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**Acculturation Process and Influencing Factors for Adjustment for Female International
Students**

by

Miranda Kriesch

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

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Abstract

This paper discusses the process female international students experience when acculturating, or adjusting, while studying abroad in the United States. The research includes interviews from ten female international students in their third or fourth year of study from a Midwestern university to answer the question of how females have handled their adjustment process and what outside factors contribute to their overall study abroad experience. It is important to find trends on the contributing factors for a positive or negative study abroad experience according to the student's viewpoint. Females make up a significant portion of the student body population studying abroad, yet there is limited research about their acculturation process and what leads to success. This study found that participants recounted negative experiences relating to factors outside of their control, such as academic or social cultural differences, language barriers or financial stress. However, the female participants in this study, combined with their personal motivation and support networks, were able to find resources that enabled positive experiences to occur which offset the female students' negative experiences. It is the female international student's own mindset along with provided opportunities to create a support network that is vital for a positive acculturation process. This positive experience is important for the international female student population to succeed in their academic journey.

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables	5
Chapter	
I. Introduction.....	6
Personal Motivation for Study	6
Overview of the Problem	7
Aim of Study.....	9
Research Questions	13
II. Literature Review.....	14
Overview of Schlueter’s (2007) Study	15
What is Culture?	16
III. Research Methods.....	30
Participants.....	30
Instruments.....	31
Procedures.....	31
Methods of Analysis	31
IV. Results of Interview	32
Home Country of Participants	32
Reason for Studying at a Midwestern University.....	33
Identifying What Helped/ Did Not Help the Adjustment Process	34
Finances	38
Language Barriers.....	39

	4
Chapter	Page
Social Language Barriers	40
Academic Language Barriers.....	41
Homesickness	43
Overall Experience.....	44
V. Discussion of Results.....	46
VI. Conclusion	51
Comparison of Results with Previous Culture Shock Models.....	51
How does this Study Answer the Research Questions?.....	52
Question 1	52
Question 2	53
Implications for Future Studies.....	54
References.....	58
Appendix A: Proposed Models of Cultural Adjustment.....	62
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	63
Appendix C: Informed Consent	65
Appendix D: IRB Letter of Approval	67

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Participants of Study.....	32

Chapter I: Introduction

Personal Motivation for Study

My own personal experience with studying abroad has inspired this research project. Culture shock is a very well-known term today, and many people think they know what this term means. Well, what does it mean? When I first heard this term, I was about to travel to Spain for my first time abroad in a semester long program. The preparation for the culture shock at my university was a 1-hour meeting with a presentation and student panel about studying abroad. They discussed the term and briefly showed a U-curve model of adjustment. I took away a vague concept of what culture shock meant from that meeting. It was to be expected that I may miss home at some point, but I did not worry. I was in disbelief that I could ever experience culture shock. I was too excited for this journey.

Two months later when I was in Spain, I experienced a low point that inhibited the enjoyment of experiencing another culture. I felt that culture shock hindered my ability to adjust to the host culture. I missed my family, the food, the smells, the greetings and goodbyes, and the general way of life at home. I missed home so much that I started to resent the culture to the point of losing interest in learning the language. Looking back at these feelings now, I still don't understand them. I feel like I missed many learning opportunities and personal growth by not participating fully in the host culture. My questions for this study are based from this experience. I am left to wonder if there was something more that could have been done to help my adjustment process. Should there have been more preparation at my university? Or, could the Spanish university have helped? Was it a lack of support systems? Was it my unwillingness to adapt to the culture or language barriers that inhibited my experience? I want to find the answers

to these questions because culture shock can negatively impact a student's adjustment process. Hopefully by finding out if other students had similar or different experiences, both educators and students can know how to lessen the severity of culture shock from studying abroad. Students should be able to be excited about their experiences and leave the host culture with a meaningful connection, personal growth, and a developed sense of intercultural sensitivity.

Overview of the Problem

Studying abroad can be a wonderful opportunity for students to experience. The exposure to a new culture in many cases can bring about a better understanding not only of a new culture, but of oneself and one's own culture. Most people will go through a culture shock before reaching this enlightened state. Overcoming this culture shock is the element that can lead one to personal growth (Adler, 1975).

Unfortunately, not everyone who studies abroad will feel that they had a meaningful and successful experience. In fact, the opposite may occur. This contention is best described when Hess (1994) states, "The reaction to culture shock varies from person to person but may consist of such things as irritability, depression, loss of sleep or appetite, anger, loss of self-esteem, and others. It may result in the person wanting to go home or developing a very hostile stance toward everything about the host culture" (p.5). So, for some, grades may suffer, motivation may fall, and a general resentment for the host culture may set in. Of course, not everyone quits their study abroad program if they have these feelings, but it is possible that many may want to.

Even though the topic of culture shock has been thoroughly discussed in the academic world, there is still no consensus about knowing what the best way is to help international students adjust. It is becoming more and more important today to try and help international

students acculturate since more and more international students are coming to study abroad each year. When looking at the number of international students who study abroad, the Open Doors Report in the 2018 school year state, “The number of international students in the United States surpassed one million for the third consecutive year, increasing by 1.5 percent to reach a new high of 1,094,792, according to the 2018 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange.” This continues the upward climb that has been happening over the last several years. In fact, the Open Doors Report for the 2016/2017 year found that the percentage of female international students was 67.3 percent compared to the 32.7 percent of male international students studying abroad that year. This has been a continual trend for more than a decade. On the report, the females studying abroad to males studying abroad shows an approximate ratio that 6 ½ international students out of every 10 international students are female.

If international female students are quickly becoming a major part of the student population of our classrooms, presumably educators would want to see the international students succeed. Although, some international students may not succeed if they are dealing with issues of adjustment. The problem that needs to be investigated is why do some students progress to an illuminated state of cultural understanding, or more specifically, achieve intercultural sensitivity, when others may not. Is there a pattern evident to help show the process of acculturation? It is claimed by Young Yum Kim (1988) that, “all individuals in a changing and changed cultural environment share common adaption experiences” (pp. 6). If this is true, what can be done to help support students along their journey to achieving intercultural sensitivity? It seems that even though many universities have developed classes or academic support systems to help international students, some students still feel lost. Even with campus resources for them to use

after arriving, knowing the stages each student moves through for either a successful transition or thwarted acculturation, along with what influencing factors affected their adjustment, can give insight on how to help more students in the future.

To show the progression someone makes when experiencing culture shock, different models have been developed dating back to the 1950's. Understanding what has been said on this topic is the first step into understanding how to help, but there is not enough support in the literature to prove that any one model is more accurate than another. The most common models known from the past are Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve model and Oberg's (1960) W-curve model. As well, a new way of looking at cultural adjustment in the late 1980's brought about a different type of model proposed by Bennett (1986) that discusses the levels a student can journey through to achieve intercultural sensitivity. This research will take a deeper look into what exactly helps or thwarts students' ability to acculturate or not to the new host culture. Students' experiences may be too unique to classify, but it can be anticipated that similarities will arise among participants. Looking at these similarities between participants may help explain how to assist future students in their adjustment process.

Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to accurately reflect how a female international student's acculturation process manifests and how positive or negative encounters in the host culture has impacted the adjustment process to living in a new culture. Research on this topic may be able to identify what, if anything, can be done to eliminate or reduce negative experiences in the acculturation process. This research may also establish what the positive encounters with the host culture can have on the students' advancements in their process to achieving intercultural

sensitivity. This enables them to grow as individuals, gain a sense of belonging, and succeed in their new university setting.

This will be a partial replication study based from the findings from Schlueter's (2007) thesis study. In that study, international students were interviewed to find out which model of culture shock was best supported by their experiences. I am redirecting this study into focusing more on the acculturation process with personal experiences of the participants since Schlueter's (2007) study results yielded inconclusive evidence to support any one model. I will not be attempting to validate or negate these culture shock models but will look to them as a reference point or as previous research done on the topic of culture shock. In Schlueter's (2007) study, the U-Curve from Lysgaard (1955) and the W- Curve from (Oberg) 1960 were tested. In Schlueter's (2007) study, data was based from the interviews with 12 students. This study will provide an investigation of student adjustment processes from an in-depth analysis from interviews. However, unlike Schlueter's (2007) study, this study has the goal of finding similarities and difference among the female international students' experiences to inform the academic world about what may help or interfere with successful acculturation. Another difference for this study is that all the students interviewed will have been in the US for 3-4 years to factor in length of stay to help calibrate student experiences. In Schlueter's (2007) study, the participants' length of stay was varied and undisclosed. Lastly and most importantly, since only three interviewees in Schlueter's (2007) study were female, the results cannot demonstrate accurately what is important in helping females adjust to a new culture.

What is not attended to in his study will be addressed in this one. This study will include how a student's self-reflection of their culture shock process affects how well they are currently

adjusted to the new culture. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986) is also being included in this study to provide more recent background information on the acculturation process. The aim of the interviews in this study is to investigate what aided students' adjustment and what did not aid students' adjustment. This may provide direction to future educators on what areas should be focused on to assist international students in their adjustment process to the host culture. Lastly, the female perspective on the acculturation process is not specifically addressed. By having only female participants in this study, educators can learn if there are any specific universal difficulties encountered for female international students and how these difficulties can be negated in the future.

