotions and nuanced experiences remained limited. Despite these limitations, the primary inquirer hopes that the valuable information gained from the participants' narrative informs researchers and counselors of the innovative use of various cultural capitals employed by international graduate students of Color to support their mental health.

Only one interview was conducted per individual. Although participants had the opportunity to engage in a follow-up interview to share additional thoughts, no member engaged in the process. Hence, it is highly possible that nuanced thoughts and more in-depth reflections were not available for analysis in this study.

Also, researchers have indicated that international students' adjustments improve over a period of time in the host country. However, the researcher did not gather

information on the longitudinal shifts in the use of cultural capitals among the participants.

Implications for College Counselors and University Administrators

The participants in this study highlighted several critical issues that must be taken into consideration by University officials and campus counseling centers. Several of these implications directly stem from participants' responses, often laced with frustration over the failure on the university's part to support international graduate students of Color adequately.

The first and foremost implication for campus counseling center is to enhance the nature and frequency of their publicity. Several participants shared that they were never aware of the existence or location of a campus counseling center, despite being on campus for almost two years. Participants claimed they almost never received any emails from the counseling center, reminding students to maintain their mental health hygiene through regular counseling. Thus, campus counseling centers must be proactive in publicizing their services.

Participants in the study also admitted to the adverse influence of cultural stigma against seeking counseling on their help-seeking behavior. Therefore, culturally congruent strategies of recruiting clients among this population may be necessary. These strategies may involve counseling centers sending a representative to meetings of international student groups with the aim of demystifying the role of counseling. Talking at the students' orientation in small groups, or even one-one when possible, can strengthen relationships between college counselors and international graduate students

of Color. In addition to this, developing an advisory group of international graduate students of Color to offer consultation to campus counseling centers to design more effective and culturally sensitive outreach activities that can further improve the help-seeking behavior of this population.

Only two participants of the total eight had sought counseling. Of the two, one participant found the process to be meaningless, given the indirect and more supportive role of the counselor. Campus counselors must be trained to work with students from diverse backgrounds, including international students who may need more directive and concrete support on their pressing concerns (e.g., Kronholz, 2014; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). A comprehensive multicultural training that considers cultural influence on international students' preference in style of counseling (e.g., direct versus indirect) could reduce the high attrition rate among international student clients. A multicultural training could also include hiring counselors of diverse racial and linguistic backgrounds to support students.

Cultural considerations may also help college counselors determine the strategic use of individual and group counseling, and support groups across campus. For instances, individuals with mental health concerns that merit strict confidentiality such as suicidal ideation and trauma history could be referred to individual counseling. For less risky concerns such as loneliness and isolation, a group counseling forum for international graduate students of Color could be created. Given the strong stigma associated with mental health counseling in several cultures across the world, group counseling sessions could be offered in more "neutral" spaces such as Student Center and Library. Peer

mentorship programs wherein international students are paired with domestic American students or other better acculturated co-nationals is another creative way of providing support and resources to this community. Thus, a multipronged approach to support international students of Color can prevent several adverse mental health experiences such as those shared by the participants in the study.

At present, rapid socio-political changes strain international graduate students' mental health. Day-to-day microaggression and xenophobia threaten the well-being of this minoritized population. Counselors must address the impact of larger socio-political developments in a proactive and culturally sensitive manner, such recent travel bans, stress associated with changes in work visa (H1B) regulations and increased xenophobia on and off campus.

Given the multilingual background of international students of Color, and the exclusive emphasis on English language in American classrooms, it is a matter of grave urgency that faculty members and staff are trained to work with and respect international students, particularly People of Color. Imposing language barriers and insisting on a certain approach to learning (e.g., verbal engagement in classrooms) (e.g., Lee & Rice, 2007; Sato & Hodge, 2015) deprives some students of an opportunity to truly engage with the learning materials.

The primary purpose of this study was to identify unique cultural assets employed by international graduate students of Color. The participants in this study employed various cultural capitals in an intentional and creative manner. College counselors can boost their students' confidence and offer a well-being centric approach to counseling if

they use an asset based model. Exploring students' unique strengths and helping them use them effectively to further support their mental health would be a hallmark of multicultural counseling.

Implications for Future Research

This dissertation study offers a wide range of opportunities for future research studies. Firstly, given the homogeneity of gender and level of education in the study, it may be helpful to explore the use of various cultural capitals among male and non-gender binary international students. Additionally, given the large presence of undergraduate international students, exploring their unique use of cultural capitals can also provide counselors with unique insights.

It is also prudent to explore college counselors' current approaches to addressing various cultural capitals. Understanding which cultural capitals naturally receive more attention and/or those that don't get attention in counseling can aid researchers in developing training manuals and protocols to improve the counselors' multicultural competencies.