The reason why this study will focus on the female perspective only is because not only do females consist of a large percentage of the student population studying abroad, but also that there is not enough academic knowledge on how their acculturation needs are being met. As Zhang, Sun, and Hagedorn (2013) point out, "A considerable number of students who participate in study abroad activities are female" (p. 141). Therefore, it is important not to neglect how the gender differences in a new society may be shaping female international students' experiences. In general, there is less literature on how females are affected by the acculturation process. Some of the studies in the literature review highlight the importance at looking at females as a separate group since the two following recent studies by Zhang et al. (2013) and Le, LaCost, and Wismer (2016) show that there are different motivations for females to study abroad and different experiences resulting from their time studying abroad. The hope is that when strictly looking at female participants, additional insights can be learned on how address their needs when studying abroad. It will be of note for future research if there are trends that many women are

experiencing when studying abroad that can account for either following or straying from achieving an enlightened experience in the host culture. Furthermore, if key similarities in the experiences of females are exposed to either being successful or unsuccessful, the information provided can then assist future female international students adjust.

This study will interview female international students in their third and fourth years of study abroad. Questions will be asked to illicit responses from the interviewees about experiences with culture shock, attitudes towards intercultural sensitivity, and what has or has not helped with their acculturation. Noting female international students' adjustments is important since there have been documented struggles for female international students when studying abroad (Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1984). However, there is less research currently on the topic of female international student perspectives and the process of adjustment to a new culture than there is on the male perspective. The data analysis from the interviews should identify some of these struggles and how the struggles impacted the students' experiences. The information the participants present in these interviews will allow the researcher to record the participants' personal perceptions of their acculturation process and what experiences impacted their acculturation the most. Gathering this information from international students will help teachers of English for non-native speakers understand how to better guide their future international students. This study's aim is to bring in a female perspective to attempt to understand the acculturation process or see if there is any additional support that is needed for the successful adjustment of female international students.

Research Questions

The following research questions for this study are:

1. How have female international students managed their own acculturation process?
2. What outside factors affect the process of adjusting to the new Midwestern host culture, i.e. social issues, attitudes, support systems, financial issues, language barriers, or other?

Chapter II: Literature Review

The literature review will cover previous theories about culture shock models such as Lysgaard's U-curve model (1955), Oberg's W-curve (1960), and Bennett's DMIS model of ethnorelativism (1993). All three models attempt to identify stages that a person will go through as they experience a foreign culture on location. The information about these three well known models will provide insight to what has been researched on the topic of acculturation in the past. It may also provide insight on what is to be expected about the participants' own processes of acculturation.

Both Lysgaard's (1955) and Oberg's (1960) studies identify a low point and a possible honeymoon phase that the traveler could experience. The traveler must follow these paths before accepting the new culture. My definition of traveler for purposes of this paper is to mean someone who has lived in another country and culture for a short period of time. Schlueter's (2007) thesis study looked at the above studies to help understand a traveler's experience but did not include Bennett's (1993) model. Bennett's (1933) model follows different stages a traveler can experience. Bennett's (1993) model is looked at as more of a progression of stages instead a series of high and low points. The theory is not designed to mean that every traveler will reach every stage of the Bennett (1993) model. In fact, a person may never reach all the stages of the model. The background knowledge of the previous culture shock models may or may not contain similarities or differences with the research participants of this study. Although, finding similarities or differences in previous research may let educators reflect with more understanding on the participants' acculturation processes of this study.

Overview of Schlueter's (2007) Study

This study was inspired by the work of Schlueter (2007) and how he attempted to see the connection between which model of culture shock a student followed and the different factors that played into their adjustment process. Through interviews, he showed how students at the different stages of acculturation were adjusting to their social and academic lives at a Midwestern university. His study yielded varying results with not any culture shock model fully supported. Also, his results showed that 25% of his participants did not experience a honeymoon stage as both Lysgaard's (1995) and Oberg's (1960) models suggest. From his results, it is evident that students may follow their own distinct journey for acculturation.

By allowing the participants to share their experiences while abroad, Schlueter (2007) analyzed factors that some of the participants reported to why they had a hard time adjusting. He also learned how they navigated issues of culture shock, such as with support systems and importance of financial means. He found that if a student had a major personal hardship that had nothing to do with culture, such as a death in the family or a break-up, it was hard to separate this from issues of cultural adjustment. Also, he found that support by other international students of the same background helped ease their adjustment the most. Pedagogical implications of this study support that it takes more than informing students of the concept of culture shock, but the necessity of developing a method to help students overcome culture shock. Schlueter (2007) stressed that this can be done by showing students what tools can be used to address issues or stress they are having due to living in a new culture. His study and literature review support suggestions that universities could have more programs to promote social involvement and

develop support systems to help their international students. It is crucial to find what works for helping students adjust so that universities can provide the best programs to help them succeed.

What is Culture?

Before we can understand how the acculturation process affects female students and what can be done to ease this transition, educators must first understand why transitioning successfully to a new culture is so important. The term *culture* can be heard in many different contexts and even though many may think it is easy to understand culture, it may not be as easy as people think. Culture is the collection of all aspects of any given society. There could be no community, a language, or a place we identify as home without the notion of these aspects being related to culture. Hall recognizes the complexities of culture when he states, “To locate culture one must look not in an individual mind as an accumulated body of unchanging knowledge, but in the dialogue, the embodied actions... between individuals in particular sociocultural contexts at particular moments of time” (2002, pp. 19). From Hall’s perspective, it can be seen that no one person can live separate from culture. It affects all aspects of our lives. Kim (1982) explains that it provides the code every human needs to be a part of the society they live in. Lange and Paige (2003) point out that everything from a person’s beliefs to the way they act belongs to the multifaceted concept that is culture. Since culture encompasses all major areas of human life, it is understandable that when one person moves from possibly the only culture they have ever known to a new one, issues arise and people either have to adjust or reject their new surroundings. This change that occurs is culture shock.

One of the first known persons to coin the term of culture shock is Lysgaard (1955) when he proposed his U-curve model to explain the process of adjustment a traveler makes during his

or her time in a new culture. Lysgaard's (1955) hypothesis explained this process for American students traveling to Norway. Hess (1994) summarizes the U-curve effectively when he states, "[In the U-Curve] They [sojourners] start out in a state of excitement and interest (often called euphoria), begin to experience difficulties in functioning in the culture, reach a nadir of dissatisfaction and discontent, and then begin to pull out of it, until they finally reestablish a stable emotional state of being" (pp. 5). The U-curve model was the first of its kind to attempt to show how a person is affected by an experience abroad.

Shortly after Lysgaard (1955), Oberg (1960) revealed his W-curve model to expand on this theory of changes a traveler will go through during their experience abroad. Like Lysgaard (1955), he too incorporates the initial stage of the "honeymoon" period. This period is different for every person, but typically lasts from a range of a few days to 6 months. This happy time quickly ends and leads into the downfall of the second stage wherein Oberg (1960) explains, "is characterized by a hostile and aggressive attitude toward the host country" (pp. 178). During this time of "culture shock" the ideology of the traveler is an issue of "us" vs. "them". The next stage is the "initial adjustment" which is identified by the traveler wanting to learn more about the country. The model moves through one more pitfall stage of "mental isolation" before bouncing to the high point of "acceptance and integration". In this last stage, the traveler can understand that this is another person's "way of living". Oberg (1960) explains that the traveler does not necessarily have to agree with the new culture but is content to have gained new experiences.

Two flaws can already be seen by looking at both Lysgaard's (1955) Oberg's (1960) models. The first is that both were meant to explain the process of someone from America visiting a new culture. If the theories are universal, then the same principles should be carried

across all travelers of all cultures. In fact, these models have been researched throughout the years yielding different and inconclusive results. According to Kim (1982), “support for the U-curve hypothesis is weak, inconclusive, and overgeneralized” (pp. 25). One of the reasons it may not be universal is that not everyone is said to experience a “honeymoon” stage, or a stage of initial excitement (Kim, 1982). This has been found to be the results from Black and Mendenhall’s (1991) study on the U-Curve hypothesis as well as the expected results from Schlueter’s (2007) study. So, for this study, it is more important to focus on the individual participant’s experience rather than attempting to relate it to one of these “curves”, as it will most likely not fall into any one specific model previously discussed in research.

Secondly and interestingly, Oberg (1960) mentions in his article that the female traveler he terms as, “the wife”, may have the hardest time adjusting to her new surroundings. His proposed models of adjustment have only been based off the experience of men who were missionaries in foreign countries, therefore, negating how accurately this could reflect current day female international student experiences. When these models were first proposed, they accounted for the stages that the man would move through due to his interactions with the host culture through missionary work. There is little mention of a female’s experience except for where Oberg (1960) says that women may feel more disconnected. He does not explain why he came to this conclusion. What can be concluded from this article is that the acculturation process of females does not factor into Oberg’s (1960) theory or conclusions. Even though Oberg’s (1960) model is dated and neglects to encompass the female perspective, it is still well known and used by some university study abroad preparation programs to help explain culture shock processes. But, when looking at women in society today who are dealing with cultural

adjustment issues studying abroad, it is apparent that more research needs to be done to see what current struggles a female international student may face when adjusting to the host culture.

Lysgaard's (1955) and Oberg's (1960) models have been the predominant models tested and used since 1955. It wasn't until the 1980's that a new way of looking at the movements through culture shock emerged. M. Bennett (1986) developed the "Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity" (DMIS) which theorized the process that a cultural learner will move through on their way to developing intercultural competence. It was developed to understand how an individual will define the differences they see in one culture to the next. Intercultural competence means, according to Bennett, Bennett, and Allen (2003), to have "the ability to recognize oneself operating in cultural context, the identification and appreciation of cultural differences, and the development of general strategies for adapting to cultural differences" (pp. 246). The main difference in this model is that the pattern of adjusting to a new culture is completely linear and does not jump to extreme high points of excitement and low points of depression. The person first starts off in the early ethnocentric stage of "Denial" and has to move one step up to the next level of understanding until that person reaches the last "Ethnorelative stages of integration".

In a brief summary, there are a total of 6 stages on the DMIS equally divided into the first three on the Ethnocentric side and the latter on the Ethnorelative side. The first stage of "Denial" is described when a person has never looked nor cannot look outside of their own culture to see more than one way of life exists. In the second stage of "Defense", a person can see that other cultures exist, but are too far removed to mean anything. It can be too threatening when in close contact. "Minimization" completes the final stage of Ethnocentrism. A person at this point may

try to make universal statements that all people are similar; however, their perception of other people is clouded by their own cultural perceptions. The fourth stage of “Acceptance”, which is the first stage in the Ethnorelative side, is where the person can respect most all other cultural differences. The fifth stage of “Adaption” is summarized best with the idea of empathy. Also, the person at this stage can see the world without the veil of one’s own personal beliefs. For many, this may be the final stage that they achieve. One does not have to take on another culture’s beliefs to have gained intercultural sensitivity. If one does take on the host culture’s beliefs, then they have reached the final stage of “Integration”. At this point the person can be completely objective and be able to understand to multiple cultural situations. (Bennett et al., 2003)

The DMIS does not assume one person will complete all stages. Depending on the person, they may forever stay in one stage without ever moving onto the next. As Hess (1994) explains, the person does not always have to move forward on this continuum. There may be moments where they revert to an earlier stage, but in the end the person can achieve intercultural sensitivity if that person strives to do so (Hess, 1994). There is no mention in this model if gender differences will impact the stages. Notably in the study conducted by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman in 2003, their results found that, “while no systematic gender differences were found, significant differences by gender were found on one of the five scales [Denial/Defense scale]” (p. 421). The study showed that results for males identifying with this scale measured slightly higher than females. However, since there were no significant differences for the other scales, overall the DMIS is not impacted by gender (Hammer et al., 2003).

Looking at the DMIS model to understand intercultural sensitivity is important because if a student can be more self-aware of the process they are going through, potentially they can learn

how to successfully transition to living and studying abroad. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) point out, “To be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures” (p. 416). Learning from this, when students can understand there are differences between cultures, it can help them gain a perspective on why they may be struggling to adapt. When students are ready to see how they affect their own adaptation process, they can better understand their own sense of belonging in the bigger picture of cultural awareness. This knowledge can help students succeed in the demands that a culturally different academic world can place on them.

It is important to understand the process of adjustment an international student goes through when they study abroad but looking at the motivation why a student is studying abroad may prove useful as well. The reason why the student is studying abroad and what they will possibly achieve out of this experience may distinguish their acculturation process as positive or negative from the beginning. One study that explores this topic is Salyers, Carston, Dean, and London’s (2015) study. The basis behind their study is that the experience of being an international student can promote an appreciation of other cultures, one’s own self, and global awareness. However, Salyers et al. (2015) study investigates what happens when the excited anticipation and expectation of studying abroad does not meet the reality of the experience of studying abroad. Their purpose is to look at the reasons why students wanted to study abroad, how their expectations differed from their experience, and how institutions can better assist meeting the needs and wants of their international students for a more positive experience.

Although this study is based on American students studying abroad, themes can be transferred on how best to assist international students coming to the U.S. as well. What Salyers et al. (2015) found through interviews with returning students is that the students wanted “opportunities for ‘hands-on’ development, and language and cultural knowledge acquisition” (p. 372). These can be considered universally positive experiences that most international students may want to experience. Also, Salyers et al.’s (2015) study revealed that a crucial element for their experience in studying abroad was pre-departure sessions, in which students rated this as being an important part of their acculturation process. The students who received information about what to expect were eased in their concerns. These pre-departure information sessions were evident in their research as to a reason why the students’ overall culture shock was minimized (Salyers et al., 2015). This study shows the power that information sessions can have on a student’s experience. If pre-information sessions in the home country are not possible for the student, then immediate information sessions upon arriving may be the next best material that can be provided to international students to help their adjustment.

From a female perspective on this topic, a study by Zhang, Sun, and Hagedorn (2013) discuss specifically why female students from mainland China want to study abroad. The most frequent response for why these female students chose to study abroad was the aspiration for higher learning. The craving for better opportunities and wish to learn more about other countries and cultures was a common theme among all participants in their study (Zhang et al., 2013). This study also found the student’s desire to improve their English skills was a factor in motivation to study abroad. Zhang et al. (2013) state, “A possible explanation could be that students with a lower level of English proficiency consider studying overseas as an important opportunity to

improve their language skills”, which again can be connected to the hunger for more learning (p. 151). When looking at these findings, it is evident that most female international students take their education serious because of their eagerness to learn the language of the host culture while living in the host culture. If motivation in furthering one’s education is an indicator of why one is studying abroad, it is important then to ask if a student does not acculturate, is it due to a sudden change and lack in motivation? Or, the question then is, is not acculturating due to outside factors such as difficulties in adjusting to social differences or academic differences without proper support systems?

It is relevant then to investigate the student’s acculturation process and see how social factors such as relationships affect the student’s acculturation or the lack of acculturation. A study by Leong (2015) found that the underlying theme in why international students have difficulty adjusting to American university life relates back to cultural differences and how the host culture accepts the international students. If the host culture reflects the people in the host culture, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the newly constructed social relationships impact the acculturation process. Also, underneath all of this, the issue of language barriers surfaces as well. Leong (2015) interviewed 11 international participants with varying nationalities, a median age of 22.8 and ranging from 1-3 years of study abroad experience at an east-coast state college. He found that a variety of social factors impacted their overall experience ranging from relationships with professors, roommates, friends, and girlfriends/boyfriends.

Leong (2015) found that if the international student was placed with all American roommates, they felt lonely and uncomfortable due to some different cultural lifestyle choices, such as inviting girlfriends or boyfriends over to the shared living spaces. Also, most of the

international students found it difficult to become friends with American students seeing that American students, although friendly, were not open to making new friends. The international students found it easier to become friends with other students of the same nationality. Similar findings in Schlueter's (2007) demonstrate that the international students found making friends with other international students of the same background was easier than making friends with American students. Leong's (2015) findings show that international students feel more comfortable with each other and can be of great support. However, the participants in Leong's (2015) study felt that not having American friends hindered their English learning performance. Another area that was difficult for these participants was dating, or having romantic relationships, which was mostly due to language and cultural barriers. Lastly, financial stress also affected their acculturation since issues of high cost of living, high cost of tuition/books, and stress over finding a campus job negatively impacted their experiences. Most interviewees of Schlueter's (2007) felt that the institution did not offer proper support for campus job searches. Therefore, Leong's (2015) study attests that the complexities of social relationships are linked to the adjustment process and linked to how a student would reflect on their acculturation process. Overall, Leong (2015) shows that, "...students with familiarity and knowledge of the English language with the American ways of doing things were more prepared to handle both institutional and societal-wide demands and expectations." (Leong, 2013, p. 460). The students were also better able to establish friendships which gave a groundwork for a more positive study abroad experience.

Another study by Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) also shows the impact that positive social relationships can have on a student's stress level. The student's stress level can

also impact how the students is acculturating. It is no surprise that international students have burdens that their American peers are not dealing with, such as the language and culture barrier, including the new adjustment to American academic culture as well (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). These factors can all lead up to “acculturative stress”, which Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) define as stress associated with acculturation that can bring on issues such as anxiety and depression. The anxiety and depression a student encounters if they are not able to cope with the language and culture barriers may be one of the reasons why students experience the inability to acculturate. In their study, Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) explain that the student can react to stress and do one of the following options:

- 1) marginalize-feel lost in both the host and home culture
- 2) Integrate- become a part of the host culture while maintaining their home culture
- 3) Separate- only want to be a part of the home culture
- 4) Assimilate-only want to be a part of the host culture

Sullivan’s and Kashubeck-West’s study concluded that the social support network in the host country lowered the level of stress of the student. Therefore, the students were more likely to integrate. Sullivan and Kashubeck-West state that, “It seems that maintaining a connection to the home culture while exploring and developing positive connections to the host culture leads to a decrease in difficulties in cultural adaption.” (p. 7). It will be important for future educators to understand how the student’s connection with the home culture and host culture has affected the student’s overall experience.