Given that international students stay in the host countries for a varying period of time, a longitudinal study exploring their shifting use of cultural capitals can provide practitioners and university staff with helpful profiles. Findings from such studies can transform the nature of orientation programs that typically provide large amounts of generic information and resources.

Finally, quantification of cultural capitals could help counselors and university staff assess an individual's profile of cultural capitals and offer customized support. In

the long run, it could simplify the helping process by giving international students the most helpful referrals and resources based on their preferences.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in the research and answer the research question: *How do international graduate students of Color support their mental health during the early acculturation phase in their study abroad period?* The study also had a secondary research question: *To what extent does Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth theory offer a potential theoretical framework to support a strengths-based understanding of international graduate students of Color's mental health?* Participants identified a variety of mental health stressors and cultural capitals to overcome the former. These included support from family, faith, monocultural and multicultural friendships, personal attitudes and resourcefulness, and a strong drive to succeed. It is hoped that this research will help college counselors to feel better equipped to work with international graduate students of Color. Implications for counselors and university officials are also offered to further aid a more positive and social-justice oriented support for international graduate students on American college campuses.

Post Research Reflection

The journey that this research demanded of me was surprisingly refreshing. I had heard of my colleagues feeling overwhelmed with the daunting process of research. However, in my case, I found that I had a reliable and supportive community to make this process not just easy, but also truly enjoyable. My research questions focused on the cultural strengths or cultural wealth used by international graduate students of Color to

support their mental health. Having lived in the U.S. for over four years, and being immersed in the literature on this topic, I had unknowingly assumed that I knew my population very well. However, I was in for lots of surprises.

I remember sending out the flyers and information sheets on social media to recruit participants for my study. It was interesting to note that a population that had been constantly associated with stigma against seeking mental health support, and cultures of honor, I got all my participants in four weeks. I acknowledge that, being a qualitative study, my team and I needed only 8 eligible individuals. However, given the timing of the semester (around midterms in Fall semester), I was genuinely surprised to see that enthusiastic individuals from various backgrounds found the time and energy to share stories of distress, disappointment, and courage. As a researcher, it humbled me that my participants were willing to travel over an hour by public transportation to speak with me and participate in this research. During this period, I had to pause and reflect on the factors that pulled these individuals to share vulnerable stories with a stranger. Most of them said they wanted to *help* another international student complete her education. I came to realize that, in many ways, the community of international students, particularly students from collectivistic cultures, viewed themselves as active agents who could help one another succeed, who felt that they had a role to play in uplifting each other in a foreign country. I came to realize that in the midst of my research work and literature review, I had intellectualized the culture of sharing and optimal inter-dependency found in our communities. Reliving it through these moments of generosity and communal perspectives was humbling.

Several friends of mine (mostly international graduate students of Color) would ask me for updates on my research. They felt invested in this process and would ask me for the kinds of themes emerging in the participants' stories. I remember one of my friend's comments that I was engaging in the "wrong" research. I needed to interview students who had graduated from their respective programs, so that they were not bound by social desirability and fear of their advisors finding out about their honest opinions of American education system. I couldn't help but feel amused by my friend's ownership of my research. He felt he had a say in how I crafted the inquiry on international students' mental health and wanted to give me his feedback. It is this collective investment in each other's well-being that continued to emerge for me throughout this process.

In my discussion on my trustworthiness (Chapter III), I had discussed the role of globalization and colonialism in my upbringing. I was raised in an upper middle-class family where Saturdays were dedicated to visits to the British Council library in Connaught Place. I grew up listening to British and American stories which strongly shaped my worldview. Thus, adjusting in the U.S. and code switching between my Indian self and American self was somewhat seamless. However, I found myself catching my biases and preconceived notions of what support looks as I listened to my participants' stories. For instance, in my initial years in the U.S., I was determined to mingle more with non-Indian international students, to further expand my understanding of other cultures. Several Indian students, including myself, avoided each other's company with diplomatic precision in order not be stereotyped by Americans. However, as I listened to Jay and TL's stories of how the support from their ethnic community proved to be critical

in their mental well-being, I found myself reflecting on my internalized biases and stigma against my own community in the initial years. I had somehow imagined that if I stayed away from the Indian community, I would not be subjected to microaggressions and racism. My participants' stories reminded me that how each one of us navigates through neo-racism and acculturation in a unique way. They felt brave and confident in their cultural identity and unapologetically leaned on their community members for support. Stories like this compelled me to pause and introspect on my own strategies in the initial years and see the fallacies in my approach.