It is necessary for the participants in this study to look at all aspects on how their culture and the U.S. culture can be defined in their acculturation process. In Kang’s (2017) study on the experiences of three Asian female participants during their teacher practicum in the U.S., social identities and culture identities were examined. By looking at how cultural identities and social

identities intertwine and may lead to difficulties on the part of the international student's cultural adjustment, Kang states, "Their linguistic and racial identities as Asian women with accents in the U.S. appeared to contribute to their racialization that may have led to forms of disempowerment" (p.3). It is evident from Kang's (2017) study that international students need to be prepared for all different kinds of expectations and issues that may stem something as simple as the perception of being foreign by the influence of an accent, which brought upon difficulties for Kang's (2017) participants. Moreover, it is important to address the point that what the student in the study abroad program aims to pursue as a career may bring up conflicts within their acculturation process as well. Kang explores the idea that there may be disconnect between how the native culture views the future profession or the international students and how the American culture views that same profession. Therefore, an international student managing their acculturation process needs to be prepared to see the disconnect between their home culture and native culture in all areas and learn how to successfully identify where the difficulty in connecting to their adjustment process, if any, appeared.

Support systems may be a critical component in helping universities decide how best to service their international students. A study by Le, LaCost, and Wismer (2016) found similar findings in which a developed support system became one of the biggest factors for a positive experience in acculturation for the international female graduate students interviewed in the study. Le et al. (2016) state, "The participants initially experienced a shock when transitioning from their native cultures to the US. However, this challenging period also provided great opportunities for growth as the participants reached out to people around them for support." (p. 146). The Le et al. (2016) study presents that the students overcame tough periods of time in

their acculturation process by forming social relationships in which alleviated stress. Many participants identified a college advisor as beneficial to their positive outlook during this time of transitioning to a new culture, since for many, the advisors became the support system.

Interestingly, if the participant previously studied abroad to the U.S. had a host-family, the student felt like they had a family system in the U.S. in place to support them. The results from Le et al. (2016) study showed that it was inconsequential to where the support came from, but if the student had a support system in place, the student prospered in the new culture. The support system directly attributed to a positive acculturation process. For this study, looking at the correlation between the student's experience in the host culture and the support system in place will be necessary to evaluate and reflect upon for an accurate analysis of the student's acculturation process.

Trying to understand what can interfere with a successful acculturation process for the female international student would be futile without seeing how the cultural identity of the participant is reflected on or changed during the study abroad duration or the participant. Understanding how the cultural identity of the participant and their acculturation process is uniquely joined becomes a key component that may help students process their acculturation process in meaningful and successful ways. It was Daniels and Rittenour (2018) that examined how the identity of the female international student can cause dissatisfaction with communication and education in their experiences at an American university. From their survey of 91 participants ranging in age from 18-28 years old, the researchers found that most of the participants' issues in feeling connected to the American education system stems from their personal-relationship identities, or more correctly stated, the gaps in these identities in which the

participants noted having differences in how they see themselves and how they are perceived by others. Conflicts that arose in the identities were due to issues of language barriers, as Daniels and Rittenour (2018) found the participants had to either hide or exaggerate their identities their fit in with American students and have conversations in English.

Daniels and Rittenour (2018) found language barriers to be difficult for the participants and found that their participants could not be true to their identities. Daniels and Rittenour (2018) state, “participants who felt constrained by the English language hoped to find appropriate words to express themselves and to be understood.” (p. 46). Many participants cited that they did not know how to accurately reflect their thoughts and feelings in the English language to others, so they split their identities in two. Many participants shared that they had an International student identity with American values attached to this identity and then a native cultural identity that came out at home in their native language. The survey also showed that many participants felt lost in their own identity if they managed their new cultural identity by only trying to adhere to American culture norms without regard to their native cultural norms. The participants struggled with knowing how much to share about their culture and with whom they should share their cultural identity (Daniels and Rittenour, 2018). If educators know that the language barriers of international students can affect personal relationships and that the act of balancing two different set of cultural norms could interfere with successful an acculturation process, then possible training on such topics given to the future international students would benefit not only their cultural adjustment, but their academic success as well.

The study by Le et al. (2016) also found that the participants’ new positive self-awareness that was formed from their acculturation experiences also helped create a sense of

belonging to the host culture. Their new sense of self was important for their positive experience since most explained that they could become who they wanted to become here without some of the more restricting confines of their home culture. Most of the participants in this study came from cultures with very traditional views of female gender roles, so they expressed an appreciation for the chance to be independent in their new surroundings. Le et al. (2016) explain, “Additionally, being females in more traditional societies they had not been encouraged to pursue education so far away from home.” (p. 144). When the participants of the study of Le et al. (2016) encountered difficulties with adjustment, especially in academics, the participants wanted to push through the struggles to prove to themselves that they could succeed here when others at home thought they wouldn’t succeed. It will be interesting to note to see if the participants that will be interviewed in this study have managed their acculturation process like the participants of the study of Le et al. (2016). Universities will benefit from the knowledge on how previous international students overcame difficulties and by determining how extra services at the college can help future students struggling to acculturate on their own.

What can be seen from the previous literature on the topic is that a student with a willingness to learn about a new culture will have an easier time adjusting to the new culture. Also, it seems that support systems from other international students in the U.S plays a crucial part in how well a student will adjust. Social relationships and support systems seem to be the commonalities that affect the acculturation process. Research shows that the more a female student felt supported and encouraged to learn directly led to a better acculturation experience.

Chapter III: Research Methods

Participants

The participants in this study are female international students in their junior or senior year at a Midwestern public university. There are 10 female participants that participated in the one-on-one interview. This number was derived because Schlueter's (2007) study interviewed 12 participants and the study done by Leong (2015) used 11 participants. As Nunan and Bailey (2009) suggest, "the larger the sample size, the more accurate inferences can be made about the population" (p. 129). Differing from what has been done in Schlueter's (2007) study, the focus will only be on female participants. This will enable the researcher to see if the variable of gender has a different effect on the acculturation process. The other main difference in participants from Schlueter's (2007) study is that he had interviewed students at random who fell in different lengths of stay in the country or at different years in their undergraduate program. The purpose using participants all in the same two years of study and length of stay in the U.S. will compile data to compare the information side by side without time in country as a factor on how an experience of one participant may differ from another. It is the hope that most of the students after 3-4 years of stay in the U.S. will give the student more experiences to reflect upon versus a first-year student. The researcher can look at possible factors during the participant's length of stay that either helped or hindered the participant's adjustment process.

Gender and length of stay were the two primary factors concerned for selecting participants. Nationality of the students vary as does previous personal experience. All female participants' names are protected using pseudonyms. One factor that was addressed in the

interview was to find out if the female participant has previous study abroad experience; however, participants were not selected on this basis.

Instruments

For this research, an interview yielded the best insight to answer the proposed research questions. This was a one-on-one semi-structured interview with predetermined questions; however, the participants were encouraged to expand with as much detail as they choose to provide for each question.

Procedures

Ten participants were chosen to complete the interview. The interview lasted about 30 minutes and included twelve questions. The interview was transcribed in notes. All participants of the interview signed a consent form to participate.

Method of Analysis

The questions in the interview directly relate to the research questions. The researcher looked for patterns between the participants to find out the biggest factors involved in the participants' adjustment process and how the participants managed cultural adjustment. The researcher coded this manually by finding similar phrases mentioned by the participants in each question to find out the most important factors for adjustment. Personal factors, social experiences, financial support, and personal support will be analyzed. These varying factors can affect the participants' adjustment process and yield varying results.

Chapter IV: Results of Interviews

Home Country of Participants

In total, there were 10 female participants who fit the criteria of being a 3rd or 4th year international student who participated in the Interview. There were six different countries represented by the students in the interview. Four participants were from Nepal, two participants were from Malaysia, one participant was from China, one participant was from the Bahamas, one participant was from Gabon, and one participant was from South Korea. The variety of backgrounds represented from the participants gives the results a broader spread of information to see if common experiences have been shared regardless of the home country of the participant. Also, all participants stated that this was their first study abroad college experience. Some additional information that was provided is that one participant was a transfer student from a university in another state, one participant visited the area before studying at the college, and one participant experienced a summer exchange program in their primary education a decade ago. All names of the participants are protected using pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participants of Study

Name	Home Country	Previous Study abroad experience
Maya	Nepal	None
Li Na	China	Transfer Student
Simrika	Nepal	None
Nanu	Nepal	None
Maryam	Malaysia	Travelled to area before/ Sibling at same University
Siti	Malaysia	None
Birsha	Nepal	None
Marlene	Bahamas	None
Olidia	Gabon	None
Ji Young	South Korea	Studied abroad in summer program as a youth

Reason for Studying at a Midwestern University

When asked why the participants wanted to study abroad and why they chose a Midwestern university for their experience, there was a consensus of two important reasons. The first, many female participants stated that they believed that they would have a better quality of education in the US versus their home country. As Simrika says, “I wanted to study here because the education system is much more convenient here. The education is very restricted back home. We cannot choose at home what classes to take”. Simrika is from Nepal, and all the other participants from Nepal along with Marlene from the Bahamas, Ji Young from South Korea, and Siti from Malaysia agreed. In fact, these seven out of ten female participants noted that they wanted to come here due to the value of improved educational programs, more advanced technology, and to earn a degree from a US institution. Siti from Malaysia explains, “My mom supports me because she wanted me to study in the US because the degrees are highly valued here from back home”. It is the hope that this US diploma would help to obtain better employment opportunities upon returning home for many participants.