Resistance was identified as one of the six cultural capitals by Yosso (2005). However, I believe there may be other cultural capitals among international students, including their faith. Although religion showed up as a strong coping strategy for three participants, other researchers have found that religion may act as a buffering factor in helping participants cope with rapid changes during acculturation. This can be explored further in future studies. I am also aware of my use of various cultural capitals during this research. Particularly, social and familial capital were of great value for me throughout my doctoral education. My doctoral colleagues, mainly colleagues who also identified as a racial minorities, helped me better understand my social location in the American society, and supported me in both professional and personal aspects of development. These individuals helped me make sense of racial microaggressions against international students and provided a safe space for me to process my feelings. As with any research, doctoral research is an exacting process that demands the highest standards. Although my challenges looked a bit different as the only international student in the program, both

faculty and students were available for my support. I could truly relate to Cheryl's comments on how, despite different social contexts, her cohort mates and faculty members provided her with a safe space to process her concerns as an international graduate student of Color.

Most of the participants in the study shared stories of how their family members showed up as an unwavering source of support. My story was no different. Amidst a health crisis, my family members found time to check-in with me and insisted that I visited home (Delhi, India) during the break to support my mental health. As with most participants in the study, I too developed a special relationship with my mother, especially during the last two years of this research. As I grew in my understanding of feminism for women of Color, I came to see the under-recognized aspects of my mother's values and personality that have shaped me to be who I am. Her poise, grace, and bottomless compassion helped me forgive individuals who engage in oppressive acts. In many ways, my relationship with my mother strengthened as I grew in my understanding of feminism, particularly feminism from a collectivistic and non-White perspective.

Research doesn't exist in a solipsistic bubble. It is influenced by the happenings of the outside world. During the course of my inquiry, several incidents inside and outside of campus have given me a deeper understanding of the position of international students in the U.S. In my interactions with the International Programs Center at my campus, I have come to learn of the common challenges they face in their work with this population. At present, we are working on identifying training opportunities for the staff

and faculty members to be more culturally sensitive in their work with international students.

Unfortunately, there were also moments when the task seemed intimidating and much bigger than the research. Several socio-political events, including the arrest of various Indian international students by the U.S. Homeland Security and a Duke University faculty's email reprimanding Chinese international students for speaking in Mandarin and Cantonese in the common areas, indicate that, as a host country, the U.S. has room for growth. As discussed above, counselors on campus must broach the impact of larger social events on the mental health of international students of Color.

During my research I also encountered some specific challenges that international students face. Homelessness and food insecurity was a major concern. A couple of international students facing temporary food shortage and homelessness reached out to me for support. They were certain they did not want to depend on Spartan Pantry (a support organization to battle food insecurity among UNCG college students) due issues of cultural pride and stigma.

Recently, a spouse of an international student reached out to me sharing stories of emotional and financial abuse by their partner. Trapped by visa restrictions and language barriers, this individual had lived in isolation for months, enduring the trauma. Thus, in many ways the research for this dissertation is merely a starting point in digging deeper into the silenced stories of international students. As I reflect on our (participants,' community members,' and my) experiences, I recognize that there exists a gap in the needs of this community and the services offered by our profession. It is with a renewed

sense of commitment and purpose that I complete this dissertation, knowing that the

journey has just started.

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RESEARCH PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITY!!

CULTURAL EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOR

This research involves interviewing international graduate students who also identify as persons of Color. If you are

- 18+older
- International Student in a Graduate Program
- Have lived in the U.S for at least 1 year but not longer than 2 years
- And, identify as a person of Color

Then you may be eligible!

If you are interested in participating in the interviews (60-90 mins) to share your cultural experiences, please contact

S Anandavalli (Valli)
s_ananda@uncg.edu

APPENDIX B

EMAIL/SOCIAL MEDIA INVITATION

Email/Social Media Invitation

Primary Investigator: S Anandavalli

Project Topic: Lived Experience of International Graduate Students of Color using a Critical Race Perspective

My name is S Anandavalli. I am conducting a qualitative study to explore the lived experiences of international graduate students of Color with the aim of gaining a balanced understanding of their acculturative challenges and strategies to cope with the same. A holistic knowledge of the strengths and challenges that international graduate students of Color experience can help campus counseling centers better serve this student group.

To that end, I am interested in speaking with adults (age 18 or older) in the United States who-

1. identify as international graduate student of Color
2. are on an F1 or J1 visa
3. have lived in the U.S. as an international graduate student for at least one year but not longer than 2 years

If you believe you qualify for this study and would like to share your experiences as a graduate international student of Color, I invite your participation in this study. Participation will include a 60-90 minutes audio recorded phone, on-line, or face-to-face interview with myself as the principal investigator.

All information shared during interviews will be treated as private and confidential. This includes any follow up e-mails and phone conversations. I will be the only person who will have knowledge of the participants' identities. Although every attempt will be made to protect your identity and anonymity, your interview maybe transcribed by online transcription services. Hence, confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed, but the researcher will make sincere attempts to limit access to the tape. Once the interview is transcribed, any identifiable information will be removed to further protect your identity. There is no cost to participate in this study nor will compensation be offered. If you are interested in participating, please email me at s_ananda@uncg.edu. If you are not able to participate in the study but know of someone who would be interested, please feel free to forward this information.

APPENDIX C

COUNSELING RESOURCES

1. UNCG campus counseling center (For UNCG students only)
   336 334-5340
   107 Gray Dr, Greensboro, NC 27412

2. Vacc Counseling and Consulting Clinic
   336.334-5112
   223 Ferguson Building; 524 Highland Avenue, Greensboro, NC 27412

3. UNC Greensboro Psychology Clinic
   336 334-5662
   1100 W Market St, Greensboro, NC 27403

4. Guilford County Mental Health
   336 676-6840
   232 N Edgeworth St, Greensboro, NC 27401

5. Family Solutions
   336 899-8800
   231 N Spring St, Greensboro, NC 27401

6. NCAT Counseling Services (NCAT students only)
   336 334 7727
   Murphy Hall, Suite 109, Greensboro NC 27401

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Your life before you came to the U.S.
    - Describe your family support system.
    - How was your educational experience in your home country?
    - How important is your culture, religion and values to you? How did they shape your personality and identity?
    - What did you think of the U.S. before you came here?
    - What were some of your reasons for wanting to come for higher education in the U.S.?
    - Who supported/did not support you in your decision to come to the U.S.?

2. What were your initial reactions to Americans' culture and behavior?
    - What were some of your feelings when you experienced the new culture here? How did you handle those feelings?
    - How did you learn (more about American culture) to adjust here?

3. Who and what supported you in adjusting to American culture, especially with your education and social life (e.g., ethnic groups, faculty members, international students office)?
    - How did those persons support you?
    - How supportive has the international community been? Explain.
    - What has been your experience supporting other international students during their transition? Describe 1-2 examples.

4. Describe 1-2 particularly stressful/overwhelming situations you have experienced as an international graduate student.
    - When did these events happen?
    - What are some strategies you used to overcome that situation?
    - Who did you reach out to, to help you?
    - How supportive were your community, culture, family or religion during those times? An example or two?
    - What was it like to be an international graduate student, experiencing these challenging situations abroad?
    - What did you feel/think about yourself during that situation? What were some resources (within campus and community) that you used to take care of yourself?

5. When did feel positive/successful as an international student? Please share 1-2 experiences.

- How did your community, culture, family or religion help you be successful? An example or two?
- What was it like, as an international graduate student, to feel successful?
- What did you feel/think about yourself during that situation? What did your family and friends feel about that situation?
- What were some resources (within campus and community), if any, that you used to maintain your success and well-being?

6. Do you share your culture with Americans and other international students?
- How do you share your culture with them? What do you do? How do persons respond when you share your culture? Does the response vary across groups of people in any ways?
- How multicultural and diverse is/are your friendships/friendship circle?
- How have your friendship with other international and/or American students influenced your views about your own culture?

7. How do you think your early transition period affected your mood and well-being? In what ways did these differ or are similar to that of other graduate international students?
- What do you know about campus counseling services?
- What are some reasons you would/would not access the counseling services on campus?
- What are some benefits of reaching out to friends and family and other support networks instead of going to counseling services? Disadvantages?
- What do you think campus counseling services could do to support international graduate students like yourself?

8. What will you do differently to take care of yourself as an international graduate student?
- What advice would you give new international graduate students?
- What advantages and disadvantages does one have in being a graduate international student?
- How would you handle your cultural transition differently?

9. During the cultural transition process, have you learned or grown any in way?
- How have you changed due to the study abroad experience?
- What are some things you have learned about your own identity and culture since coming to the U.S.?

10. Any other thoughts you would like to share?

APPENDIX E

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Lived Experience of International Graduate Students of Color using a Critical Race Perspective

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: S Anandavalli (PI) and Dr. L. DiAnne Borders
(Faculty Advisor)

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
        You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form via email or a paper copy. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researcher named in this consent form. Her contact information is s_ananda@uncg.edu.

What is the study about?
        This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of study is to understand the lived experiences of international graduate students of Color, using a Critical Race perspective. It is hoped that by gaining better understanding of this student group's challenges and cultural strengths, campus counseling centers and other offices on college campuses can provide better services to other international graduate students of Color in U.S. universities.