Many of the participants had support from family to study abroad with the belief that their education would be better. Another participant, Nanu, spoke about how since she was the first born in the family, the hope was for her to gain knowledge and expertise from her degree so that when her younger siblings would pursue similar degrees in Nepal, she would be able to help. Nanu says, “I am the first born and my parents wanted to give me a better experience academically. My parents heard from friends about all the benefits and help then I can come home and teach my younger siblings and show them the way. Even if siblings study at home, I

can help”. So, by coming to study abroad, she could impart her knowledge to give the siblings a better advantage.

Another primary concern for most participants in their deciding factor to study at a Midwestern university was the cost. The female participants spoke about how the tuition and cost of living in the Midwest were reasonable. Olidia from Gabon received a scholarship for the college and that was the primary factor in her decision-making process. Lastly, a few participants spoke about how they already knew some older family or friends that went to the same college and that helped make their decision. For example, Siti shares that her aunt is already here and Maryam states, “All my family was supportive because my brother was already here and they don’t worry about me because my bother can take care of me”. The decision for these participants to study abroad was easier to make to come here versus staying home or studying somewhere else.

Identifying What Helped/ Did Not Help the Adjustment Process

All the female participants were able to state what was helpful in their transition process to adjusting to a new culture. The number one factor commented on by all the female participants that was helpful was having a network of friends on campus. All female participants except one, Birsha from Nepal, stated that by having a mix of friends from the US as well as their home culture, they were more comfortable in their new surroundings. As Li Na states, “My three roommates from the Midwest have helped and taught me about the culture and what they usually do in their homes and leisure time and different foods and hobbies. They helped give me rides and meet new friends”. The friends eased the transition in adjusting to living in a new place.

Even though many female participants stated that having American friends or roommates who could help explain cultural norms was beneficial to them, it was stated by all female participants (except the participant that was the only student from that country on campus) that the friends they made from their home culture helped the most. These nine female participants stated that by having friends from the same culture, especially friends that were a year or two older, gave them helpful tips on how to navigate campus life more effectively. The female participants stated that their friends were helpful in giving advice on different aspects of living in a new place and culture and what is important for a first-time college student. Birsha explains this when she says, “Friends from my home culture helped me find an apartment and took me to grocery stores like Walmart and said this was cheaper. They also showed me where my classes were”. All female participants shared stories like this where the friends from the same culture showed them around campus and shared personal experiences about adjustment processes or academics.

The only participant who did not state that friends from her home culture were helpful was because this participant was the only student from her home country on campus (to protect this student’s identity, the country will not be shared). However, she stated that friends from similar cultures to hers have been helpful and beneficial since she could relate to her friends’ study abroad experiences. Also, this student stated that due to the connection of a professor, she was able to meet a family from her home country living in the surrounding area which was helpful as well.

There were a few more reasons that many of the participants explained to be helpful in their adjustment process. All the female participants mentioned that there was at least one person

on the campus staff such as a professor or advisor that helped ease the transition to living in the US. They also mentioned about campus programs for international students. Some female participants in the interview process, such as Olidia from Gabon, named a specific professor who helped. Ji Young also mentioned how much her human relationship professor helped her. As for some of the other female participants, they talked about programs on campus that helped. The female participants in this study commented on how receiving help from advisors on what classes to take was important to them. As well, half of the participants stated that by having experiences pertaining to an international student center or a cultural orientation class was not only beneficial to help explain American cultural norms, but it was also beneficial in meeting new students from other cultures. As Simrika says, “In the second semester we needed to take a class on US academic culture. It was really a good class and had a fun atmosphere, since everyone in the class was from a different culture”. Birsha made a similar remark when she said, “The TESOL program and culture class really helped since the teacher gave a lot of reassurances”. Other college programs that were noted were the writing center and international student center.

Some of the biggest struggles the participants experienced in their adjustment processes were not necessarily due to cultural differences. One complaint that was not an unexpected result, since it was also mentioned in the participants in Schlueter’s (2007) thesis study, was about the weather. The cold weather in the Midwestern region negatively impacted the participants’ experiences for studying abroad. Most of the participants are from warmer weather countries and the cold weather and snow have brought them difficulties and unpleasanties, like walking in the snow to class, that they did not expect.

Another difficulty that was mentioned by Simrika from Nepal was the necessity to learn new laws and regulations. Simrika explained that although she finds it beneficial that the laws and regulations in the US are easily understandable, it has taken time knowing what is legal or permitted. The example she stated was that it was difficult to learn where and when you can smoke a cigarette. She was also surprised by the age limit for buying tobacco products. This comment was not an expected result since it was not mentioned in previous research pertaining to this study. It was not mentioned by the other female participants in this study either.

Lastly, half of the participants mentioned how difficult it was to adjust to the food in the American culture. Food is a part of culture; however, this was an unexpected result in the study as well. The previous research pertaining to the study did not mention difficulties in acculturation due to the impact of cultural food. The topic of food was commonly mentioned in interviews with the participants for this study. Maryam from Malaysia says, "It was difficult to adjust to the culture because it is very different from Asian culture. The food was too different". Not only did the participants state that was it hard to adjust to a new culture when they missed the traditional foods served from home, the participants also stated that the food when living in the dorms on campus was flavorless. What helped Marlene from the Bahamas overcome this obstacle to her adjustment process was being able to live off campus and cook her own food. Marlene states, "The biggest struggle is the food and the dorm food was awful, so I bought food later on to cook for myself". The female participants also mentioned that it was helpful to have friends to go out to new restaurants and try and to find better food experiences than what was being offered on campus.

Finances

The topic of finances and findings from the interviews brings some intriguing results that was not expected. During the interview, most of the participants, as previously stated, mentioned that the cost of attending school played into the decision of why they decided to study abroad at a Midwestern University. When asked if the participants felt that they were financially dependent upon their family or financially independent, the results were varying. The varying results was to be expected as some students stated that their families paid for everything and others said that their families paid only for some of the cost such as tuition. In these cases, the participants held a campus job to help pay for rent, food, or to have a personal spending allowance. None of the female participants claimed to be 100% financially independent from their families. However, what is interesting to note is that whether they claimed to be financially dependent or independent, all 10 of the participants said they were stressed about finances. The participants stated that this stress impacted their ability to adjust to the new culture. Previous research mentioned the impact financial stress could have when the cost of tuition was high, but the previous research did not mention how the stress of financially dependent students would affect the acculturation process.

All participants who claimed to be financially dependent stated worries such as feeling like they must earn top grades, or they were disappointing their family nor using their parents' money wisely. Nanu from Nepal mentions this when she says, "My family pays everything. I am less stressed about not worrying about housing or tuition, but it is stressful if my grades are not good and thinking how mad they [the family] would be and then you feel bad about how much money it costs". Maryam from Malaysia is another completely financially dependent student and

she says, “It is more stressful because I have to study really hard to show my parents we are not wasting money”. The other cause of stress for those who claimed to be financially dependent was that they stated they could not ask for any extra money for spending. The participants stated worries that their families would not approve of the extra money being spent for social experiences with friends and should only be intended for school costs. Many participants also expressed the desire to learn how to be independent and take care of their own finances but were unable to learn how to be more responsible while still accepting family money.

Language Barriers

There was a split on whether the participants stated they felt that a language barrier impeded their ability to thrive in the new culture. This can also be thought of as two different types of language barriers. There is an academic language barrier and a social language barrier. The female participants shared their thoughts as to if they felt that they had a language barrier socially, academically, both, or felt no language barrier at all. All the female participants, except one, commented on feeling a language barrier in one of these categories. Marlene from the Bahamas was the only one that felt no barrier academically nor socially since she comes from a country where English is the national language. However, as for the rest of the female participants, the major difference in their experiences is the degree they felt the social or academic language barriers and if they thought it significantly impacted their acculturation process.

Social Language Barriers

When given knowledge about the home countries and previous background experience of the participants, these varying results that show who said there was social or academic or both types of language barriers are understandable. Some of female the participants mentioned there was no barrier academically, but there was to varying degrees a barrier socially. Four of the female participants from Nepal stated that they were educated in English since primary school. These were the participants who did not see a language barrier academically as a negative experience to adjusting to the culture in the US. When asked if there was a language barrier, Nanu says, “No, not really. We learn English from nursery school and carry the home language and native language through school. The pronunciation is hard to hear new words here socially though”. Even though a language barrier academically was not a significant impact in their acculturation process for the female participants from Nepal, it was mentioned by a few of these female participants from Nepal that they had experienced at least one difficult time socially. The examples stated were about when people either did not understand their accent or they could not understand someone else’s English accent.

For the most part, the female participants in this study said that issues with an accent was an inconsequential factor in their overall acculturation process. Maya from Nepal talks about this by saying, “There was a struggle but now it is not a big deal”. However, Birsha from Nepal, who spoke English since primary school as well, noted a negative experience about having American students presume that she did not know English well and stated sentiments of being belittled and treated indifferently. She says, “It is hard to adjust socially with the language barrier, not academically. Some students say I have great English skills, but some students talk to me like I

do not know anything in English. There was an example with my boss who told me what to say and how to say it and it made me feel inadequate since I know English”. For Birsha, the presumption of her English skills by peers was noted as a negative experience in how she acculturated to the new culture due to the social language barrier.

The students from Nepal were not the only ones to mention a language barrier socially. Two participants, Olidia from Gabon and Siti from Malaysia also mention the issue of having an accent in their interview. Both Olidia and Siti state they have an accent and it is hard when other people do not understand them. In the interview, Olidia speaks about how she struggles socially meeting new people back at home, so it is even harder here. She talks about how she is naturally shy. Olidia says, “All the people I know came to me. I do not seek out new people. I leave class immediately and don’t chat with anyone”. When talking about how she overcomes this issue of a social language barrier in a conversation, she states, “I feel like I do not pronounce right and then I just say never mind if they ask again”. Even though Olidia speaks about her issue to adjust socially to the new language, it is unclear if this is inherently because of the language or a natural unwillingness to start new conversations with people.

Academic Language Barriers

Overall, there were less comments on the academic language barrier than there were on the social barrier. The level of difficulty they encountered with an academic language barrier represented their comfort level and ability with the English language upon arriving to the US. There were three female participants that mentioned the academic language barrier. Li Na from China and Maryam from Malaysia stated that it was only a minor inconvenience in their adjustment process. This is because they stated being confident in their English skills and

quickly gained more skills through their studies or speaking with friends. Li Na talks about how she overcame this struggle when she says, “It was at first really hard. Exposure to movies, reading books, and writing to people gradually helped. At first, I was not sure and now I am fine with the language”. Maryam also mentions how there was a difficulty academically with the language because she says, “some of the vocabulary doesn’t translate very well”. However, she says it did not hinder her adjustment and she mentioned that when it gets hard academically, she finds friends to study together.

In the study, there was one participant who explained that she was unable to enjoy new experiences and meet new friends because she could not speak English as easily as she wanted. This was Ji Young from South Korea. When asked, Ji Young said that the language barrier both socially and academically hindered her adjustment process. There was a lot of concern in the beginning of her studies about her academics and how the language barrier affected her grades and how difficult it was to understand the materials. She also was receiving poor grades in classes that were heavily weighted with group discussions. One way she was able to overcome this was when a professor noticed her lack of participation and became involved with concern. She stated that the professor was very friendly, and the professor encouraged her to use her English skills in class. Ji Young says, “At first I did not participate because I could not speak English. She [the professor] asked me after class if anything was wrong. She was also not from here so she understand and she motivated me”. This caused the Ji Young to worry less about her English skills and contribute what she could in class. Ji Young spoke about how, even though it is an ongoing struggle, she learned that by trying to involve herself more in group discussions or campus activities, she was able to improve her English abilities.

Homesickness

An expected result from this study about culture shock and acculturation is that most students who study abroad would at one point or another experience a period of being homesick. In terms of Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve model and Oberg's (1960) W-curve model, the homesickness could be the low point or points on the models indicated. As far as Bennett's (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, being homesick could be interpreted as a factor for why someone cannot move onto the next stage or would revert backwards in stages. With these three models in mind, it was to be expected that most, if not all, participants would talk about a time, or times, when missing people or items from home hindered their ability to adjust to the new culture. However, overwhelmingly it was either not a factor or only a minor factor that played a part in the participants' acculturation process in this study. Only Birsha and Nanu, both from Nepal, stated emotions or experiences, such as feelings of extreme sadness, unwillingness to study or eat, or the lack of desire to try new activities were due to how much they missed their families and home lives. These two female participants stated these feelings would come and go to this day. As Birsha says, "I miss my family so much that I don't feel like studying. It happens some weeks and some weeks I am fine. I go out with friends and call my family and this helps. This has been happening my whole experience that I miss home". It appears that Birsha and Nanu both have reached "low points" in their study abroad experience, however both shared sentiments about how this is a worthwhile experience for them.

As for some of the other participants, five of them stated that missing home only interfered occasionally in their adjustment process. These participants stated that the technology to video chat family helped overcome their homesickness. Li Na from China mentions how

technology helps when she says, “It is not as bad since you can call or skype parents”. These female participants also hang out with new friends of the same culture on campus which made homesickness a minor factor in the acculturation process. Lastly, three of the participants said that missing home was not something that hindered their adjustment process to a new culture. Marlene from the Bahamas says that missing family does not hinder her ability to adjust to the new culture. She says, “My mom is my best support, she pays my school and calls me daily over the phone”, so Marlene can stay connected to her best support system daily regardless of the distance.

Overall Experience

It is interesting that 100% of the female participants stated that a benefit to their acculturation process was being in a multicultural environment. The female participants stated that the experience of being in a multicultural environment gave them a more open mind about other cultures than they had before studying abroad. All participants said that overall, their experience studying abroad could be described as positive. All the participants gave similar statements to why they believed the experience to be positive. For example, most of the participants spoke about growing as a person or becoming a better person. Many participants claimed to have a more open mind about different cultures, and the stereotypes the participants had about the US culture or other cultures have been broken down. Simrika speaks about her previous attitude and what she has since learned here when she says, “The positive is that you get away from superstitious beliefs from what you know about the culture [American culture] back home”. All the female participants talked about their appreciation to learn about new cultures.

The only negative experiences mentioned by the female participants were stated as not being a major contributing factor in hindering their overall positive experience. The varying examples given by different participants as mentioned before that were mostly negative was that some participants missed home, a few participants stated a language barrier inconvenience, financial stress experienced by the participants, and the new cultural food. Even with all the negative experiences mentioned, not one example for any participant in this study was severe enough for the participant to claim an overall negative acculturation process.

Chapter V: Discussion of Results

Findings from this study and previous research have many similarities. A couple of studies, such as Salyers et al. (2015) and Le et al. (2016), talk about the personal growth of the students studying abroad and how they relate the experience as a positive one. This aligns with the findings of this study since all the female participants stated studying abroad was overall positive and that they have grown as individuals. One topic that was discussed in Salyers et al.'s (2015) study was about the benefit of pre-departure information sessions. Although none of the participants in this study mentioned having pre-departure information sessions, most of the participants in this study spoke about giving advice to future international students to research as much as they can about the culture and college they will be attending. Some female participants in this study also stated to not have too many expectations when studying abroad since all might not be met. Having reality not meeting expectations was also something mentioned in the study by Salyers et al. (2015). This reflection shows well in Simrika's interview that she had personal growth as well as a shock to what it is like to be on your own studying abroad. When asked what advice she would give someone studying abroad, she states, "Do not expect a lot of fun and freedom. It makes you responsible". This statement aligns with what the study by Salyers et al. (2015) found.

This study also shows that students can benefit from programs through the university after arrival. Findings from Schlueter's (2007) study also supports the idea of after-arrival university programs. Some female participants from the present study mention how classes on culture and other cultural information sessions on campus have helped them. Maya from Nepal mentions in her interview how friendly the professors and staff were to her and would give

advice to future students to make use of the advisors and professors. She was impressed with how kind they were and how fast the professors were at responding back via email. One female participant from this study mentioned how the culture class was not helpful in providing information on topics such as time management, but that participant stated the role advisors take in one-on-one assistance was more beneficial. However, Nanu would disagree when talks about what helped her adjust here, she says, “Cultural Orientation helped to explain and relate how it is different here and back home. It helped prepare me for what to expect”. Therefore, both cultural orientation classes and making connections with advisors or professors take on a critical role in a student’s acculturation process and should be continued for future international students.

Other contributions to why a student might consider their study abroad experience a successful or pleasant one is discussed in the study by Zhang et al. (2013) and by Bhawk and Brislin (1992). In the research by Zhang et al. (2013), it is mentioned that the reason why female students wanted to study abroad was to not only receive a better education, but also to learn about a new culture. In their findings, there was a correlation with the willingness to learn about the new culture and the positive of experience of the student. Even though only the importance of receiving a quality education was mentioned in the interview for this study to explain why the participants choose to study abroad, all participants at the end of the interview stated that it was important they gained knowledge about a new culture. Being intrigued by a new culture was a factor for success in acculturation that Bhawk and Brislin (1992) mention as well.