Why are you asking me?

To be included in this study, participants must be 18 years of age or older, live in the United States, and a graduate international student on a F1 or J1 visa. Specifically, only those students who have lived in the U.S for at least a year, but no more than 2 years, are invited to share their lived experiences on their early acculturation period as an international graduate student of Color.

Thus, the population for this study is international graduate students who also identify as persons of Color who have been enrolled in a U.S college or university between for at least one year but no more than two years. Participants must also agree to participate in an audio or video recorded interview regarding this experience.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will meet with you either in person, over the phone, or over the internet to conduct an interview on the topic of your acculturation experience in the U.S. as an international graduate student of Color. I expect this interview will last about 1-1.5 hours, and you may choose to end or cancel the interview at any time.

I will ask interview questions from a list I have created; however, you may add any additional comments you wish, even if it is not specifically asked. Once the interview is complete, I will reach out to you, between two to three weeks after the interview to see if you have any additional insights or reflections you wished to share as an international graduate student of Color. I expect this conversation to take 20-30 minutes. Although participation in the follow-up interview is optional, your reflections and additional thoughts on the topic can prove valuable to my understanding of your experiences.

After I analyze the data from all the interviews I am conducting, I will send you a summary of the themes/topics that emerged from your interview and all the interviews overall. I will do this to make sure I have understood your experiences correctly, and to allow you to provide feedback to me regarding whether the findings reflect your experiences. I also will ask you to tell me whether your anonymity has been protected (i.e., that no details were included that would make it easy for someone to identify you as the source). You may choose whether to provide this feedback, but it is very important to me that your voice is the one that is heard in my analysis, so I do hope you will take the time to provide this feedback. This part of the process will be done via email or any other method you prefer and should take about 30 minutes or less of your time.

Talking about the challenges associated with being an international graduate student of Color can be emotional and discussing your experiences may create some difficulty for you emotionally or psychologically. At the conclusion of our interview, if

you indicate that you would like to seek counseling services, I will work with you to identify potential service providers in your area.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Our interview will be recorded by audio or video taping. This will ensure I remember our interview correctly. Although every attempt will be made to protect your identity and anonymity, your interview will be transcribed by online transcription services. Hence, confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed, but the researcher will make sincere attempts to limit access to the tape. Once the interview is transcribed, any identifiable information will be removed to further protect your identity.

What are the risks to me?

As discussed above, talking about challenges as an international graduate student of Color could be tough and discussing your experiences may create some difficulty for you emotionally or psychologically. Prior to our interview, I will identify 3 licensed counselors in your area if you desire this as a way to address any emotional or psychological difficulty. If you utilize this service, you will be financially responsible for these counseling services. If you find yourself in crisis at any point, you may also call 1 (800) 273-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline), 24 hours a day.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact me, S Anandavalli at s_ananda@uncg.edu, or my faculty advisor, Dr. L. DiAnne Borders at borders@uncg.edu. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study,
please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (336) 334 4623.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

As a result of your participation in this survey, the counseling community may gain a holistic and multicultural understanding of experiences of international graduate students of Color and provide a more social justice and culturally sensitive counseling services to this student body.

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

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, although people often find it therapeutic to discuss difficult emotional experiences, so it is possible that this may be a therapeutic experience for you.

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

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study other

than your cost involved in travelling to our meeting location, which will be determined by you and may not involve travel, or the costs involved with using the telephone or internet on your end.

How will you keep my information confidential?

I will make every effort to keep your information confidential and use your pseudonym throughout my research study. However, as stated above, I will be recording our interviews and because you may be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears/views the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed. Your original name will not be attached to the recording directly. If I use a quote from you for the data analysis or when publishing the results, your original name will not be used.

There may be some information that I would not be able to keep in confidence, including any known danger to you or others, any child or elder abuse, or if I were required to disclose information by a court order.

As you know, the internet also has limitations with confidentiality, so if we are conducting our interview online, I cannot guarantee our interview will be completely confidential due to the possibility of hacking or of other people accidently overhearing our interview on my end or your end. On my end, I will be alone and in a place that prevents other people from hearing our conversation when conducting the interview so that no one will hear our conversation. All hard copies of information and recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office. The recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study. Any electronic versions of the information, such as the written transcripts will be kept on my personal computer which is password protected. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect your relationship with me or The University of North Carolina at Greensboro in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that have been collected be destroyed unless it is in a deidentifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By participating in the study activities, you are agreeing that you read this consent form, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By participating in the study activities, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by S Anandavalli.