A network of support was another major contributing factor to how students perceived their acculturation process, not only in this study, but also in the studies by Schlueter (2007), Leong (2015), Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015), and Le et al. (2016). The study by Le et al.

(2016) discusses how the support system an international student has is the biggest factor for a positive experience. There is a need for the students to create a second family in the new culture. Like the participants in Le et al.'s (2016) study, whose participants created relationships of support with either college staff or peers, the female participants of this study also developed meaningful relationships with people at the college that became the network of support necessary for a positive acculturation process. It was in the studies by Schlueter (2007) and Leong (2015) that emphasized the need to have friendships from people of the same culture to help the adjustment process or overall experience. Some participants in this study, such as Siti, Maya, Maryam, and Birsha also noted how helpful it was to have known someone from their culture who attended the college first and could give information about the culture and college before arriving. The findings by the previous studies fits the findings of this present study since the female participants stated that friends from the same culture gave them advice or gave them comfort in knowing that someone else was going through the same experience.

One major difference in the findings by the study of Leong (2015) was that results of that study showed how only friendships from the same culture were helpful. It was found in the study of Leong (2015) that most friendships made from international students and American students created a negative effect in the acculturation process. Participants in Leong's (2015) study found American roommates to be difficult since cultural norms clashed when sharing a room. On the contrary, the results from this study provides insight to how a few participants mentioned it was helpful to have an American roommate. The American roommate helped the participants navigate through cultural norms or campus life. One participant of this study, Simrika, stated how fun it was to have an American roommate to show her new places. Li Na also appreciated

the help from her three American roommates. Also, Ji Young stated she appreciated that she was able to experience a traditional American holiday hosted by her roommate's family. There was only one participant from this study, Birsha, who stated she found many American students to be rude which negatively impacted her acculturation and she preferred the company of friends from the same culture.

A concern that was mentioned by all the participants in this study was finances and the level of stress it caused. The study by Leong (2015) also explores the topic of how finances can affect acculturation, however the stress factors discussed by the female participants in this study and the Leong (2015) study differ. The findings in Leong's (2015) study discuss the high cost of tuition and living expenses to be a stress trigger. Also, it was stressful for the participants in Leong's (2015) study to find campus employment. The participants in this present study speak about financial stress mostly due to being financially dependent upon their parents. The stress factors include worries over their academics for fear of wasting the families' money if the participant fails academically. Also, some female participants talked about feeling guilty for using too many of the families' financial resources when there was a need for these resources to be used at home as well.

One of the expected results of this study was to find a language barrier as an important part in how a female student adjusted to the new culture. This was found in the study by Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) in which it found that the language barrier negatively affected the participants' social relationships with American students. This was not an important finding in this study since most of the participants did not say that a language barrier gave them a negative

acculturation experience. However, Birsha did state it was negative experience to interact with American students and be perceived as not able speak English due to an accent.

Accents are also mentioned in the study by Daniels and Rittenour (2018). The findings of the Daniels and Rittenour's (2018) study showed that participants had a level of frustration due to the language barrier. This mostly was because the participants were not able to show their identities in the foreign language due to limitations of the language or their accents. However, a participant in this study, Ji Young, stated that it was in a way freeing being able to speak in English versus her native language. She explains that is a positive experience being here since she says, "When I was in my home culture, I was very introverted...but here I am more extroverted". Ji Young explained that her native language, Korean, has more social hierarchies which inhibits her ability to show her identity in the native language and she says, she "doesn't have to think about that here". Similarly, it was discussed in the study by Le et al. (2016) that the role of how the female is portrayed in the native culture and language impacts the identity negatively in native culture. It was found in Le et al.'s (2016) study that a new positive identity was developed in the new culture for most participants. Ji Young in this study said in the new culture and language, she does not have to worry about social hierarchies in the language thus letting her be more herself.

The last note on the topic to language barriers is the role the accent plays in the acculturation process of the international female student. In Kang's (2017) study, the results reveal that having an accent may negatively affect the international student's identity and how the student is perceived by native speakers. The presumption is that you lose your identity if you must communicate with an accent. Well, in this study, if the participant mentioned having an

accent as an interference with their acculturation process, it was stated to play a minor role in their acculturation process. Only one participant, Olidia, stated that if she was asked to repeat herself due to her accent, she was likely to give up on the conversation. This result from the participant Olidia could support the idea of a negative impact in identity; however, there was not enough emphasis on the role the accent played in the acculturation process for the rest of the participants to give further information.

VI. Conclusion

Comparison of Results with Previous Culture Shock Models

This study's aim was not to prove or disprove one of these culture shock models as Schlueter's (2007) study aimed to do. From information in this study on how the participants perceived their overall experience, it shows that regardless of the path the Lysgaard (1955) U-curve model or the Oberg (1960) W-curve model propose for acculturation, it is evident that these participants related their overall acculturation experience as positive. However, based off the experiences of Birsha and Nanu, Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve model, which shows only one low point, and Oberg's (1960) W-curve model, which shows two low points, can be dismissed. Birsha's and Nanu's experiences show repeated "low points" of missing home and invalidates these curves. Also, the experiences of the other female participants show that there was no extreme low point at all. These participants mention missing home, but not to the extreme point where they felt it hindered their ability to adjust. One of the reasons for these models being outdated from the findings of this study could be that those who missed home said it was not as bad as they expected because of the use of technology. With the aid of video chat and improved technology for communication with family across the globe, it appears to affect how well a female participant can manage their acculturation process.

Also, even though it is unobtainable by the results of this study to yield definitive information about the proposed stage the participant would be in if relating to Bennett's (1986) DMIS model, the information represented by this study could be interpreted that the participants would be in a state of progression in the model. This is because all participants in this study mentioned the appreciation to learn about new cultures which does not occur in the first stage of

Denial on the DMIS model. In fact, most, if not all, the participants could be thought of as being on the Ethnorelative side of the model since the participants mention the respect they now have for other cultures that they did not have before. The only participant that could be on a pendulum swing between the Ethnocentric side of the DMIS model and the Ethnorelative side would be Birsha. This would be because she makes statements in her interview on how she is less likely to associate with American students and prefers only the company of friends from her own culture. All the other female participants mention their appreciation for having friends from both similar cultures to their own and different cultures.

How Does this Study Answer the Research Questions?

Question 1: *How have female international students managed their own acculturation process?*

To answer the first question, the purpose of this study is to understand a female's perceived perspective on their own acculturation process and what they have done to overcome the difficulties in acculturation. As predicted, the acculturation process itself is unique to the individual to provide one simple answer in how they manage their acculturation. What can be gathered from the evidence to answer the research question is that there are underlying themes that assist in creating a positive study abroad experience. The biggest trend that was discovered in how the female participants managed their own acculturation process and created a positive experience is that when they encountered a difficulty, they found a way around the problem. All the participants mentioned some factors that were difficult for them such as a language barrier, finances, food, or navigating campus life; however, none of the participants gave up and returned home because something was hard. They solved their problems by seeking out resources. These resources came in various disguises such as friends whom they shared their difficulties with,

family from home they stayed connected with, or college advisors/university provided programs they sought out to ease the transition in adjusting not only to college life, but life in a different culture. It was the participant who is to credit to their overall positive acculturation experience. Also, it was found that the females in this study all shared a strong desire to improve their education by studying abroad in the US which gave them motivation to succeed.

Question 2: *What outside factors affect the process of adjusting to the new Midwestern host culture, i.e. social issues, attitudes, support systems, financial issues, language barriers, or other?*

The answer to this is that all these outside factors can contribute to the acculturation process; however, it varies depending on the participant which factor affected them more than the others. Social relationships, support systems, and personal factors were all mentioned by some degree or another in how it affected their acculturation process, yet not one participant stated that studying abroad was an overall negative experience. This means that even though these issues can affect adjusting to living in a new culture, not one of these different factors was enough of a trigger to divert their acculturation process and have them give up on attempting to live in a different culture. Even though every female participant's journey in studying abroad was different, all were affected by factors outside of their control. This leads back to research question number one which tells us how they overcame their struggles and managed their acculturation process was by seeking out solutions to their problems.

Implications for Future Studies

There are a few directions future studies can take with the results from this study. First, it will be interesting for future researchers to continue the study of female acculturation process

because of the overwhelming numbers of female international students year after year compared to male international students. One area to focus on for future research would be on accents of students studying abroad. Future studies on the subject could help explain the relationship between identity in the home language and new language, accent, and acculturation. One of the questions for this future study could be how accents affect the female's acculturation processes. Since knowing the background information of Olidia, who does not seek out new social connections in her home language nor the new language, it would be necessary to factor in the personality of the participant to see if they are shy or outgoing. However, Ji Young who claims to be an introvert in her native language, according to herself, changed her natural state into an extravert in the new language. It is inconclusive in this interview to say if the issue with acculturation to the new language is entirely because of the barrier socially or because there is an already present barrier within oneself to acculturate socially. So, by looking at introverts and extroverts in a study, it would enable the data to reflect which participants encountered more difficulties in acculturation due to accent. The findings would hopefully produce correlations to see if introverts or extroverts had more difficulties acculturating and provide solutions on how to help those who struggle more.

Secondly, an area that could be researched further with future studies is how financial stress can impact an international student's experience studying abroad. There is more research out there to help explain why being financially independent is more stressful than being financially dependent. Also, this study did not compare how being completely financially dependent upon family for females was different from males in the level of stress this would give or the difficulty it would have on the acculturation process. A future study could compare

financially dependent male and female students and study their stress levels. The study could also determine if they overcome this stress in a similar or different fashion depending on their gender.

Most importantly, it will be key for future studies to look at more in depth what programs at colleges will have the most effect for helping all female students to achieve that same level of positive acculturation that has happened on this campus. A few specific examples in this study that were mentioned were cultural orientation classes, advisors, international student centers, and connections with professors. A future study could look at and rate which is the most important to the least important in a larger survey, since the small sampling of this study mentioned how all of these were important in some way to one or more participants.

Lastly, it will be necessary for future studies to see if desire for success leads to success for females studying abroad. The ten female participants in this study seemed highly motivated to continue in their acculturation process because of their desire to succeed in their studies. So, it could have been the motivation of these participants that gave them the ability to manage their acculturation process and allow them to succeed. For females it was found, at least in the study by Zhang et al. (2013), that the desire to learn and study abroad was because of their aspiration for higher learning and that there could be more to prove for females than males when choosing a higher learning path by studying abroad. This may influence a female's motivation to succeed and acculturate. In a future study, it would be beneficial to track the progress of female participants from the first year of college until the last to study how their level of motivation relates to their success in acculturation. All the participants in this present study shared their desire for higher education.

Overall, even though these ten female participants could have interpreted their experiences in acculturation negatively, they all chose to see the positive experience they had while studying abroad. This helped the female participants of this study in their acculturation process.

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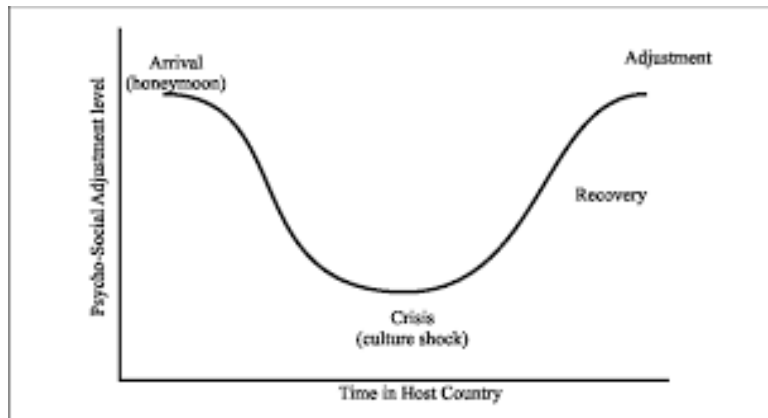
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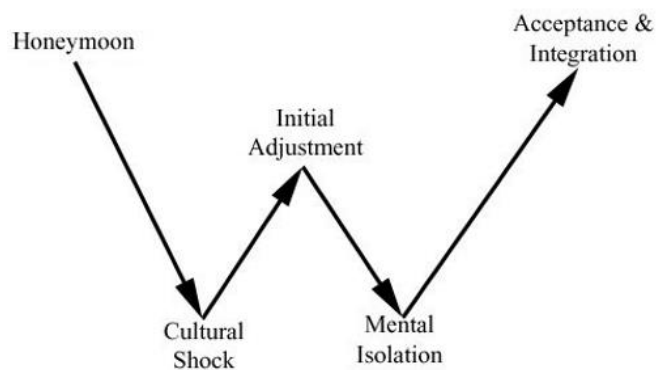
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Appendix A: Proposed Models of Adjustment

Lysgaard (1955) U- Curve

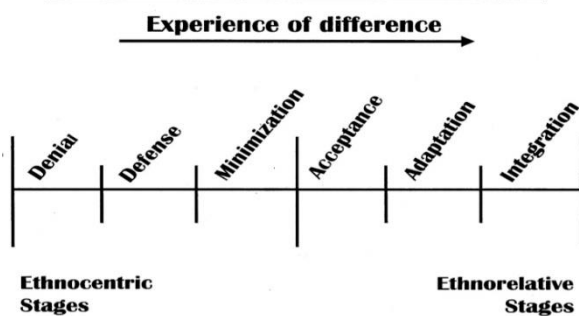


Oberg (1960) W- curve



Bennett M. J. (1993)

Development of Intercultural Sensitivity



Appendix B: Interview Questions

Background information

- a. What is your home country?
- b. Have you ever studied abroad before? If so, please state:
 - a. Where:
 - b. When:
 - c. How long:

1. Why did you want to study abroad to a Midwestern university in the United States? Is this your first time in the United States?
2. When you first came to the Midwest from another country, what were three things that helped you adjust to the new host culture the most? What were three things that made it hard to adjust to the host culture?
3. Would you say a social support network such as friends have helped you adjust to the new culture here in the Midwest? Can you give me an example of when a friend helped you adjust to living here?
4. Were you supported by your family to study abroad? How did this impact you when you first arrived? Can you tell a story about how a family member did or did not support you in adjusting to a new culture? Do you think there is anything your family could have done to better help your adjustment to the host culture?
5. Would you consider yourself as financially dependent upon family or financially independent? How do you think this contributes to your adjustment process to living in the Midwest? Do you think having more financial support would help you adjust to the host culture better? How so?
6. Have teachers, advisors, or other university members helped your adjustment process to the host culture? How so? Can you describe a time or event that helped or did not help your adjustment?
7. Who or what would you say is your best support system? Can you tell me a story about this?
8. What would you say your biggest struggle in adjusting to a new culture is? Could you describe a specific time you had this struggle and how it impacted your adjustment?
9. Do you feel that you struggle due to a language barrier to adjust either socially, academically, or both to a new culture? If yes, would you say the language barrier made it harder to adjust socially, academically, or equally both? Could you tell me a story about when this occurred and how you felt the language barrier hindered your adjustment?
10. Do you feel that missing friends and family from home have hindered your ability to adjust to the host culture? How so? How have you overcome this struggle or what helps the most?

11. Do you feel that adjusting to a new culture has negatively or positively impacted you socially and/or academically? Can you tell me a moment about a positive moment in your transition to adjusting to the host culture? Can you tell me a story about a negative moment in your transition to adjusting to the host culture?

12. What advice would you give to new international students to help ease their transition to living in a new culture?

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Female International Students Process of Cultural Adjustment in their University experience

You are invited to participate in a research study of “*Acculturation Process and Influencing Factors for Adjustment for Female International Students*”. You were selected as a possible participant because of your status as an international student.

This research project is being conducted by Miranda Kriesch to satisfy the requirements of a Master’s Degree in English at St. Cloud State University.

Background Information and Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand the adjustment period to a new culture when arriving to a new country and the process that female students go through when they come from abroad to study in the United States. By learning what processes female international students go through when they acculturate when studying abroad can help students and educators learn how to better facilitate their adjustment process. When we learn about what issues and influencing factors the students encountered, solutions to how to avoid these obstacles may come to light.

Procedures

If you decide to be a participant, you will be asked to participate in a 30-minute face-to-face interview consisting of 12 questions on the topic of your adjustment to the Midwestern, university culture. The interviewer will dictate notes from the interview.

Risks

The risks of this study are minimal if nonexistent. Some foreseeable risks could be stress related to a specific question or an emotional reaction to a specific question depending on your personal life experiences. To minimize these risks, you will not be required to answer all questions. You may choose to not answer any question you do not want to and you may choose to quit the study at any given time. If you choose to no longer participate, your information will not be used in this study.

Benefits

Your information will add to the body of research on adjustment processes and be an asset to future students who come to study at your school. Benefits to you maybe a deeper understanding of how you adjusted to a new culture and new place. This study can give you the chance for self-reflection on your experiences and add to positively adjusting to living in a new culture.

Confidentiality

Although names of individual subjects will be kept confidential, there is a possibility that you may be identifiable by your comments in the published research. To minimize this, the researcher will use pseudonyms for identity protection. Also, only 1-2 other identifiers such as

country or language background will be discussed. You will have an opportunity to review the text and withdraw comments prior to publication. All notes and materials will be stored safely and disposed of after the completion of the Thesis.

Research Results

At your request, I am happy to provide you with a summary of the research results when the study is completed.

Contact Information

If you have questions right now, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at mekriesch@stcloudstate.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. You may also contact Jim Robinson, my faculty adviser at JHRobinson@stcloudstate.edu or 320-308-4956.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.

Signature

Date

Appendix D: IRB Letter of Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th

Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Miranda Kriesch

Email: mekriesch@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL

DETERMINATION:

Exempt Review

Project Title: Acculturation Process and Influencing Factors for Adjustment for Female International Students

Advisor James Robinson

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies