THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

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International graduate students are immersed in a new cultural environment and encounter influences that lead to changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The immersion experience in the United States is best understood from the perspective of acculturation theory (e.g., Berry, 2003). Acculturation theory, to date, has largely emphasized description of the acculturation process but has focused much less on the mechanisms that underlie that process. Padilla and Perez (2003) proposed a theory to explain the variability in acculturation patterns by considering social cognitions, but the theory provided little guidance on examining those social cognitions in research settings. This study actualizes the consideration of social cognitions in the acculturation process through qualitative methodology and analytical techniques that are based on grounded theory. Twelve international graduate students completed open-ended survey questions and follow-up interviews that addressed their experiences in the United States. The emergent model is composed of a central category – Cultural and Social Assessment – and four key categories – Language Acquisition and Proficiency, Social Support, Cultural Learning, and Individual Growth. The model suggested that upon
making an assessment of the new cultural environment, international graduate students exhibited changes in psychological and social dimensions. Evidence also suggested that these changes may have been motivated by the presence of cognitive and cultural dissonance. Implications for future research, practice, and training are discussed.
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DEDICATION

To my teachers, family, and friends… thank you for believing in me, urging me forward, and challenging me to remain true to myself.

To Mom… no amount of thanks can ever express my appreciation for your ceaseless support and limitless love. I am still on first without you.

To Kathleen… thank you for always being there to provide hope, clarity, and calm. I love you, and I love our life together. Here’s to our next great adventure.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

According to the most recent report from the Institute for International Education, 586,323 international students studied in the United States during 2003 – 4.6% of the total enrollment of students in U.S. colleges (Davis & Chin, 2004). Approximately half of these students are enrolled in graduate programs. International graduate students often face a unique challenge of navigating a new culture while striving for academic excellence and professional competency. This navigation is best understood by framing their experience in the context of the acculturation process, which identifies and describes psychosocial changes that occur for individuals entering a new culture (Berry, 2003; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936).

Acculturation theory has historically focused on individual and group level changes in behavior, attitudes, and values that occur in response to a new cultural environment (e.g., Graves 1967; Padilla, 1980; Kim & Abreu, 2001). Researchers have suggested that individuals respond and react to their new cultural environment, but mechanisms to explain individuals’ understanding and integration of their experiences have not been sufficiently advanced (Padilla & Perez, 2003). A recent model emphasizes the active role that individuals take in creating changes in their cultural orientation (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Padilla and Perez posited that social cognitions,
particularly goals and motivations for behavior, influence the way in which acculturating individuals address four key elements of acculturation: cultural competence, social identity, social dominance, and social stigma. As individuals address each of these facets of acculturation, individual differences in the experience arise (e.g., the presence or absence of psychological distress or variable patterns of identification with native and new cultures). According to Padilla and Perez, differences in social cognitions can begin to account for some of the variability in individuals’ experiences. With the inclusion of established social components in acculturation theory, these researchers sought to advance empirical testing and explanatory power. Their theory, however, provided little conceptualization of how social cognitions should be evaluated and did not address the viability of other elements of social cognition (e.g., attribution or self-esteem) that may be crucial to the explanation of individual differences in the acculturation process.

This study investigated international graduate students’ subjective experiences of the acculturation process and focused on gaining a clearer understanding of the role that social cognitions play in that process. Until recently, the focus of acculturation research has centered on the description of how individuals change during the process (e.g., Berry, 2003). The focus on description is evidenced by the 68 acculturation theories developed between 1918 and 1984 (Rudmin, 2003) and the 33 measures of acculturation identified in a recent review of the literature (Kim & Abreu, 2001). Yet, explanations of individual differences in the acculturation process are virtually nonexistent in the multicultural psychology literature because most extant theories describe individual changes without advancing an understanding of why the changes
occur. Understanding the role of social cognitions offers an opportunity to begin explaining individual differences as opposed to simply describing them. Why are social cognitions so important to the understanding of acculturation? A condensed review and evaluation of the acculturation literature provides some direction in answering this question.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

International graduate students in the United States commit to an extended stay in a new cultural environment while they receive advanced training in their field of study. While the rigorous nature of the academic programs are common to international and native students, alike, the extent of cultural learning that occurs is more pronounced in international graduate students. Differences in language, customs, and social standards are among the topics of social learning that international graduate students encounter. Within the psychology literature, theoretical conceptualization of the acculturation process has examined and described how an individual enters and integrates a new culture into their identity and daily living (e.g., Berry, 2003). The explanation of how international graduate students adjust to life in the United States is further understood by framing their experience in the acculturation process.

2.1 Advances in Acculturation Theory

As numerous scholars have recognized (e.g., Berry, 2003; Trimble, 2003), acculturation was identified several decades ago as an important psychological phenomenon to understand in order to better explain intercultural contact. Scholars often point to two early works as the foundations of contemporary conceptualization of acculturation theory – *Memorandum on the Study of Acculturation* (Redfield, Linton, &
Herskovits, 1936) and *Acculturation: An Exploratory Formulation* (The Social Science Research Council, 1954). Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) provided one of the earliest formal definitions of acculturation. According to this early definition, acculturation resulted when “groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, et al, 1936, p. 150). This definition implies two essential conditions that must be met – contact with another cultural group and changes in beliefs and behaviors associated with the person’s culture. Since its publication, the definition has been added to or specified to further explain acculturation in a contemporary or specific cultural context, but the central premises remain virtually unchanged.

A few decades later, context was emphasized in the adaptation to a new cultural milieu as environmental factors and varying lengths of time associated with acculturation patterns were acknowledged (The Social Science Research Council, 1954). These proposed features of acculturation emphasize the interaction between individual factors and social context in the understanding of individual differences in the process. That is, acculturation is a process that varies from one person to the next due to numerous individual and environmental factors. As a result of the Social Science Research Council’s observations, researchers and practitioners began to explore the experiential components that make the acculturation process common among groups but unique among individual members.

Allport (1954) made an important contribution in furthering the conceptual understanding of the acculturation process. Allport explored the nature of intercultural
and interpersonal contact and highlighted methods for fostering the sharing of cultural values and ideals. Allport contended that becoming friends or acquaintances with members of different social groups may serve to dispel prejudice actions and beliefs and provide better insight into other cultures’ features. This would allow individuals to make more informed and less biased decisions about their cultural identification, such as which values to maintain from their culture of origin and which values to adopt from the new cultures they encounter. Effectively, Allport addressed mechanisms of acculturation by describing conditions that facilitated the sharing of cultural values among individuals from different cultural groups, as well as the transmission of those values from one individual to another.

At an individual level, numerous issues must be addressed and a significant amount of change can occur. Individuals new to a cultural context must adapt in order to perform daily functions, develop cross-cultural relationships, and maintain relationships within their native culture. This applies to members of both the indigenous and incoming cultures since individuals entering a community face a new cultural environment while, simultaneously, creating new cultural dynamics for indigenous cultures. The individual-level process of adapting to these cultural changes was recognized by Graves (1967). Graves highlighted the notion that adaptive behaviors must be developed in order to function in the new environment and that individuals create strategies to aid in the development of those new behaviors. This conceptualization emphasizes the active role that acculturating individuals may take. Individual differences, such as differences in social cognitions, however, may impact the degree to which individuals feel empowered and efficacious in their ability to enact adaptive behavior and create change.
Kim and Abreu (2001) identified a series of advances that helped to further explicate the ways in which individuals change during the acculturation process. With Graves’ conceptualizations as a foundation, Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, and Aranalde (1978) suggested that acculturation precipitates personal changes in two specific dimensions – behaviors and values. Behavioral changes could include acquiring new languages and adopting new cultural customs, whereas value changes include alterations in beliefs about concepts such as materialism and time orientation. These observations broadened the awareness of how individuals change during acculturation. Padilla (1980) extended the notions suggested by Szapocznik and colleagues to include other specific dimensions of cultural change. Padilla proposed that cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty are crucial in the way in which individuals change with regard to culture. Cultural awareness denotes an individual’s cognizance and understanding of how both the native and new cultures are integrated in his/ her life. Ethnic loyalty represents an individual’s preference for one culture over others, with contributing factors that include cultural identity and attraction to various aspects of the cultures.

Cuellar, Arnold, and Maldonado (1995) extended these descriptions of the acculturation process by suggesting that acculturation is associated with changes in behavior, affect, and cognitions. This resembles earlier depictions of acculturation because changing behaviors and values are still recognized components of the process. Cuellar and colleagues, however, include emotional responses to cultural change, as well as the formation of beliefs about cultural characteristics, as necessary elements for depicting the acculturation experience. This emphasizes both the external and internal
reactions to the acculturation experience. Behaviors associated with acculturation can be witnessed in the way an individual interacts with the environment and with other people in the environment. There is also a simultaneous internal process involving emotions and cognitions that is unique to the individual. Cuellar, Arnold, and Gonzalez (1995) found evidence for the changes in cognitions associated with the acculturation process. Using a specific cultural example, five values of Mexican culture – *familism* (reliance on kin for emotional support), *fatalism* (belief in destinies beyond individual control), *machismo* (traditional male behavior), *folk beliefs* (belief in folk illness and treatment), and *personalismo* (preference and proclivity to relate to people rather than institutional relationships) – were assessed along with the acculturation patterns in 379 Mexican-origin people. ANOVA revealed that traditional values were endorsed less as individuals became more oriented to Anglo culture in their behavior. These results represent possible shifts in cognitions and behaviors that individuals encounter in the acculturation process. The contributions of Cuellar and colleagues as well as the work of Szapocznik, and colleagues, and Padilla, have helped to further elucidate the manner in which cultural change occurs during acculturation. This conceptualization was furthered by the explication of dimensionality in the acculturation process.

### 2.2 Dimensionality and Acculturation Theory

Several models have been proposed to describe the dimensionality of the acculturation process. According to Vazquez and Vazquez (1998), competing hypotheses arose from the work of Matthiasson (1968), McFee (1968), and Padilla (1980). Matthiasson (1968) proposed a single continuum model that described a
person’s cultural traits as characteristic of either the original or the new culture. Although this view of acculturation provides a global assessment of whether an individual is more aligned with the native or new culture, the perspective does not account for differences in cultural alignment based on situational differences. This view also excludes the possibility of being aligned with different aspects of the native and new cultures. To respond to this limitation, McFee (1968) extended the notion of dimensionality to include two continuums, one for each culture in question. Each continuum reflects the degree of acceptance for cultural traits inherent to the two cultures. The two-dimensional model could identify the extent to which individuals align themselves with the cultural traits of their new U.S. community and those of their culture of origin. Thus, this conceptualization provides greater insight into the functioning of acculturating individuals.

Padilla (1980) took dimensionality a step further and suggested that cultural traits, rather than the simultaneous consideration of multiple traits, should be represented on the continuums. Each continuum, therefore, describes the level of acceptance for specific cultural traits instead of acceptance for a broader culture. For example, language, affinity for family, decision making methods, value placed on time, and other cultural traits could all be evaluated as being either traditional or adopted traits. Padilla’s suggestions provided researchers with a method of describing how individual cultural traits change and collectively contribute to the acculturation process.

Some empirical research has been conducted in order to compare the various conceptualizations of dimensionality. Magana, de la Rocha, Amsel, and Magana (1996) compared the descriptive powers of a unidimensional model and a two-dimensional
model in explaining cultural values. Using both a one and two-dimensional measure of acculturation, 178 Hispanic individuals were assessed on their acculturation patterns. Results indicated that there are relationships that are better explained using the two-dimensional model. For instance, a closer identification with the English speaking culture on the unidimensional scale was associated with significantly greater years of education when compared to participants who identified more closely with the Spanish speaking culture. This suggested relationship could obviously generate some culturally incompetent conclusions – either, one must be educated to become more integrated in the U.S. society or one must be more like U.S. citizens to become educated. When challenged by the two-dimensional model, results indicated that participants maintaining identification with both cultures also had significantly more years of education. According to these findings, either education would not be limited by the level of integration or integration would not be limited by the level of education. These results highlight the additional descriptive power that is possible with the two dimensional model. Yet, a multidimensional model – one examining cultural traits of both cultures in question – would provide more detail as to how specific traits of each cultural group were maintained and related to qualities in question.

A review of acculturation measures helped to clarify the explanatory power of a multidimensional approach. Zane and Mak (2003) performed content analysis on items of the 21 most often cited measures of acculturation. After each item for each measure was placed into a category (e.g., language use/preference, perceived prejudice/discrimination), a percentage of the total items was calculated for each category. The categories that contained items from the most measures were language use/preference
(12), daily living habits (9), social affiliation (6), and cultural identity/pride (6). This review of acculturation measures demonstrates the power of multidimensionality. These categories represent some of the internal and interpersonal elements of the acculturation process and are consistent with established definitions and descriptions of acculturation. Together, these multiple categories are better able to describe the acculturation process than if all of these traits were loaded onto one continuum (native versus new culture) or even two continuums (adherence to new and native cultures). The use of multidimensionality reflects the observation of Berry (2003) that acculturation is best understood by moving beyond identifying people as either pro-new or pro-old culture.

In addition to a multidimensional perspective, it has been postulated that acculturation is an orthogonal construct (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990-1991). Although acculturation has been described as a single factor on a single continuum or as multiple traits on multiple continuums, Oetting and Beauvais propose an orthogonal process. The orthogonal approach conceptualizes acculturation on distinct, yet connected planes. Each of these planes represents a cultural orientation. Alignment with each culture can be described both independently and in relation to alignment with other cultures. For example, a Chinese national coming to the United States may encounter a Native American and an Anglo culture in their new community. Identification with each of the three cultures can be described independently, or the orthogonal model allows for a description of how an individual simultaneously identifies with each culture. This perspective allows for a comprehensive description of cultural alignment and allows for a description of bicultural and multicultural statuses.
All of the previously mentioned conceptualizations have emphasized acculturation as a general process that is common across all social settings. Kim and Abreu (2001) noted the contributions of Ramirez (1984) that called for the examination of acculturation in different settings because the process may occur differently at home, work, or school. Internal and external pressures to adopt and exhibit cultural values also have the potential to differ across settings. For example, an individual may align himself/herself more with the new culture in work settings but retain an alignment with his/her culture of origin in a familial setting. Essentially, this represents an orthogonal quality with respect to cultural setting that is similar in form to the orthogonal nature of cultural identification conceptualized by Oetting and Beauvais (1990-1991). Acculturation patterns in each setting could be described independently or in relation to one another. The recognition of intersecting settings and cultures has furthered the theoretical development of the acculturation process.

Theoretical development of the acculturation process has yielded significant strides in descriptive power over the past several decades. Acculturation has evolved from a unidimensional conceptualization of cultural alignment to a multidimensional view of change. While many processes of change have been identified and described, theory in the area of acculturation is still relatively ineffective at delineating the individual differences in the acculturation experience. One recent conceptualization of acculturation has identified a viable area of research that could help to further explain the differences in individual acculturation experiences. This theory, posited by Padilla and Perez (2003), proposes a critical role of social cognitions in explaining individual differences in patterns of acculturation.
2.3 Social Cognitions and the Acculturation Process

Padilla and Perez (2003) posited a model of acculturation that focuses on the role of social cognitions in making adaptations to a new culture while maintaining beliefs, attitudes, and values from the culture of origin. These researchers identify how social cognitions impact four main elements of acculturation: cultural competence, social identity, social dominance, and social stigma. Padilla and Perez recognized that perceptions and interpretations of experiences impact how one comes to understand his/her unique place in a new culture. In identifying the role of social cognitions, Padilla and Perez refer to the work of Fiske (1993), Heider (1958), and James (1890) and assert that their model follows “the tradition of pragmatism in social cognition research that emphasizes the motivational and intentional bases of perception and cognition” (Padilla & Perez, 2003, p.41). In essence, Padilla and Perez propose that goals and motivations of individuals will affect both their behaviors and perceptions of their experience. This implies that the individual has an active role in the acculturation process as opposed to a process that happens to and creates change in individuals. From this perspective, acculturation is a process replete with opportunities for individuals to interpret events, develop emotional and cognitive responses to those events, and make choices about future behaviors based on those previous experiences. By placing a greater emphasis on the active role of individuals in the process, the conceptualization of the acculturation process becomes more robust in explaining individual differences in patterns of acculturation.

Differences in social cognitions related to cultural competence, social identity, social dominance, and social stigma are critical to understanding individual differences
in acculturation. First, *cultural competence* is “the learned ability to function in a
culture in a manner that is congruent with the values, beliefs, customs, mannerisms, and
language of the majority of members of the culture” (Padilla & Perez, 2003, p. 42).
Individuals differ in the way that they acquire skills that will help them to navigate a
new cultural environment, and they also view their efficacy in those environments
differently. Padilla and Perez suggest that different goals and motivations will lead to
different levels of cultural competence. By assessing the motivations for such skill
development, Padilla and Perez suggest differences in acculturation patterns can be
better explained.

Second, varying social cognitions can impact the development of an individual’s
social identity. An individual’s core beliefs, values, behaviors, and attitudes have been
linked to the larger cultural group’s characteristics (e.g., Sherif & Sherif, 1979; Tajfel,
1981). During the acculturation process, however, the degree to which an individual
identifies with the group varies, as well as the actual group with which they identify.
Under different circumstances, identification with one group may be more
advantageous for an individual to fulfill certain goals. Identifying the differences in
motivation for adhering to one group over another furthers the understanding of the
acculturation process.

Third, Padilla and Perez propose that differences in social cognitions will impact
how acculturating individuals resolve issues related to social dominance. McIntosh
(1998) identified the existence of social advantages for White individuals, mainly
males, from this country. These advantages create a systemic gradient against which
individuals from other cultures struggle. The manner in which one conceptualizes their
experience with such social standards impacts the understanding and experience of the acculturation process.

Finally, social cognitions must be considered when addressing issues of social stigma. *Social stigma* addresses the experience associated with being the new cultural group in an environment and helps to describe the intercultural climate as well as the subjective experience of an individual in a new cultural environment. Behaviors, appearances, or values demonstrated by individuals new to a cultural setting may make them a target for discrimination or prejudice, whether it is implicit or explicit, covert or overt. Preconceived notions about the incoming cultural group that are maintained by the indigenous culture may also affect an individual’s adaptation to the new environment. Hovey (2000) recognized multiple manifestations of social stigma that may be encountered by individuals during the acculturation process. These include discrimination, difficulty securing employment, language difficulties, and lack of acceptance from the new culture. The interaction of an individual’s motivations and the experience of stigmatization impacts the ramifications that the stigmatization may have on the individual, as well as the manner in which instances of stigmatization are perceived.

Examining the role of social cognitions in each of the four elements of acculturation makes acculturation more receptive to in-depth analysis of individual differences. Individuals formulate beliefs and comprehend their experiences based on the motivations they maintain in a particular social context. For example, differences in levels of cultural competence could be partly accounted for by differences in motivation. If an international graduate student does not speak English as a first
language and desires to return to the native culture to practice their profession, it may not be as critical for that individual to acquire a mastery of the English language. If the same international graduate student sought to remain in the United States to practice their profession, then English proficiency would be a more desirable goal. This exemplifies how differences in motivation may provide insight that potentially explains some of the variability in the acculturation process, in this case, the development of language proficiency.

2.4 Attribution Theory and Acculturation

While Padilla and Perez suggested social cognition as an explanatory component of how the acculturation process is experienced, they stopped short of providing a clear operationalization or method for studying the role of motivations. Consequently, no empirical studies have been conducted that test their model or capitalize on their insights. Aspects of social cognition related to motivation, however, have been examined in a cultural context. In particular, the concept of attribution, or locus of control, (e.g., Jones & Davis, 1965; Zimbardo, 1985), plays a significant role in how individuals view their capacity to affect change in their social environment.

As Berry and Kim (1988) indicated, individuals vary in the way they experience the acculturation process. Many individuals can become distressed or overwhelmed by the cultural changes whereas others make a nearly seamless transition to a new cultural setting. The manner in which an individual conceptualizes his or her experience helps explain some of the variability in the experiences. One focus of understanding individuals’ explanations of their experience is by examining how they account for and
understand the event. Proponents of attribution theory (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Weiner, 1974; Jones, Kanouse, Kelley, Nisbett, Valins, & Weiner, 1987), have examined how a number of events and situations – both positive and negative – have been interpreted and explained by individuals who experienced those events. One significant facet of attribution theory is the fundamental difference in the way life events can be interpreted and explained. The perceived cause of events – internal/individual versus external/social (Jones & Davis, 1965) has significant bearing on how experiences are interpreted and understood. Behaviors and causes of those behaviors are determined by a combination of individuals’ actions and personal traits (e.g., internal locus of control) or factors outside of individuals’ control (e.g., external locus of control) (Zimbardo, 1985), and the interpretation of one’s role in a situation can affect self-efficacy as well as subjective well-being. This interpretation applies quite readily to the consideration of acculturation. Individuals who maintain an external locus of control with regards to cultural change, may view themselves as impotent in their ability to affect or determine change. Contrastingly, individuals who maintain an internal locus of control may see themselves as having an active role in instances of cultural change. Regardless of the true nature of the cultural setting, the individuals’ attribution style may significantly impact their experience.

One important way in which attribution style impacts an individual’s experience is in the area of subjective well being. Subjective well-being (SWB) research explores factors that contribute to individuals experiencing life in a positive way (Diener, 1984). Using a thorough (148 studies) and comprehensive (consideration of 137 personality variables) meta-analysis of subjective well-being studies, DeNeve and Cooper (1998)
sought to identify personality traits and social cognition factors that were associated with well-being. Correlation coefficients were calculated, and several constructs were identified as having moderately strong relationships with subjective well-being.

Repressive defensiveness was found to have the strongest correlation ($r = -0.40$), followed by trust ($r = 0.37$), emotional stability ($r = 0.36$), locus of control – chance ($r = -0.34$), and desire for control ($r = 0.34$). Internal locus of control ($r = 0.25$) displayed a moderate but weaker than expected association with subjective well-being. DeNeve and Cooper posited that repressive defensiveness was detrimental to subjective well-being because of both the denial of negative experiences (and, thus, not addressing relevant negative emotions) and the actual effects of the negative experiences. Trust seemed to complement the findings regarding repressive defensiveness, indicating the importance of being able to share emotionally taxing experiences with others.

*Emotional stability* reflects the capacity an individual has to address emotionally taxing situations and mitigate the stress associated with the events. In addition to encountering and adequately coping with negative experiences, the authors indicated that control is also a central element in understanding subjective well-being. DeNeve and Cooper reported that attributing control over life events to an external source can be damaging to one’s subjective well-being. The importance of control is triangulated by the moderately strong correlation between desire for control and subjective well-being, as well as the moderate association between internal locus of control and subjective well-being. The authors pointed out, however, that there has been minimal exploration of cultural differences in the relationship between subjective well-being and constructs such as control. This is especially true for the cultural dimension of nationality.
Padilla, Wagatsuma, and Lindholm (1985) examined stress associated with cultural change in students of Japanese heritage. Results indicated that first-generation Japanese students experienced more stress, lower self-esteem, and were aligned with a more external locus of control than third-generation students. Another empirical study found that an internal locus of control predicted psychological well-being while an external locus of control was associated with lower psychological well-being in a sample of individuals making cultural transitions (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Another study also demonstrated that differences exist in the perceived sense of control that Caucasian individuals from the United States have compared to Asian American individuals (Park & Harrison, 1995). Asian American individuals perceived that their control in personal and interpersonal settings was more external compared to that of Caucasian Americans. Although the members from both groups resided in the United States, the differences emphasize systematic individual differences that may be associated with cultural values or power and privilege dynamics of the society.

Previous studies examining attribution in cultural settings have neither been proliferate nor comprehensive, particularly in the study of acculturation. Consequently, relatively little is known regarding the social cognitions that accompany the observable behaviors of the acculturation process. While acculturation theory has advanced in the intricacies of detailing the acculturation process (e.g., dimensionality, differential impact of social settings, and the changing cognitions, behaviors, and attitudes), surprisingly little progress has been made in better understanding the individuals’ subjective experiences. Although the strength of the acculturation research is in its
description, it is time to begin advancing the literature’s capacity to better explain the individual differences that exist in the experience.

2.5 A Qualitative Approach Emphasizing Theory-Building

This research represents the initial phase of a research program that is aimed at investigating the way acculturation can be further explained by social cognitions. Given the lack of empirical research examining social cognitions and acculturation, this study addresses the issues from a theory-building rather than a theory testing perspective in order to generate testable relationships and hypotheses (Glaser, 1992; 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In particular, this approach is heavily influenced by the tenets of grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the approach was further specified by subsequent methodological considerations (Denzin, 1978; Glaser, 1992; 1998; Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory is predicated on a fundamental notion of emergence in which themes, relationships, and models are allowed to emerge from the data. As such, the main goal of this research is theory development rather than hypothesis testing, verification, or falsification. The development of theory is driven by the experience and insight of participants rather than through the confirmation or falsification of testable relationships that have been forced from the existing literature or conceived by researchers’ intuitions. A qualitative approach was used in this research to capitalize on the wealth of exploration and depth of description that is inherent in interview methodology and qualitative analysis (Myers, 2000). Qualitative methodology facilitates the process of
participants sharing their experiences and insights to inform the researchers of key concepts, allowing for the emergence of an informed theory. The emergent theory is then open to further empirical testing and modification via future inductive or deductive (either qualitative or quantitative) approaches. Emergence, the active role of participants in the development of theory, and the emphasis on theory development rather than theory testing are each fundamental notions of grounded theory and are evident in this current research.

A theory-building approach was selected for this study for several reasons. The acculturation literature contains numerous theories that have been conceived by individual researchers and groups of researchers. These theories have produced concepts that have become recognized within the literature. Individuals may experience acculturation, but may not, however, conceptualize their experience in the way it has been previously described. The fracture among available explanatory concepts and participants’ conceptualizations has been noted by previous researchers (e.g., Atkinson & Wampold, 1993; Glaser, 1998). By using grounded theory techniques, individuals who actually experience the acculturation process – as opposed to theorists who may or may not have actually experienced acculturation – will be able to provide insight into the process. In doing so, conceptualizations of their experiences are not merely compartmentalized in predetermined categories. Furthermore, individuals experiencing acculturation can provide insight into relationships that have yet to be identified, thus extending the incorporation of elements such as social cognitions in acculturation theory. Additionally, and equally important, eliciting insights from individuals experiencing the acculturation process demonstrates cultural competence. The
perspective of the research team is greatly informed by participants who are intimately familiar with the experience, and the result is a more comprehensive and culturally appropriate conceptualization of how social cognitions influence acculturation patterns.

Since grounded theory subscribes to the notion that all is data, it allows for a diversity of information to be analyzed via constant comparison and analysis (Glaser, 1992; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The method of analysis allows for a systematic and replicable approach to identifying emergent themes in interview responses or open-ended surveys. This feature of the methodology also allows for subsequent research to be integrated into the increasing body of knowledge in order to refine and further clarify the extant theory. This benefits the current study because well-established measures of social cognition and acculturation can be continually administered in subsequent studies to supplement the theory generated from participants’ responses in this study. As Schwarz (1999) indicated, the information gained from open and close-ended questions can be dramatically different. Relying on only one type of question could result in biased or incomplete data, but the use of related open – and close – ended questions can provide mutual elucidation of concepts. The use of close – ended questions in future studies (e.g., Rotter’s Locus of Control scale, 1966; Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale, 1965), which have been more widely and consistently used than the selected interview and survey questions of this study, allows comparisons to be made more easily between this and other lines of research.

Grounded theory techniques also provide a complement to other strictly quantitative and deductive approaches (e.g., Glaser, 1992; Polkinghorne, 1989). The methodology provides a systematic method of developing hypotheses to be tested by
quantitative analysis. In the traditional hypothetic-deductive method, hypotheses are generated from previous research and intuitive observations. The reliance on published articles for hypothesis generation brings the “file drawer” problem into focus (Scargle, 2000). Relying solely on previously published articles introduces the possibility that the studies that have been published do not provide a complete perspective of the topic of study. Intuitive development of hypotheses is equally open to criticism, as strict methodological standards are variably acknowledged and followed when relying solely on intuition (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Grounded theory techniques provide a rigorous, systematic, and organized method of developing testable hypotheses which can then be subject to further verification or falsification studies. Grounded theory methodology has been applied in a recent study that has gained acclaim for its contribution to crucial issues in multicultural psychology (Pope-Davis, Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, Ligiero, Brittan-Powell, Liu, Bashshur, Codrington, & Lang, 2002). The application of grounded theory techniques by Pope-Davis, et al was praised by Ponterotto (2002) for its inclusion of participants’ perspectives using qualitative methodology. Ponterotto concluded that the methodology provided a depth and breadth of explanation that would not have been capable via other means. Cross (2004) has also commended the qualitative nature of such studies in further accessing individuals’ experiences in cultural studies, allowing for more meaningful data to be obtained while empowering participants to voice their true experiences.

The current study attempted to generate testable hypotheses and emulate the explanatory power evident in the application of grounded theory techniques by Pope-Davis, et al. In the current study, grounded theory techniques (Glaser, 1992; 1998;
Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to develop a theory regarding the role of social cognitions in the acculturation experience of international graduate students. Based on the perspectives of international graduate students, grounded theory techniques allowed for the emergence of a theory that will lead to further testing of relationships among social cognitions and various aspects of acculturation.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed a method of systematically generating theory from observational, survey, and experimental data. From a philosophical standpoint, the fundamentals of grounded theory have been generally robust to criticism from opponents and critics of qualitative and inductive research (Glaser 1992; 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). From a methodological standpoint, qualitative research has been historically criticized for a lack of disclosure regarding the method of data collection, derivation of findings, and descriptions of results (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). A number of provisions have been made in order to assure that this study is methodologically rigorous and replicable. These provisions will be highlighted in the following sections.

Following the guidelines set forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967), as well as specifications for various parts of the procedure that were developed by Patton (2001) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994), this study concentrated on developing a theory that accounts for the social cognitions involved in the acculturation process of international graduate students. In this initial phase of the research program, qualitative data composed of written responses to open-ended questions and verbal responses to interview questions was collected. In maintaining the framework established by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and specified by Glaser (1992) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994),
all procedures of this experiment were executed with the goal of allowing for the optimal emergence of psychological constructs from participants’ responses. Emergence of the data, as opposed to forcing decisions and imposing preconceived categories upon participants and the data itself, allows for the insights of the participants to guide the development of critical constructs (Glaser, 1992). This is particularly optimal in the current research since the acculturation literature has a limited scope of the individual social cognitions associated with the acculturation process. In this instance, participant-conceived constructs are more relevant to the examination of the topic compared to constructs imposed by the research team. The onus is placed on the research team, however, to accurately and clearly communicate the expressed constructs.

3.1 Credibility of the Research Team

Researchers engaged in a qualitative study are extensively involved during data collection, analysis, and interpretation of constructs that emerge from participants’ data. Conducting qualitative data analysis with a research team improves the credibility of the research process, as well as the overall integrity of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2001). In the current study, multiple researchers allowed for reliability and validity checks and helped establish inter-rater reliability and triangulation during data collection and analysis procedures. Specific examples of how this was achieved are detailed in Chapter 4.

The research team was composed of four members and was supervised by the author of this dissertation, a bicultural (White and Hispanic) male born in the United
States who is currently an advanced graduate student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame. I have extensive clinical and research training in multicultural issues, having completed over 1600 hours of clinical psychological services with 139 individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and national origins. My Master’s thesis focused on issues of racial identity development, and I completed a comprehensive review of acculturative stress literature in 2003. Additionally, I was integral in developing and instructing the first Cross Cultural Psychology course in the history of Notre Dame’s curriculum. In each of these endeavors, I have been mentored by a nationally recognized scholar in Multicultural Psychology, Don Pope-Davis. Three advanced undergraduate students were also engaged in the completion of this research. Each of these students has completed an undergraduate Research Methods course at the University of Notre Dame. During the course, these students demonstrated a basic knowledge and understanding of psychological research concepts in the completion of an executable research proposal and concise literature review of a topic within psychology. These individuals come from diverse backgrounds and have varying experience in associating with individuals from countries other than the United States. A general description of each of these research team members is found in Table 1.

The four members of the research team met two or three times per week – totaling three to seven hours – for sixteen weeks. Undergraduate members of the team were involved in all aspects of the research, and training was required in data collection, qualitative data analysis, and data interpretation. Research team members were required to read several theoretical, empirical, and practical articles and chapters
<table>
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<th>Research Team Member 1</th>
<th>a 20-year-old, male from California. He is a junior psychology major and identifies himself as biracial with African American and Mexican American backgrounds. Regarding his international travel, living, and work experience, he indicated that he has been on several week-long vacations to destinations such as Acapulco, Mexico; Milan, Italy; Vienna, Austria; Paris, France; and Brussels, Belgium. Regarding his contact with international students at Notre Dame, he indicated that he encountered several students from Latin America who lived in his old residence hall. He also indicated that he currently maintains a friendship with a Japanese student. Outside of training provided by the research team leader, Research Team Member 1 completed a Research Methods course where he earned an A. During the semester, he completed an independent literature review on a topic relevant to his interests. During this experience, he was exposed to a variety of methodological approaches to data collection and analysis.</th>
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<td>Research Team Member 2</td>
<td>a 22-year-old, female from Pennsylvania. She is a senior psychology major and identifies herself as White. Regarding her international travel, living, and work experience, she indicated that she studied abroad in Santiago, Chile from February of 2004 through June of 2004. She stated that it was a full semester of coursework at Pontifica Universidad Catolica de Chile, where she studied with Chilean students under Chilean professors. Regarding her contact with international students at Notre Dame, she stated that she has several close friends from Colombia and a close friend from France with whom she spends significant amounts of time with in social settings. She has known each of them for about one year. Outside of training provided by the research team leader, Research Team Member 2 also completed a Research Methods course where she earned an A. This is the third research team she has been a part of in her four years at Notre Dame, the previous two were under the direction of full professors in the Psychology department.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Team Member 3</td>
<td>a 22-year-old, male from Ohio. He is a junior accounting and psychology double major and identifies himself as White. Regarding his international travel, living, and work experience, he indicated that he has taken vacations to Canada, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. Regarding his contact with international students at Notre Dame, he stated that he has developed numerous relationships with international students through the Notre Dame Climbing Club. He has met, climbed, and trusted his life with international students from Romania, Brazil, Spain, and France. He has been involved as an officer of the club which allowed him to work closely on projects with other officers from Brazil. He also served as President of the club which allowed him to have extensive contact with all members of the club. Outside of the climbing club, he indicated that he has been close friends with a number of international undergraduate students and postdoctoral students since his sophomore year. Outside of training provided by the research team leader, he has a strong analytical background that he developed as an accounting major, and his business classes have required that he work extensively in groups to accomplish projects. Research Team Member 3 also received an A in Research Methods, completing an independent literature review and a research proposal in the process.</td>
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pertaining to grounded theory techniques. These included excerpts from Glaser and Strauss (1967), Maykut and Morehouse (1994), Patton (2002), and Pope-Davis, et al (2002). After reading these selections, topics contained within the texts were thoroughly discussed at team meetings. Training also consisted of applying data analysis techniques to sample data. During this process, team members were able to learn experientially by using the data analysis techniques detailed in Chapter 4 of this current study. At the conclusion of the training (approximately six weeks), data collection began.

3.2 Participants

Twelve international graduate students from the University of Notre Dame participated in this research. Detailed information of each participant is found in Table 2. These students were recruited by enlisting the help of the International Student Services and Activities (ISSA) office at the University of Notre Dame. An email originating from the ISSA office inviting students to participate in the research was sent to the subscribers of the International Students Organization Board and International Student Organization listservs. These listservs reach members of the twenty-four international student clubs on campus, and as of December 18, 2004, there were 679 subscribers. These clubs are comprised of both undergraduate and graduate students. Since this study emphasized the experience of graduate students, the email called for volunteers who identified as graduate students from a foreign country. No selection criteria were established for nationality, English language proficiency, phenotype, or other factors that have been previously identified as important in the acculturation
Participant A: a 26-year-old, Arab male born in Damascus, Syria who has been living in the United States for eight years. Aside from Syria and South Bend, he has resided in Southern California. He decided to study in the United States because he attended an American school in his home country from nursery school through the completion of high school. The fact that he had an older brother who attended college in the United States was also a determining factor. He is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Social Sciences.

Participant B: a 26-year-old, Hungarian male born in Transylvania, Romania who has been living in the United States for two years. Other than Romania, he has lived in Hungary and has visited numerous places in Hungary, Germany, and the United States. He decided to study in the United States because the educational opportunities are excellent, the United States is viewed as a “dream place” for eastern Europeans, and he wanted an opportunity to study away from home in order to “grow up.” He is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Science.

Participant C: a 25-year-old, Chinese female born in Shanghai, China who has been living in the United States for two years. Other than her hometown of Shanghai, she has never lived in any other location besides South Bend. She decided to study in the United States because of the quality of the education, but she also indicated that she wanted to experience a “different culture and ideology, as well as [enhance] my academic capability.” She is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Engineering.

Participant D: a 26-year-old, Chinese male born in rural China who has been living in the United States for one year. He moved from the village where he was born to Beijing to complete his high school and undergraduate education. He decided to study in the United States because the research facilities in the United States are better than in China, he wanted to become more proficient in the English language, and he wanted to experience the cultural differences between China and the United States. He is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Engineering.

Participant E: a 23-year-old, Chinese male born in Shanghai, China who has been living in the United States for one year. He has not lived anywhere else besides Shanghai and South Bend. He was encouraged by professors and family members to study in the United States because he was the top student in his class. He is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Engineering.

Participant F: a 29-year-old, White female born in Buenos Aires, Argentina who has been living in the United States for three years. Other than Buenos Aires and South Bend, she lived in North Carolina during a semester-long exchange program when she was completing her undergraduate education. She decided to study in the United States because she had a positive experience while she was on her exchange program, she desired to improve her command of the English language, and the United States offered a wide variety of degrees in her field. She is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Social Sciences.

Participant G: a 31-year-old, British male born in Doncaster, England who has been living in the United States for five years. Other than his birthplace, he lived in London, England, Oslo, Norway, Dallas, Texas, and Chicago, Illinois. He worked for the British government in the
United States and decided he wanted to remain in the United States. In order to be competitive in the job market, he decided to pursue an advanced degree. He is currently enrolled in a graduate Business program.

Participant H: a 26-year-old, Asian Indian male born in Maharashtra, India who has been living in the United States for three years. He lived in his birthplace for a short period of time and has lived in a number of other Indian cities including Bombay, Trichy, Madras, Bangalore, Calcutta, Belgium, and now South Bend. He decided to study in the United States because of the opportunity for “academic and financial progress.” He also chose the United States as his place of study because he is fluent in the English language and there are many other students from India studying in the country. He is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Engineering.

Participant I: a 32-year-old, multiracial Venezuelan male born in Caracas, Venezuela who has been living in the United States for five years. He has also lived in Paris, France, Merida, Venezuela, the Amazonas, and Colombia. He decided to study in the United States because of the available resources, advanced technology, and high caliber of scientists and professors. He is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Science.

Participant J: a 24-year-old Romanian male born in Bucharest, Romania who has been living in the United States for seven years. Aside from Bucharest and South Bend, he has lived in France, Norway, and Syracuse, New York. He decided to study in the United States after experiencing the US education system in high school and during his undergraduate education. The United States also appealed to him because of the opportunities for personal growth and available resources and areas of study. He is currently enrolled in a graduate Business program.

Participant K: a 28-year-old Chinese female born in Datong, China who has been living in the United States for five years. In addition to Datong and South Bend, she has resided in Zhengzhou, China and Beijing, China. She and her husband decided to attend graduate school in the United States because the “US has the best graduate education system in the world.” She is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Engineering.

Participant L: a 29 year-old Asian Indian female born in the Himalayan region of India who has been living in the United States for four years. She has not lived in any other locations besides India and South Bend, Indiana. She began her graduate studies in India, but she indicated her advisor’s busy travel schedule provided her with very limited access to him. After a year of frustration, she applied to programs in the United States. She is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Science.
experience. The purpose of this is to support the minimization of presupposition in the
development of the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Glaser, 1998). The
average age of participants was 26.9 and participants had been in the United States for
an average of 3.82 years. Participants’ countries of origin were located in Eastern Asia
(4), South America (2), Southern Asia (2), Eastern Europe (2), the Middle East (1), and
Western Europe (1). Not inconspicuous in the sample is the fact that no participants
originated from African countries, despite a targeted recruiting effort later in the data
collection process that involved sending emails specifically to international graduate
students from African countries. All participants received a 10” pizza and 16 ounce
soda for their involvement in the study. On average, each participant spent
approximately two hours engaged in activities associated with the research.

3.3 Open-Ended Survey and Follow-Up Interview Protocols

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix A), open ended written survey, and
follow-up interview were completed by participants. Written survey data and follow-up
interview data were both collected in order to facilitate triangulation of key findings
(Denzin, 1978). Triangulation refers to the convergence of information that arises from
different data sources or data collection techniques. The convergence of information
provided by participants through multiple data collection methods helps to address
issues of credibility, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative findings (Krefting,
3.3.1 Open-Ended Survey

Participants responded to a written survey consisting of thirteen open-ended questions in order to assess the acculturation experience of international graduate students (Appendix C). Questions were generated according to the specifications posited by Glaser (1992) and Cozby (2001). These specifications seek to allow for the maximal opportunity of elaboration and minimal presence of forced choice. The questions were written in English, as opposed to participants’ native languages, in order to preserve the independence of participants’ responses. In order to accommodate the native languages of the participants, numerous translators with diverse bilingual capabilities would have needed to be recruited to translate responses. This would have resulted in the substance of the participants’ responses being heavily influenced by the interpretation of the translators, resulting in a game of “Telephone” for the research team. By phrasing questions in English, participants were able to communicate their experiences in words of their choice, even if their English vocabulary was not as extensive as their native language vocabulary. The questions were presented to participants in the form of a Microsoft Word Document. Participants responded to these questions by typing their responses in the spaces under each question. No minimum or maximum response length restrictions were specified, rather, participants were instructed to write as much as necessary to convey their individual experience.

3.3.2 Follow-Up Interview

Based on responses to the open-ended survey questions, the research team identified responses that required clarification or elaboration. This was done to ensure
the integrity of participants’ responses by acquiring better conceptualization of participants’ intended meanings. Follow-up interview questions were generated when research team members became uncertain about the intended meaning of participants’ responses to the open-ended survey questions. Uncertainties in the responses were typically a result of syntactical errors or insufficient explanation. All phrases requiring further clarification or elaboration were used to develop the follow-up interview guide. During the follow-up interview, a printout of the participant’s responses to the open-ended questions was provided with ambiguous phrases highlighted. Participants were then invited to further discuss the phrase by using the following prompts: “You wrote that… (insert ambiguous phrase). Could you talk a little more about this?” A sample of the follow up interview questions is presented in Appendix C.

3.4 Design

This study used a non-experimental design composed of survey and interview observations. Although the design is non-experimental, the nature of the design was intended to foster the emergence and specification of hypotheses that are amenable to future experimental testing. There were two phases of the data collection representing two sources of information – written and oral. The written data collection was comprised of participants completing the demographics page and open-ended survey questions. In the oral phase of data collection, follow-up interviews were conducted in order to clarify any ambiguity found in the written responses to the open-ended survey questions.
3.5 Procedure

Invitations to participate in this research were distributed to the International Students Organization Board and International Student Organization listservs from the ISSA office. Individuals who were interested in participating in the research contacted the head of the research team by email or telephone to indicate their willingness to participate. Upon volunteering to participate in the study, participants verified that they did meet the inclusion criteria of being a graduate student from outside of the United States. Final participants were then be contacted by email or telephone to schedule a time for the first data collection – the completion of the written survey. All participants were asked to arrive at the office of the research team leader located in Brownson Hall 114. After completing a consent form, participants’ questions were addressed by the research team leader. Once all questions were answered, participants entered Brownson Hall 118, a conference room located in the Multicultural Research Institute. Participants were provided with a completely quiet environment with climate control.

Participants were then directed to a laptop computer that was set up in the room. After instructing the participants how to operate the computer, files containing the demographics page and the written survey were opened. Members of the research team then left the participants to work independently on the files. Members of the research team were available throughout the completion of the files to answer any questions or concerns that participants encountered. After the files were completed, they were saved to the hard drive and backed up on a removable disk. At this time, participants were also invited to have pizza and a beverage. Before leaving Brownson Hall, participants scheduled the follow-up interview. These follow up interviews typically occurred.
within fourteen days of completing the survey, but extenuating circumstances extended this time span to twenty-five days for one participant.

After the completion of the written survey portion of the data collection, the research team met to review the participants’ written responses to the survey questions. Any responses or phrases that needed clarification or further explanation were identified and noted. When the participants returned for the follow-up interview, participants received a copy of their responses. They were asked to review their responses before the oral interview began and were then introduced to the Sony M-455 Microcassette Recorder that would record the interview. Upon completion of reviewing the responses, the research team leader asked the participants if there was anything they wanted to add to their responses. Once participants were satisfied with the alterations or additions to their responses, the participants were presented with another copy of their responses. This copy was identical to the first, except that ambiguous phrases or responses were highlighted. The interview proceeded by addressing each of the ambiguous phrases using the phrase, “You wrote that… (insert ambiguous phrase). Could you talk a little more about this?” This questioning strategy was used in order to minimize any priming on the part of the interviewer, a technique supported by Ivey and Ivey (2003). Two members of the research team – the research team leader and one undergraduate team member – were present for each interview in order to help establish good rapport with interviewees and provide a means of checking interview bias and demand characteristics. The research team leader was the interviewer for all of the follow-up interviews, and the undergraduate member of the team served as an observer of the interview process.
At the completion of the follow-up interviews, the interviewer debriefed with the observing member of the research team to identify any procedural concerns in the interviews. Afterwards, the interview data was transcribed and compiled with the written responses from the first data collection, and data analysis began. Printouts of all responses were photocopied and distributed to each research team members for analysis.
In the following two chapters, I address two aspects of the research that are equally important. Firstly, in this chapter I present a description of how data analysis proceeded and led to the development of a theory grounded in the data. Secondly, in Chapter 5 I detail the procedures used in the data collection and analysis that maximized trustworthiness (Guba, 1981) of this research. An explanation of both the analysis procedure and scientific rigor are critical for the evaluation of the findings and provide opportunities to identify strategies to replicate and extend the scope of the research.

4.1 Data Analysis

Data analysis progressed according to the fundamental procedures of grounded theory that were developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In the decades following their initial proposal for how to inductively generate theory using a participant-centered approach, Glaser and Strauss diverged in their thinking regarding some specific procedures for developing theory in qualitative research. Fundamentally, Glaser sought to remain as passive as possible in fostering the emergence of theory in the data (Glaser, 1992). This entailed refraining from developing techniques to systematically advance the theory. Glaser’s stance reinforces the emphasis placed on the participant in advancing the theory, but it also hampers the development of transparent and systematic
procedures that are easily replicable. Strauss worked to develop replicable procedures in order to arrive at intermediate steps in the development of a comprehensive and emergent theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This, however, came at the expense of researchers reclaiming more of a formative position in the development of theory than in the initial grounded theory approach introduced cooperatively by Glaser and Strauss.

In this research, the analysis procedure that was used was influenced by the participant-centered approach stressed by Glaser and the use of transparent and replicable analytical procedures proposed by Strauss. Procedurally, this approach is also influenced by the work of Maykut and Morehouse (1991). Maykut and Morehouse drew upon the earlier works of Glaser and Strauss to develop a strategy for theory development that is maximally receptive to the contributions of participants while retaining systematic characteristics. This combination makes the approach participant-centered and allows for replication with a high degree of preciseness. The analysis was conducted in several steps and follows the lead of Pope-Davis, et al (2002) in promoting a culturally competent analytical technique. The steps of the analysis include the following actions: Concept Coding, Category Discovery, and Axial Coding.

4.1.1 Concept Coding

Theory development began with concept coding – the systematic identification of themes in raw qualitative data. In this research, concept coding involved analyzing participants’ responses to the open-ended questions and comments from the follow up interview. Each participant’s responses were coded according to the procedures
specified by Maykut and Morehouse (1991). Maykut and Morehouse advise that raw qualitative data should be unitized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) – a procedure for identifying significant portions of meaning in raw qualitative data.

To unitize the data, each member of the research team received a photocopy of each participant’s responses to the open-ended questions and comments from the follow-up interview. Research team members independently examined the data and identified standalone phrases that embodied significant meaning. Each research team member assigned a label to this standalone phrase and used the participants’ words verbatim whenever possible. Two features delineate each unitized piece of data: 1) the verbiage – the participant’s verbatim responses – and 2) the label – the word or phrase assigned by the researcher to characterize the participant’s responses.

After research team members independently coded a participant’s data, a full research team meeting was held. At the beginning of each full research team meeting, a moderator was assigned from among the research team members. The moderator, whose role was rotated among the four research team members for each meeting, was responsible for leading the team in a discussion of the participant’s coded responses. The discussions of coded responses began with the moderator asking group members to introduce their first unitized piece of data. The discussions proceeded in the following manner. If research team members were all in accordance with both the verbiage and label given to the unitized piece of data, the moderator would track the consensus on a fifth transcript. If there was disagreement regarding the verbiage and label, research team members discussed the nature of the differences. Consensus building was used to identify the applicable verbiage and label for the unitized piece of data, but consensus
building did not yield unanimous verbiage or labels in all cases. When these instances arose, one of two strategies was used to resolve the lack of consensus. If research team members could not reach consensus regarding the label for the verbiage, multiple and unique labels were assigned to the verbiage. If research team members could not reach consensus regarding the verbiage that composed the unitized piece of data, overlapping verbiage was assigned distinct labels. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1991), these strategies allow for the discordant data points to be resolved at later stages of the analysis, thus maximizing the integrity of the data while controlling researcher bias.

Concept Coding concluded when all participants’ responses had been unitized and assigned a label. Following the guidelines of Maykut and Morehouse (1991), each label and corresponding verbiage was then affixed to a 5” x 8” index card. In addition to the label and verbiage, the index card was coded for the participant who was the source of the verbiage and the location of the verbiage in the participant’s transcript. These cards were then analyzed in the next phase of the analysis – category discovery.

4.1.2 Category Discovery

Theory development continued with category discovery – the systematic identification of related concepts in qualitative data. In this research, the unitized data points generated in the concept coding phase of the analysis were systematically examined for associations. This stage of analysis used the constant comparison method (Glaser, 1992, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maykut & Morehouse, 1991). By following the constant comparative method, each piece of unitized data is compared to every other piece of unitized data. This allowed for the individual unitized data points
to be grouped with other unitized data points that contain similar meaning. The resulting categories provided convergence of similar concepts and allowed for higher order relationships to be developed.

Full research team meetings were held in order to proceed with category discovery. Category discovery began by equally distributing the unitized data points – displayed on 5” x 8” index cards – to the four members of the research team. Similar to the concept coding phase, a moderator was selected at each meeting to manage the progress of the analysis. Analysis began when one research team member introduced a provisional category – a theme that was prominent in the concept coding phase of the analysis. Team members then reviewed the unitized pieces of data and sought data points that applied to the provisional category. When an applicable unitized piece of data was identified, it was read aloud so research team members could note the content and connotation of the unitized data point. Research team members then reviewed their unitized pieces of data to identify similar concepts. Once a similar concept was identified, the concept was read aloud so research team members could compare the content and connotation to the first card that had been identified. If research team members all agreed that the concepts were closely related, the data points were grouped together. This same procedure was followed for subsequent unitized data points. The goal of this process was saturation – the inclusion of multiple concepts in a category (Glaser, 1992).

In the constant comparison method, Maykut and Morehouse (1991) promote the use of the “look/ feel alike” standard that was advanced by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This process supports the comparison of each unitized data point with every other card.
that is identified as being applicable to the provisional category. By using the “look/feel alike” standard, research team members discussed the similarities and differences in the content and connotation of the unitized data points. The verbiage of participants’ responses, as well as the context of the responses, was examined in order to determine whether a unitized piece of data should be included in the provisional category. Unitized data points that were not unanimously identified as meeting the “look/feel alike” standard were returned to the pool of unitized data points for later examination. The unitized data points that applied to the provisional category were affixed to a 2’ x 3’ piece of paper, and the paper was labeled with the title of the provisional category.

When a category had become saturated, the category and its data points were reviewed. Upon examining the data points, common features could be identified for the unitized data points. Characteristics embodied by the data points were used to develop *rules of inclusion* (Maykut and Morehouse, 1991). The rules of inclusion were recorded on the 2’ x 3’ provisional category sheet and were used to aid in the inclusion of subsequent unitized data points. As the analysis progressed, these rules helped to solidify the categories while emphasizing salient characteristics. It is important to note the fluid nature of the category discovery procedure. After unitized data points were assigned to a category, the constant comparative method promoted the continual assessment of data points’ fit with the category and relationship to other data points. If unitized data points were found to diverge from the category’s general characteristics, adjustments were made to assign the data point to a more appropriate category or return it to the pool of unitized data.
Identification of provisional categories, assignment of unitized data points, development of rules of inclusion, and continual adjustments to the categories continued until all unitized data points had been assigned to a category. Data points that did not adequately embody the characteristics of the established categories were set aside and designated as miscellaneous. The retained categories were then analyzed in the next phase of analysis – *Axial Coding*.

### 4.1.3 Axial Coding

Pope-Davis, et al (2002) referred to axial coding as “the process of making clear the relationships among the categories” (p. 367). In axial coding, categories that emerged from the category discovery stage of the research were systematically analyzed to identify emergent relationships. The goal of this phase of the research was to identify higher order categories – referred to as *dimensions* or *key categories* (Pope-Davis, et al, 2002). The dimensions characterized the relationships among categories, and the individual categories represented properties of the dimensions.

Dimensions were formulated in a manner similar to the process involved in the identification of concepts and categories. Research team members met to review each of the categories – now represented on a 2’ x 3’ piece of paper with a category title and supporting unitized data points. Similar to the previous steps of the data analysis, a moderator was selected to manage the progress of the axial coding. Analysis began when one research team member proposed a dimension. The proposed dimension was a label that represented an emergent relationship among clearly defined and saturated categories. Each research team member reviewed the categories implied by the
proposed dimension as well as the individual data points to determine the appropriateness of the proposed dimension. The “look alike/ feel alike” technique was used to analyze the content and connotation of the categories and their fit with the proposed dimensions. As in previous stages of analysis, categories and their supporting unitized pieces of data were read aloud. If unanimous agreement was reached regarding the title for the proposed dimension and the categories to be included under the dimension, the categories were grouped and officially assigned the name of the dimension. If unanimous agreement was not reached for the title of the dimension, consensus building was used to arrive at a suitable title for the dimension. If unanimous agreement was not reached for a category to be included under the dimension, the category was returned to the pool of categories for further consideration. The dimensional categories form the basis for the emergent theory, and a graphical depiction of the dimensions and the relationships among the dimensions was produced at the completion of axial coding (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Graphic representation of the model that emerged from participants’ responses.
CHAPTER 5
PROCEDURES FOR ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Instilling integrity in the research process requires special attention in all types of research – quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-model. Maykut and Morehouse (1991) champion the guidelines of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the completion and evaluation of qualitative research. Broadly defined, trustworthiness refers to the confidence in the findings, methodology, and applicability of a study. Guba’s model of trustworthiness (as cited in Krefting, 1991) is characterized by four elements: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. These elements – and the tactics used to address each element – are parallel in quantitative and qualitative research. Regardless of whether a study is quantitative or qualitative in nature, these elements are used to assess the integrity of the research.

Multiple techniques were used to meet the criteria for each element of trustworthiness. Enacting these techniques – considered integral in conducting sound qualitative investigations (Glaser, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut and Morehouse, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) – led to predictable and positive outcomes in the enhancement of the study’s trustworthiness. Among the strategies used to address trustworthiness are the six techniques identified by Padgett (1998) as essential in increasing the scientific rigor of qualitative research. These six techniques – prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, negative case
analysis, and auditing – are used in this study and are supported by ancillary means of addressing concerns of trustworthiness. A summary of techniques used to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are presented below.

5.1 Credibility

Truth value assesses the confidence in the study’s findings and the environment in which the study was conducted. The element of truth value is addressed by credibility in qualitative methodologies and internal validity in quantitative designs. Credibility is established when the findings emerge directly from the participants’ data and contain minimal experimenter bias.

5.1.1 Reflexivity

Each member of the research team maintained a set of field notes during the data collection and analysis phases of the study. These field notes were used to help research team members reflect on reactions to data that they encountered. By maintaining these field notes, research team members were able to examine the data and record observations and impressions. The field notes were used to identify recurring themes that were later used in the development of concepts, categories, and higher order categories. Additionally, the field notes allowed research team members to identify potential sources of bias.
5.1.2 Prolonged Field Experience

This research is the culmination of approximately two years of engagement in the field. In preparing for this research, I began exploring the adjustments that students make while in residence at the University of Notre Dame. Two versions of surveys containing open-ended questions about the transition to life at the University of Notre Dame were distributed to a Cross Cultural Psychology class and a Research Methods class. Participants were primarily undergraduate students from the United States. Two students, however, were international undergraduate students. As I began amending the survey questions, I recognized potential differences in the experience for international students.

After recognizing potential differences in the experience of international and domestic students, I conducted a literature search and review of acculturation and acculturative stress. This endeavor eventually led to a major area paper. After conducting the literature review, I was left with a number of questions regarding the experience of international students on campus at the University of Notre Dame – particularly international graduate students who were typically in residence longer and more permanently than undergraduate students. With a revised list of questions and background knowledge of acculturation issues, I arranged meetings with Bong Miquiabas, the Director of International Students Services and Activities (ISSA) at the University of Notre Dame. ISSA advocates for international student needs on campus and provides a wealth of services in including assistance with visas, taxes, recreation, and language programs. Mr. Miquiabas provided me with specific contextual information regarding international students at the University of Notre Dame. I also
arranged follow-up meetings with Connie Peterson-Miller, the Assistant Director of ISSA. These meetings enriched my understanding of the international student experience at the University of Notre Dame and further prepared me to conduct the research.

Before beginning the research, I asked a female international graduate student from Austria to review the questions I had provided. This review served as a check for clarity and ease of understanding. After this final check of the open-ended questions, I began the data collection procedures.

5.1.3 Identification of Potential Sources of Researcher Bias

The focus on emergence was maintained by peer examination – candid discussions of researcher bias throughout the analysis process (Krefting, 1991). Before data collection began, research team members identified potential sources of bias that may arise for individual members of the team and the team as a whole. The sources of bias that were identified included: prior experiences with international students, previous international travel, individual cultural assumptions and biases, and reactions to implications of emerging data. This procedure, similar to the method employed by Pope-Davis, et al (2002), set a precedent for open and continual dialogue regarding potential sources of bias throughout the data analysis procedures. Research team members also regularly engaged in peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), or the process of formulating and verbalizing alternative conclusions in order to minimize the influence of one’s subjective experience.
5.1.4 Triangulation

In the process of triangulation, multiple methods are used to arrive at a similar conclusion. Triangulation occurs in multiple phases of the research process. In this research, triangulation was evident in the data collection procedures, the convergence of multiple participants’ responses, the participation of multiple research team members from various cultural and experiential backgrounds, and the direct and indirect support for key categories.

Data was collected in two distinct manners – through written responses to the open-ended questions and through verbal responses to follow-up questions. Data from each of these sources were compiled and found to yield similar results, suggesting the methods of data collection led to convergent rather than disparate findings.

Triangulation was also evident in the findings that emerged over the course of the study. Responses from multiple participants converged on similar concepts. This convergence – which ultimately led to saturation of categories – was largely responsible for moving the data analysis forward. Reliance on the participants’ data and minimizing researcher bias was central in the development of trustworthy results.

Triangulation was also evident in the manner by which findings were identified. Throughout the data analysis process, research team members from varied experiential and cultural backgrounds arrived at similar conclusions. Regardless of individual researcher differences, clear concepts, themes and relationships emerged.

The emergence of key categories was also motivated by triangulation, in this case, triangulation of data representing participants’ experience and projections. For example, an emergent key category centered on the need to develop written, oral, and
auditory English language fluency in order to engage in the Notre Dame community. This key category was saturated by participants’ responses that indicated English fluency has aided them in engaging the Notre Dame community. One participant’s response indicated that he had not been able to engage the Notre Dame community because of his limited English fluency and that increasing English fluency would increase his capability to engage the Notre Dame community. The emergence of key categories through this type of triangulation led to more sophisticated and robust findings.

5.1.5 Negative Case Analysis

In the data analysis process, negative cases – participants’ responses that did not support the emergent themes (Padgett, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) – were sought. In this research, no negative cases were identified. Disparate responses existed in the participants’ data, but these did not pertain to the key categories that emerged from the data analysis. Unique viewpoints – those viewpoints not shared by other participants – were typically eliminated from data analysis before they advanced to the category discovery phase of the analysis.

5.1.6 Member Checking

In the process of member checking, participants are asked to review all responses they had supplied during the course of data collection. Upon review of their responses, the participants were invited to edit any comments they may have written or
spoken. This procedure served as a check for accuracy before the data was analyzed by the research team members.

5.1.7 Participant Review

Participants who were available at the completion of the data analysis were provided with a summary of the findings and invited to provide feedback on the results. These participants checked the report to see that the findings accurately represented the experiences and views of the participants. Participants’ feedback indicated that the results accurately captured elements of their experience as an international graduate student at the University of Notre Dame. In general, participants who reviewed the results suggested the inclusion of some of their unique experiences, but these elements did not reach a level of saturation in the data analysis procedures. These suggestions, therefore, were noted but no action was taken to alter the representation of the findings.

5.1.8 Peer Review – Methodology

The proposed methodology for this study was reviewed by multiple sources. In addition to individual members of the dissertation committee, Natalia Munoz, an advanced member of Dr. Lisa Edwards’ research team, evaluated the methodology of this study. Dr. Lisa Edwards and her team have been actively conducting qualitative research, and Natalia Munoz has been integrally involved in all phases of the research. Ms. Munoz reviewed the methodology of this study to identify potential sources of bias and other logistical issues that may impede the collection or reporting of participants’ results. The lone concern that was identified revolved around the amount of data that
international students would provide via written means. In the execution of the data collection, this concern was dispelled as each participant provided extensive information. Additionally, several comments were made by participants that indicated their preference for the written portion of the data collection. Participants indicated that the written responses allowed them to provide responses at their own pace. This was beneficial because, when necessary, it allowed participants to ponder their responses before formulating them in English.

5.1.9 Peer Review - Results

In the peer review process, Dr. Gary LeFebvre, an educational psychologist who has worked extensively with international students and families in the United States, audited the results of the study. Dr. LeFebvre was not present for any of the research team meetings but was provided with a general context for the research and an overview of the data analysis procedures. Dr. LeFebvre evaluated the representation of coded concepts in the key categories, much like the peer audit conducted by Pope-Davis, et al (2002). Dr. LeFebvre found that the coded concepts were appropriately represented in the key categories.

5.2 Transferability

Applicability assesses the ability of the findings to be applied to other settings, groups, or situations. The element of applicability is measured by transferability in qualitative research and external validity in quantitative research. Transferability is
established when a study’s sample is comprised of participants from representative cultural and situational backgrounds.

5.2.1 Purposive Sampling

In qualitative research, sampling techniques aim to include participants who are able to readily provide information related to the topic of study. The study was limited to international graduate students – those individuals who were born in, had previously lived in, and maintain citizenship in another country but have come to the United States (specifically, the University of Notre Dame) for educational purposes. During the recruiting process, it was indicated to potential participants that participation in this study would require written and oral communication – primarily in English. These parameters led to the collection of pointed information from participants who were comfortable communicating their thoughts using the English language.

5.2.2 Representative Sample

Regarding the demographic and experiential backgrounds of the participants, the sample provides a rough approximation of the University of Notre Dame international student population. The emphasis of qualitative research is not necessarily on the reflection of the population’s characteristics in the sample, but in this case, a fairly representative sample was obtained. Participants represent students coming from diverse regions of the world, countries of origin, areas of study, and duration of time in the United States and on campus at the University of Notre Dame. The participants, furthermore, come from rural, urban, and suburban environments and represent diverse
ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, sex, and age characteristics. The transferability of the study’s findings may be constrained beyond the University of Notre Dame setting, but the findings appear to be applicable to international graduate students’ experiences at the University of Notre Dame.

### 5.2.3 Dense Description

The Method section of this study contains detailed information regarding participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. These descriptions provide the necessary information to replicate the study in various settings.

### 5.3 Dependability

*Consistency* assesses the ability of the findings to be obtained again if the study were to be replicated under similar circumstances. The element of consistency is measured by *dependability* in qualitative research and *reliability* in quantitative research. Dependability is established when measurement and analysis procedures are consistent and transparent throughout the course of the research.

#### 5.3.1 Development and Amendment of Interview Questions

The interview questions used in this research were shaped by a literature review and input from pilot study participants, dissertation committee members, and program directors of ISSA. Amendments to the questions were conducted to improve clarity of the questions. By improving the clarity of the questions, participants were able to respond more directly to the essence of the question. The improved clarity increased
the consistency of responses among participants because participants were more likely to be responding to the same prompt.

5.3.2 Methodology Triangulation

As described above, triangulation procedures embedded in this research increase the confidence in the results of the research. Evidence of triangulation is particularly important to the dependability of the research. By using multiple methods or sources to arrive at the same conclusion, the possibility of results being obtained by chance or bias is minimized. Triangulation in data collection and analysis allows for the recognition and resolution of discrepancies in the data and improves the chances of finding similar results if the methodology is applied to a new sample in a similar setting.

5.3.3 Transparent and Dense Description of Procedures

The Method section of this research provides a detailed and full account of procedures used to arrive at the results. Throughout the data collection and analysis procedures, maintaining transparency was paramount because it facilitated communication among research team members. The transparency and dense description is also important to consumers of the research because it allows for the evaluation of the research in order to identify concerns with the consistency of data collection procedures.
5.4 Confirmability

*Neutrality* refers to the lack of bias in the research methodology and results.

The element of neutrality is measured by *confirmability* in qualitative research and *objectivity* in quantitative studies. Confirmability is established when sources of bias have been identified and accounted for during data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings.

5.4.1 Triangulation

As described above, triangulation of sources and methods of data collection minimize the chance that results are generated from biased perspectives or non-representative data points. Results, therefore, have an increased probability of being arrived at and reported from a neutral standpoint.

5.4.2 Reflexivity

As described above, reflexivity helped research team members in making their observations more concrete. Research team members were able to trace observations recorded in their field notes and recognize tendencies or pervasive thought patterns that could constitute a biased perspective. Research team members’ self-checks were then introduced to the whole research team for feedback and discussion.

5.4.3 Identification of Potential Sources of Researcher Bias

As described above, the peer examination and peer debriefing that occurred throughout the research process was integral in minimizing the bias in the research. By
verbalizing the perspectives of individual research team members, bias was identified, addressed, and managed. Research team members – aware of other team members’ biases – created a system of checks and balances throughout the research.
CHAPTER 6
RESULTS

This study yielded a theoretical framework composed of key categories generated from participants’ reported experiences. The theoretical framework proposes that several interconnected components converge to characterize the acculturation experience of international graduate students at the University of Notre Dame. The integral piece of the framework is composed of participants’ recognition of similarities and differences between living in their country of origin and in the United States. This central category, labeled Cultural and Social Assessment, influenced the manifestation of the other key categories: Language Acquisition and Proficiency, Social Support, Cultural Learning, and Individual Growth. The central category captures the general perceptions that international graduate students maintain about life in the United States while the supporting key categories outline the specific dimensions of the acculturation experience.

The recognition of similar and dissimilar aspects of cultures in participants’ countries of origin and the United States has a large influence on how adjustments are made to life in the new cultural environment. Perceived cultural similarities and differences – particularly differences – represent cultural issues that must be addressed in order to successfully adapt to the nuances of life in the United States and interact effectively with members of the new culture. Some of these perceived differences
appear to be resolved through the acquisition of new skills, relationships, or insight into personal and social issues. Resolution of the differences often precipitates adaptive changes in behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that may or may not be aligned with traditional cultural values. Other perceived differences, however, appear to remain unresolved. Some of these perceived differences appeared to create varying but significant stress in the lives of international graduate students, preventing or hindering the attainment of personal, educational, and professional goals.

During the acculturation experience, individuals – either implicitly or explicitly – recognize cultural and social similarities and differences in the new environmental context when they compare their experiences to life in their cultural environment of origin. This comparison is not necessarily planned, but after adequate exposure and contact with the new cultural environment, recognition of similarities and differences ultimately occurs. Upon making such a comparison, individuals, seemingly motivated by the need to reduce some degree of cognitive dissonance, plan to resolve the differences that they encounter in the new environmental context. This leads to changes in the individual’s behavior, attitudes, and/ or beliefs. In the model, the recognition of the differences is represented by the central category – *Cultural and Social Assessment*. Subsequent changes made as a result of the cultural comparisons is represented by the remaining key categories, Language Acquisition and Proficiency, Social Support, Cultural Learning, and Individual Growth. These four categories represent tangible and measurable adaptive techniques used to address the discomfort that arose upon recognizing differences in the new cultural context.
Language Acquisition and Proficiency characterizes participants’ recognized need to acquire, hone, and use English in communicating orally and verbally. Implications of English use are evident in a number of settings in the new cultural environment, most notably school and in interactions with native English speakers. Social Support captures the notion that participants needed to identify and develop formal and informal social support networks in their new cultural environment. These support networks provided resources to facilitate emotional maintenance and obtain critical information for accomplishing daily tasks. Cultural Learning reflects the information and insights gained by participants through observational and experiential learning in the new cultural environment. By observing and participating in the new culture, participants garnered an awareness of cultural trends that differed from their own culture of origin. Through this process, participants also modified preconceived cultural assumptions and offered cultural lessons to the members of the new culture. The final key category, Individual Growth, captures essential changes that occurred in the identity of the participants as a result of being immersed in the new culture. Self-sufficiency, assertiveness, maturity, and understanding of self were altered by the experience of living in and engaging members of the new culture.

In addition to the emphasis placed on the perception of differences recognized by international graduate students and subsequent changes, this model also emphasizes the interactions of the various dimensions in understanding the acculturation experience of the participants. As Figure 1 shows, each dimension is affected by and, in turn, affects each of the other dimensions. The central category appears to initially influence the manifestation of the other key categories, and the key categories interact. In
addition, the manner in which the other key categories are manifest in the international 
graduate student also impacts the central category. Changes in one dimension, 
therefore, have a cumulative effect on the entirety of the acculturation experience, 
making the model a fluid and dynamic model that captures the nature of the 
interactions. The model is not intended to serve strictly as a diagnostic tool for the 
acculturation process. The emphasis of the model, rather, is on identifying the 
important relationships in the acculturation experience.

In the following sections, a detailed description of each of the five categories of 
the model is presented. Delineation of the categories is reliant upon information from 
the participants. In each of the following sections, direct quotations from the 
participants are provided in order to exemplify the essence of the category. The 
quotations also provide tangible evidence of the varied, but largely convergent, 
perspectives of the participants. In the depiction of the central category and each key 
category, some vernacular is used to encapsulate the emergent findings. The 
vernacular, similar to the strategy used by Pope-Davis, et al (2002), aids in the 
understanding of reported findings. When reporting findings, the terms most, the 
participants, international graduate students, the majority, typically, generally, and 
usually refer to emergent findings that were common among a three-fourths majority of 
the sample (9 participants). The terms some, a number, and several refer to responses 
that were common among 4 – 8 participants. The term a few refers to responses 
characteristic of 3 or fewer participants. Specific words, including all or one are used 
when appropriate.
6.1 Cultural and Social Assessment

The central category, *Cultural and Social Assessment*, embodies the participants’ perceptions of how the new cultural environment is different from their culture of origin. These perceptions are very notable, as participants generally began a description of their current circumstances by comparing life in the United States to life in their cultures of origin. Even more notable is that these perceptions often emerged unsolicited. That is, participants typically made some type of top-line comparisons between life in the United States and life in their country of origin when they responded to the omnibus interview question (question 1) which read, “How would you describe your experience in the United States to this point? Please explain, using examples if necessary.” The propensity to compare aspects of life in the new and native cultural contexts reflects an active and ongoing process of social and cultural assessment. These assessments appear to be firmly in the realm of awareness for participants (or at the very least easily accessible) and impact daily functioning and understanding of their situations.

Integral in the social and cultural assessment are two components: expectations of the new cultural context and realities of the new cultural context. Some participants had prior experience with the United States through living in the United States or being educated in American schools in their country of origin. These individuals had empirical knowledge of what to expect when they began graduate studies at Notre Dame. Others, however, had no direct contact with the cultural climate of the United States, but they still maintained preconceived notions of what to expect. Rather than prior and direct contact with individuals from the United States, naïve participants
based cultural assumptions on media or norms that governed their culture of origin. Having intimate knowledge of life in the United States led to more developed and seemingly more accurate than inaccurate perceptions of the new cultural environment, but nonetheless, even intimate knowledge could have led to erroneous or obsolete preconceptions.

During social and cultural assessment, cultural assumptions are challenged, confirmed, and adapted. Participants revealed that they often based their behaviors and methods of interaction on these preconceived notions. One of the most salient preconceived notions about life in the United States that emerged revolved around the quality of graduate education. Most participants indicated that they initially chose to study in the United States because the educational opportunities, professors, resources, and working conditions were superior to those in their country of origin. Some participants indicated that their preconceptions were, in fact, valid, but some indicated their preconceptions were exaggerated. Identifying assumptions like these were of critical importance in understanding the acculturation process. The accuracy or inaccuracy of cultural assumptions provided information concerning motivating factors for patterns of behavior and adopted beliefs. Typically, participants who had accurate perceptions of the new cultural context verbalized less significant changes in behaviors and attitudes in order to more fully engage members of the new cultural context. Inaccurate perceptions seemed to demand more adaptive changes in order to better navigate the new cultural context and more fully engage its members.

The experience of participant F, a 29-year-old White female from Buenos Aires, Argentina, demonstrated how cultural assumptions are developed and used during the
acculturation experience. During her undergraduate education, Participant F attended a university in North Carolina as part of a semester-long exchange program. Through this experience, Participant F gained insight into life in the United States and found it to be a desirable option for her graduate education.

I lived for a semester in a dorm in UNC at Chapel Hill. The semester I spent in Chapel Hill was great. I was living on my own for the first time in my life and in a place full of people of my same age – many of them with similar interests. Living in a University campus is a common experience here in America, but not for Argentineans. All universities are located in the middle of big cities so we have no experience like that of living in a campus. This positive experience was of course a key factor for me applying for a Fulbright scholarship and wanting to come back to the US for graduate school.

Participant F developed a positive perception of life in the United States. She also indicated that she had often been in agreement with many political positions that the United States assumed in international situations. In 2002, however, her preconception of the United States as being a contributor to global efforts of peace was challenged by the start of the war in Iraq. As the following quote suggests, this challenge to her preconception caused some turmoil and moved her to resolve the turmoil and cognitive dissonance.

I struggled a lot with the fact that I was living here, that I chose to come and study in a place that was doing so much harm to the world. My way of reconciling this with my principles was to be vocal about it and participate in every protest and opportunity I had to voice my opinion and rejection of the current US policies. I’m still until this day doing it, and finding many Americans that share my views comforts me and gives me hope that things can change. However, there have been times when these things have made me so sad and depressed and frustrated as to feel the urge to live the US.

Other participants had no previous, firsthand experience on which to base their preconceptions of life in the United States. Without preconceptions, international graduate students not only had to adapt their preconceptions to meet the realities of the
new culture but they had to form them in the midst of the cultural change. With no
accumulated experience to compare new experiences to, some participants seemingly
became overwhelmed to a certain degree. This led to some pronounced difficulties in
adjusting to the new cultural environment. Participant E, a 23-year-old male from
Shanghai, China, expressed realities about his academic abilities, daily life stressors,
and perceptions of US students that he did not necessarily anticipate before he began his
studies in the United States.

Before coming to the United States, I was very confident and always had a
belief that I can conquer any difficulty. Now I am just an average student in the
class. The difference in my sense of control [in China and the United States] is
largely due to the tough competitions in my department. However, since
studying abroad, I have to worry about many things. For example, when can I
have enough money to buy a car; when my oral English will get better….Other
new students in my group have already gotten an MS degree before they come
to ND. However, I just graduated from a university. Compared with them, I was
lack in advanced knowledge and research experience. My classmates are smart,
and they are really good at examining (I mean they always get high grades at
exams). Sometimes I felt frustrated after exams. But my American classmates
in the department are not good enough to pursue a PhD degree in electrical
engineering. I mean their lack in basic math skills and common sense in science
really surprises me.

Participant E has encountered a number of unanticipated differences since he
began living in the United States. He continues to learn, understand, and revise his
perceptions of nuances in the new culture. Resolving the discomfort that arises with not
being familiar with or understanding certain aspects of the culture leads to changes in
behaviors and attitudes. These changes result in the acquisition of new skills, the
development of new relationships, greater understanding of the new culture and culture
of origin, and individual growth. Each of these changes is represented in the
elaboration of the following emergent categories.
6.2 Language Acquisition and Proficiency

Throughout the data collection process, it became readily apparent that English language familiarity and mastery were critical to interactions in the new cultural environment of the United States. English proficiency had an impact in all areas of international graduate students’ lives. Participants indicated that English proficiency impacted social relationships with friends and colleagues, interactions with strangers, and interactions in classrooms and other academic settings. English proficiency, generally, emerged as a critical element in the acculturation process. Verbal communication in English, particularly, served as a conduit for understanding the new cultural environment, developing supportive relationships, and maximizing educational and career aspirations.

The importance of English language proficiency was accentuated by the convergence of three distinct insights on English language usage. First, several participants indicated that they had a solid grasp of the English language and pointed to that proficiency as a reason for a relatively smooth transition to the new culture. Participants who expressed these views felt comfortable in their ability to navigate the new culture and access resources (e.g., community agencies and services) that were important for daily functioning. Participant L, a 29 year-old Asian Indian female, pointed to her English proficiency as being vital to her adaptation to life in the United States.

Something that has really helped me grow is my command over the English language. I have been schooled at an English medium, Irish missionary Convent in India, and so English is almost my first language (perhaps I am better at English than my own mother tongue!). However after coming here, it took awhile to understand the accent here which is very important to get to know people more personally. In my opinion, once I was able to understand what
people were saying and talk to them fluently and partake wholeheartedly in their conversations and share their views, it was very helpful in understanding the American way of life. The American perspectives in certain ways of life were quite evident, due to better interactions with people and this helped me in settling down faster and more comfortably.

Command of the English language assisted Participant L in forming relationships and developing a better understanding of the new culture’s features. Other participants without advanced English language skills recognized that English proficiency could be helpful in becoming more settled and comfortable in the new environment.

A second manner in which the importance of English language was conveyed by participants was through the expression of needs or desires to acquire a greater level of English proficiency. Several participants pointed to this goal as being crucial to further establishing relationships and interacting more effectively with members of the new cultural environment. Participant I, a 32-year-old, multiracial male from Caracas, Venezuela, talked about the process of learning the English language, how it helped him to understand the culture, and how he still needs to perfect his skills to become better at interacting with native speakers.

At the beginning it was really hard to realize that you can be in such a similar place to your country with so many social and cultural differences. I didn’t speak English when I came so it was hard to study and live at the same time without having all the skill necessary for survival, but I made it, ja! I’m trying to use more correct English, because if you don’t specify much, Americans don’t do a great effort to understand you.

Participant I also provided examples of misunderstandings resulting from his developing English language capacity that led to academic consequences. These examples illustrate the importance of continuing to develop English proficiency so that international graduate students may convey the knowledge, expertise, or point of view.
During an exam a year ago, the professor use the expression “fast as” to indicate “faster than” – an American expression that I never heard before. For me as fast as means equally fast, I lost 9 point in that problem even though I knew how to solve it. Even though I complain to the professor, she practically disregard my complaint and I lost those points. Similar to this situation I can recall several ones. For example, “Exam day at room 180” instead of 118, it cost me 30 min late for the exam.

These examples demonstrate the necessity of English proficiency to communicate ideas and perform academic duties and other daily tasks. As illustrated above, confusions in language can occur even when there is a basic familiarity and proficiency of the English language. For those students with minimal English proficiency, there are definite consequences that inhibit the adaptation to the new culture. Frustration can arise in acquiring the skills necessary to interact with members of the new culture. Learning accents, vocabulary, and expressions all pose a challenge to international graduate students, regardless of language of origin.

The third manner in which international graduate students identified the importance of English proficiency emerged when a few participants indicated their dismay over their lack of English skills. These participants indicated that the lack of English proficiency prevented them from engaging the new environment. As a result, these participants expressed frustration regarding their ability to establish relationships with native speakers, aptitude in class, and interactions with critical members of their academic life, such as graduate advisors and other professors. Participant D, a 26-year-old Chinese male, expressed his disappointment, but conveyed his commitment to learning English in order to not be separated from the new culture by a language barrier.

Communicating in English – it is disappointing because I have hardly improved. Some Chinese students can not speak fluently after a few years....Some guys are always taking a dim view of me in terms of English, but when we get into trouble—e.g. we were lost somewhere, it is I who will ask/call....I will not be
frustrated by my broken English. I made my mind to speak English well—till like a native speaker. But sometimes I can not catch one or more words in one sentence, but I will not stop for each [instance]. Some native speaker have not implied whether they got what I said—they might nod, but they did not get. I have overcome being embarrassed in talking broken English.

The importance of being persistent and patient appears in the insights from Participant D. A lack of English language proficiency may lead to awkward moments, embarrassing situations, miscommunication, and frustration. The goal of becoming more proficient in the English language addresses these undesirable and, at times, unpleasant situations. English proficiency appears to be a key to accessing the new cultural environment because advanced proficiency enhances communication and underdeveloped proficiency limits communication. Knowledge and self-assurance to use English in the new cultural environment appears to facilitate the acculturation process, but a lack of English language did not, necessarily, appear to preclude participants from interacting with the new culture. Cultural values and traditions, however, are conveyed through verbal interactions. Participants with greater English language proficiency appeared capable of more easily identifying and addressing these cultural nuances. In turn, this helped participants to become better acclimated to the new cultural environment and more fully understand its intricacies.

6.3 Social Support

While English proficiency emerged as a critical tool for accessing the new cultural environment, adjustment to the new cultural environment was not sufficed by knowing grammatical rules and vocabulary. English usage, rather, was a tool for developing supportive networks in the new cultural environment. Generally,
participants expressed that they were more secluded from friends and family of origin than at any other point in their lives. The important support networks from their cultures of origin were often inaccessible or separated by geography, time zones, or experience. The establishment of emotional support networks emerged as an imperative for international graduate students. In times of doubt, frustration, or uncertainty, participants expressed that solace and guidance were often found in the support networks that they had established in the new cultural environment. These social support networks included friends, mentors, and professional staff members in offices on campus at the University of Notre Dame.

Social support was found through both formal and informal channels. Several participants indicated that they routinely used University agencies, such as ISSA, to help gain access to social opportunities, cultural learning events, or services necessary for maintaining livelihood (i.e., tax assistance and visa support). Other formal settings helped international graduate students to connect with other members of the new culture and develop skills necessary to further their personal and professional goals. Participant K, a 28-year-old Chinese female, expressed the important role that formal agencies played in her and her family’s adjustment to life in the United States.

Ever since the first day we arrived in South Bend from China, we have received numerous help from a lot of people. The ISSA office, especially Connie Peterson, has made us feel like we are with our family. I was pregnant in my third year of Ph.D. study. The birth of our son brought us as much fun as troubles. Without the help from the community of the University Village Housing, it would be much harder for us to raise our son and continue our study at the same time. I worked as the Chair of the Information Technology of GSU for a year. And I have participated many events held by the Chinese Friendship Association, ISSA, and Campus Ministry. These experiences helped me to improve my skills in organizing and interacting with people.
Other participants expressed the integral helpfulness of such formal channels as ISSA, the Chinese Friendship Association, and Campus Ministry, and most expressed needs to develop interpersonal relationships that offered the emotional support they were seeking, similar to Participant K’s relationship with Connie Peterson-Miller and the neighbors of her community. These informal social support networks provided participants with opportunities to feel more socially and emotionally connected with the new cultural environment.

Participants with established, informal social support networks expressed feelings of belonging and emotional stability, regardless of whether the support network was composed of friends, significant others, advisors, professors, University of Notre Dame officials, fellow international students, or native students. Support networks composed of individuals from the participant’s same country of origin offered a unique opportunity to recall images, relevant topics, and cultural traditions of their past. Informal networks composed of United States citizens gave participants access to the culture – a sort of tour guide for the new cultural environment. As in the case with participants who expressed a deficit in their English proficiency, a deficit in informal social support made the acculturation process more stressful and less enjoyable. The importance of the social support networks are reflected below in the quotes from Participant C, a 25-year-old Chinese female. She highlighted the stress that evolves as a function of being new to a culture, how support networks can be satisfying and helpful, and situations that precipitate feelings of isolation.

Most of the time I am quite happy for my decision of coming to the United States, mainly due to the fact that I met my current boy friend here. I feel homesick once in a while, especially at the time people in China celebrates our traditional holidays. Feeling lonely is inevitable. Though all the Americans I
have met here are friendly and kind, I still feel it hard to break the culture barrier to be truly close friends with them.

Participant C’s observations that it is difficult to establish significant friendships in the United States was echoed by Participant G, a 31-year-old British male. He identified a fundamental difference in the quality of friendships in the United States compared to his country of origin. While making acquaintances and establishing good relationships with those around him were similar to his experience living in England, developing deeper friendships was more difficult.

Developing my social life has been one of the more complicated aspects, but my time at ND has enhanced that. I thrive in social situations and find Americans easy to talk to. I attribute this to my years at boarding school where there is an imperative to get on with those around you. Although it sounds like a cliché, in the absence of real family, those around you become a surrogate family and you learn to understand character traits very quickly. However, it is hard to develop lasting friendships with Americans as a foreigner. After 6 years and excluding my wife, I have few American friends on a deep level but many acquaintances. That is the real difference between the US and the UK.

Several international graduate students commented not only on the difficulty in establishing deeper friendships, but how the intimacy in friendships differed from their accustomed manner of interacting with others in their culture of origin. Participant B, a 26-year-old Hungarian male from Romania, emphasized this difference and expressed doubt about his ability to develop friendships similar to his friendships in Romania.

I am usually friendly to people and I have made some superficial friendships here. I have no control over making deep friendships – that seems to be much harder here than at home. I miss my large friend network from home – there is no way or time to recreate that.

The general perception is that it is difficult for international graduate students to establish deep friendships in a new culture – particularly with members of the new culture. Many of the participants indicated that they developed relationships with other
international graduate students that shared their culture of origin. The close interpersonal relationships with individuals from the United States, however, still appeared to be desirable and a goal for many of the participants. Regardless of whom international graduate students developed relationships with, the most ideal and most important aspect of the relationship was to feel a sense of belonging. Participants who felt this sense of connection were truly grateful for such social support. Participants E captured the sentiment of most participants in his account of how members of the new culture made him feel welcome.

I should thank my language instructor, Dr. Harmutuik, who helped me a lot in the last 6 months. My foreign family, Dr. Patrick and his wife, invited me to their house for several times, they also took me to several traditional American events. What’s the most important is that they give me a feeling that there are people here who also care for me.

The sense of connectedness with social support networks helps provide emotional stability for international graduate students. This provides resources for international graduate students to access when they have difficulties in their personal and professional lives. The sense of connectedness also helps international graduate students to further explore and acquire a greater appreciation for the new culture, as well as their own culture of origin.

6.3 Cultural Learning

International graduate students expressed that they encountered a wide variety of cross–cultural situations that furthered their understanding of the new culture and their own native culture. Each of these experiences contributed to a process of learning more about the various aspects of the new culture, as well as their own native culture. This
cultural learning emerged as an apparent product of experiential learning. Through firsthand and intimate contact with a new culture and members of the new culture, the majority of international graduate students indicated that they became more aware of and developed more informed insights regarding the various aspects of the new cultural context. Traveling within the United States, meeting people from various regions of the country, and observing the daily existence of the new culture’s members provided an abundance of information for participants. This information was very important for the participants because it allowed them to develop a more accurate perception of the new cultural environment and its members.

Several participants indicated that intimate knowledge of the new culture provided information that helped them revise or reinforce cultural assumptions that they had about the new culture and its members. Over time, the cumulative effect of cultural learning moments provided greater insight into the new culture. Resultantly, the knowledge allowed for the formation of more accurate depictions of the culture and its people. Important in this process is the first-hand contact with members of new culture. The experiential component appears to leave a much more indelible mark on the international graduate students than media portrayals of life in the United States or second-hand explanations from others. Participant L discussed the cultural sharing that occurs when she interacts with students from the United States.

As a foreign student, I would say that most people here are quite interested in knowing about other cultures and take a good delight in listening to the viewpoints, cultures/ traditions of other nations. The better you are in striking up an informative conversation, the better impression you can create about yourself and your country/ culture. Often they compare these to customs/ traditions present here in the US and talk about it. This is often loads of new information for me and very beneficial too.
Similar accounts of cultural exchanges described by Participant L were noted by several participants. These mutually beneficial conversations provide learning opportunities for both international graduate students and US students. Before these types of communications occur, however, it appears that conditions exist that make these types of exchanges more probable and fruitful. Cultural learning appeared to be most pronounced when participants expressed a comfort with the English language, adequate contact with members of the new culture, and a strong social foundation. These factors appeared to increase the propensity for international graduate students to immerse themselves in the new cultural environment. When basic social needs were met, participants were better prepared to engage in conversations with native individuals regarding various cultural nuances.

Several participants shared instances in which they developed a greater sense of understanding for their own culture by sharing information with others. Naïve perceptions or lack of knowledge that US citizens maintained of international graduate students led to teachable moments. When encountered with a naïve comment, assumption put forth by a native citizen, or genuine question about the culture of the international graduate student, a few participants indicated they developed a greater sense of appreciation for their culture of origin through informing others. This notion is captured in the comments of Participant H, a 26-year-old Asian Indian male.

There have been many instances when people have expressed great interest in knowing about Indian culture, religion, languages, clothes and food. But people also have some misconceptions about the arranged marriages, caste system, etc. which I find hard to explain [and hard to] clarify their notions. To tell the truth, I have started respecting many aspects of my country and culture more now.
Prior to living in the United States, Participant H viewed various aspects of his culture as being very routine and ordinary without a great deal of emphasis placed on the reasoning behind certain traditions. Interaction with US citizens provided opportunities for Participant H to reflect upon these traditions and more fully understand and explore the foundations of the traditions. As a result, Participant H has not only learned about the life and cultural context of the United States, but he has also acquired a greater sense of appreciation for his country and culture of origin.

Through the experience of living in the United States for an extended period of time, Participant B indicated that he, too, had learned much about the various cultural groups and traditions in the United States. He also indicated that he developed an increased appreciation for many elements of his native culture that he had taken for granted.

My experience in the United States was an eye opener from many points of view. I have met a lot of interesting people from all over the world, I have seen different cultures and I have learned about different places by meeting these people. I have also seen the United States (I’ve been to 26 of the continental states) in a way in which one can only learn by personal experience. I have seen the American way of making a school (or university) and the way people think. I have been exposed to both very conservative and very liberal views from Americans and I watched them study, work and enjoy their leisure time. I think that now I understand Americans much better than I did before and I can relate to how they are thinking and why they are thinking that way. I have also learned to appreciate a lot of things that I had in my home environment that I always took for granted and now I see values in things that were not obvious and non-important to me before (like: real organic food, the importance of personal relationships and the importance of walking vs. driving).

By living in a culture without constant access to seemingly routine aspects of his native culture, Participant B recognized the instrumental nature of some values, traditions, and behaviors he maintained in Romania. Participant F also expressed such appreciation for her culture of origin after living outside of the culture for an extended period of time.
period of time. Like other participants, she embraced her culture more after recognizing how important they were to her.

Being far also made me value the good things about Argentina that I used to take for granted. It made me love my country and my people even more and it made me more committed to them. An example is that ever since I’ve been here all my research has been centered around Argentina.

Cooperative and amicable teachable moments and realization of important elements of native cultures represented positive aspects of cultural learning. In addition to the positive and open-minded examples of cultural sharing, there were also several instances in which international graduate students were the target of discrimination or prejudicial thinking. These scenarios were more intrusive and confrontational than the teachable moments expressed by other participants. These encounters emphasized the differences between the international graduate students and the people they encountered – mostly US citizens. The negative connotation of the differences expressed by the other party put international graduate students in a position where they had to defend various aspects of their culture rather than interacting with US citizens as symbiotic cultural beings. An example of such an instance occurred to Participant A, a 26-year-old Arab male from Syria. He commented on the implications of the September 11th bombings in his adaptation to life in the United States.

After the bombings of September 11, 2001, I became more conscious than before of my identity as an Arab. Personally, I was pretty isolated here but I did get my share of minor disturbances. Also it is weird to read and listen to someone talking about Syria while living here. I haven’t felt hostility personally, but I realize what many think of ‘those people’ and ‘those countries’ so that’s always something to consider.

In a follow up conversation, Participant A shared that he became more aware of his Arab identity, in part, because others made him aware of it. He indicated that he felt
media sources in this country impacted the perceptions that US citizens had of the Arab culture, and some US citizens began to apply stereotypes to Arabs. These stereotypes labeled Arabs as ruthless, extremist, and dangerous. This impacted Participant A’s interactions to some extent in everyday situations. Shortly after September 11th, Participant A shared that he was verbally attacked by a US citizen who hurled vulgar epithets at him in front of his home, seemingly because of his cultural background. This individual was someone Participant A had known and had talked with somewhat regularly before the terrorist attacks. This made him aware that there were some people in the United States who would harbor stereotypical views towards him because of his phenotype’s association with an isolated segment of his own Arab culture. Participant A was also candid about how the institutional discrimination may impact his future, saying that the he will not be able to leave the country after his graduation for fear of not being able to get his Syrian visa renewed to come back to the United States. He hopes to become a professor in the United States, but the decision will involve continued isolation from his culture of origin and the friends and family members who remain there.

While only a few participants shared instances of overt types of racism similar to Participant A’s experience, several others mentioned covert forms of discrimination. These implicit forms of discrimination impacted the acculturation experience of international graduate students. Participant I talked about the manner in which US citizens view his rights in this country, emphasizing how he may be treated differently because of his status as an international graduate student.

We are in a disadvantage when it comes to claim our right because most Americans don’t know the extent of our rights. They just know that we’re not
one of them, so we don’t deserve the same treatment….The only way to control these situations are by knowing the extent of your rights, fighting for what you believe is fair and educating the population so both sides get what is fair and honest. After all it’s an exchange.

Participant I highlighted the cultural assumption that some US citizens may hold regarding the status of international graduate students. His insight describes a potential obstacle in the acculturation process. International graduate students may not fully participate in the new culture because of implicit limitations placed upon them by native citizens. The comments reflect the need for international graduate students to become more aware of their own rights and more assertive in expressing those rights.

Other graduate students focused more on everyday contact when they expressed feeling different from others. Participant H talked about a constant recognition of the fact that he was different from the majority of the people in his surroundings. Most of the time, Participant H indicated that he feels comfortable with these differences, but certain instances occur where he feels somewhat uncomfortable because of the way he looks.

Most of the time I am not in a situation where I am embarrassed or anything because I am from a different culture. I just accept what I am. I accept my shortcomings and proud of my strong points. But there have been some occasions when I have felt color conscious in a bar or in a group photograph.

Instances in which international graduate students experience discrimination, prejudice, or being among the outgroup of society can impact the acculturation experience profoundly. When international graduate students are the target of discrimination, the new culture becomes less welcoming and more threatening. This has the potential to disrupt adaptation and cultural exploration which stunts participation and immersion in the new culture.
6.4 Individual Growth

Despite facing such disruptive challenges as prejudice and discrimination, international graduate students indicated that a tremendous amount of individual growth occurred in the new cultural environment. The convergence of participants’ insights pointed to a saturated category of individual development that focused on increased self-sufficiency/reliance, assertiveness, maturity, and understanding of self. Participants expressed these fundamental changes were linked to their experience of living in the United States. Exposure to the new culture, its people, and people from other parts of the world precipitated substantial changes. Participant J, a 24-year-old Romanian male from Bucharest, Romania, expressed his increased self-reliance that developed as he lived in the United States. He indicated that he recognizes his role in affecting change in his interactions with others. He also emphasized the necessity to take ownership for his actions in order to obtain results that he seeks.

I am – first and foremost – responsible for the outcome of social situations, living and interacting in the U.S. I have been told that I am direct, persuasive, and likeable. Maybe these have something to do with having control of social outcomes. I also feel that I HAVE TO take control because otherwise nobody else will. In Romania it’s different.

Participant J also indicated that he overcame several obstacles in his individual development. In the process of overcoming these obstacles, he mentioned that there was also an experience of loneliness that arose.

[Obstacles I have overcome in order to better interact with others include] learning to be less shy, more direct, and always knowing that if I don’t take care of myself nobody else will. And also learning that independence sometimes means loneliness.

Participant J’s observation regarding the loneliness that accompanies the increased independence resonated with several other participants. Life in the United
States provided opportunities for international graduate students to learn about themselves and develop the skills necessary to attain their personal and educational goals. The new environment, however, appears to isolate international graduate students to some extent, creating an impetus to become more self-sufficient and self-reliant. Successful resolution of the demand to become more self-sufficient can contribute to the continued participation and interaction with the new culture.

Several participants highlighted the fact that they came from environments where they lived with their parents or in communities that were much more collectivist in nature. In some of these cultures of origin, participants would acquire input from others (e.g., parents, grandparents, or older siblings) before making decisions. Living in the United States necessitated that some decisions had to be made more independently. Participant A noted this difference in the following statement.

I’ve been more independent here, more in command of my life than when I lived with my parents. I feel more in control because I feel more independent whereas I would always go back to what my parents told me on how to act or behave or what my parents expected when I was in Syria.

Above and beyond the recognition that international graduate students must make more independent decisions, a finding emerged that indicated most international graduate students have become less shy and more assertive over time. The increased assertiveness conveyed a growing sense of importance that participants placed on their individual needs. The necessity to overcome shyness is captured in the comment made by Participant F as she reflected on the most difficult part of coming to the United States.

The main obstacle was personal shyness, but once you’re in a new country where you don’t know anyone, you are just forced to overcome your shyness. If you don’t, you will be completely miserable, so you just go and do it.
By becoming less shy, Participant F and other international graduate student are able to establish relationships, communicate their needs, and have a greater capacity to affect change in their new cultural environment. Part of this process of becoming less shy seems to revolve around the development of the belief that the participants’ views and needs are important and will be received by members of the new culture. Participant D pointed to his increased sense of assertiveness, particularly in academic situations.

[I am] more assertive than in China. Partly because students have the right to ask teachers to do better because they pay tuition. I dare propose some problems to teachers [at Notre Dame] in class instead of only listening.

This quote highlighted the impact that the increased assertiveness can have. Rather than accepting authority figures’ comments as truth, Participant D indicated that he reserves the ability to be skeptical and question. This increased assertiveness allows for a more complete participation in the new culture. The increased assertiveness was also indicated as something that was important in social situations and completing daily tasks. Participant B stated that:

I am a lot more assertive right now and it is because I came here. I learned that I have rights and I learned to stand up for them. I return the goods that I don’t like to the stores (something you would never even try in Romania). I think that I can do a lot of things and my mind opened up to possibilities (I started climbing, snowboarding, photography, I use the internet in a very different way and I am even thinking about investments on my savings).

Participant B’s comments indicated that increased assertiveness can be instrumental in navigating daily situations and garnering respect from others. Whether returning goods or standing up for oneself in a social confrontation, the development of assertiveness helps to make international graduate students feel more comfortable and
empowered in their new cultural environment. As the comments indicated, it also appears that increased assertiveness was connected with a growing demand to meet individual desires or goals. This recognition of important, personal desires and goals compelled participants to realize talents or hobbies in which they had an interest. Several participants, indeed, pointed to life in the United States as a factor in the development of new hobbies and activities.

By exploring and recognizing what is subjectively important to an individual, a more sophisticated perspective of the world can be developed. Results suggested that international graduate students’ sense of overall maturity developed along with their recognition of personally important values. Nearly all participants indicated that one of the largest differences in their experience of being in the United States is that they have become significantly more mature. Many participants could not specifically identify how it is that they became more mature, but Participant J identified his broadened worldview as a main reason why he has become more mature.

I have become more self-dependent, more poised, more mature in my understanding of the world – because now I have both the European and the American perspectives.

Participant J accounted for his increased maturity, but other participants were unable to delineate specific mechanisms that fostered maturity. It appears that a confluence of nebulous factors may account for the increased maturity. Despite the inability of participants to identify these factors, the emergent finding that most all participants indicated that they had matured remains a salient aspect of the experience and is captured by Participant G’s comments.

I was a little bit out of control and certainly directionless before I came to the US. I now have much greater clarity as to what I want to do, and how I organize
those things around me, but I think that is a product of maturing and that which
the US has installed in me.

One factor that may have contributed to the overall sense of increased maturity
is the increased understanding of self – particularly self-efficacy and the identification
of ambitions. During their time in the United States, most international graduate
students indicated that they have more clearly defined their educational and career
pursuits and have developed a much clearer definition of their talents and limitations.
Participant F reflected on how her experience in the United States has impacted her
motivation to attain her career ambitions.

In a way being in the US also made me develop my social consciousness even
more. I’ve been very committed in social causes since I came here, even more
than when I was in Argentina. I met great people with whom to share this
interest and drive and I guess that is what explains this increasing commitment.
But it also has to do with growing up and rethinking my life goals, and aspiring
to have a life devoted to others through teaching and activism. This was
somewhere inside of me since I was back home but for some reason it became
explicit and more obvious since I’ve been here.

Other participants identified how being in the United States has helped them to
realize their strengths and limitations. Participant D talked about his shifting values and
emphasis in his work and in his life. He came to the United States in order to receive
the best training so that he may become a leading researcher in his field. After taking
courses and comparing himself to others in his field, he recognized possible limitations
that may prevent him from attaining his previously envisioned goal. He reflected on his
shift in priorities and the development of new goals.

I can not be a famous scientist, and I do not tend to be either. I may not be the
best students in courses or research, but what I can do may be getting high
grade, instead of working out creative ideas. What I can do is to do as well as I
can with what I have. Life is colorful. There is more than ranking, grade,
money in life.
In addition to obtaining a more realistic perspective of one’s capabilities, international graduate students also expressed that they became more aware of the values for which they stood. Variation existed in the specific sets of values that each participant championed, but the commonality was that the values became more clearly defined while living and studying in the United States. Participant B discussed some realizations he made about the changes he has undergone since living in the United States. He discussed some of his behaviors and then discussed changes in his values.

I also learned to smile (more) and to try and be polite especially in formal situations. I am also not that concerned with money as I was and I regard a lot of things important that were not that important to me before. I learned to be a lot more tolerant towards other cultures. And I know more clearly the values I stand for.

Participants provided little insight into the specific mechanisms or factors that precipitated changes in their sets of values, but it appears clear that fundamental changes occurred.

6.5 Summary of Emergent Categories

The central category – Cultural and Social Assessment – and key categories – Language Acquisition and Proficiency, Social Support, Cultural Learning, and Individual Growth – are well-defined concepts that emerged from participants’ data to explain the acculturation of international graduate students. Characteristics of each category were also defined by participants’ stated experiences. Cultural and Social Assessment was characterized by the identification of congruent and incongruent cultural behaviors, values, traditions, and attitudes that had been experienced by the participants. Recognition of cultural congruence and incongruence by the participants
precipitated specific elements of cultural change. These elements were represented by
the key categories.

Similar to the central category, each of the key categories was supported by
caracteristics generated from participants’ stated experiences. Language Acquisition
and Proficiency was characterized by participants’ expressions of how English fluency
has helped adaptation to life in the United States, how English fluency would help
adaptation, and disgruntlement over a less than desired level of English fluency. Social
Support was characterized by participants’ reported informal and formal social support
networks. Cultural Learning was characterized by participants’ accounts of increased
appreciation and knowledge of their native and new cultures. Increased appreciation
and knowledge occurred experientially through cultural exchanges with members of the
new culture. Individual Growth was characterized by participants’ expression of
increased self-sufficiency, assertiveness, maturity, and understanding of self. A
summary of the emergent categories, complete with characteristics that delineated each
of the emergent categories, is displayed in Table 3.
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>defining Characteristics</th>
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<td>Cultural &amp; Social Assessment</td>
<td>Recognition of congruent cultural patterns</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognition of incongruent cultural patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Acquisition and Proficiency</td>
<td>English fluency aids cultural adaptation</td>
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<td>English fluency would aid cultural adaptation</td>
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<td>Lack of English fluency leads to frustration</td>
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<td>Social Support</td>
<td>Informal sources of social support</td>
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<td>Formal sources of social support</td>
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<td>Cultural Learning</td>
<td>Increased knowledge/ appreciation of native culture</td>
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<td>Increased knowledge/ appreciation of new culture</td>
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<td>Experiential learning through intercultural contact</td>
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<td>Individual Growth</td>
<td>Increased self-sufficiency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increased assertiveness</td>
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<td>Increased maturity</td>
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<td>Increased understanding of self</td>
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This study was conducted in order to examine the acculturation experience of international graduate students studying in the United States. Additionally, this study sought to develop a theoretical framework grounded in international graduate students’ perspectives that explained the acculturation process. Existing acculturation literature has addressed individual and group-level changes that occur as a result of continuous contact with another cultural group (e.g., Berry, 2003; Graves 1967; Padilla, 1980; Kim & Abreu, 2001). The current study supports previous findings and extends the current literature’s capacity to explain and understand international graduate students’ experiences, especially with regards to the individual experience.

Findings from this research demonstrated that participants adopted behaviors that helped them to function more effectively in the new cultural environment. International graduate students increased English language proficiency, developed social support networks, developed a greater sense of appreciation for the new culture and their culture of origin, and developed a more pronounced sense of maturity and self-reliance. The development of adaptive behaviors is consistent with previous theoretical propositions and empirical findings that describe how individuals experience the acculturation process (e.g., Berry, 2003; Graves, 1967; Padilla, 1980; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978).
The findings of this research are also compatible with the explanation of the acculturation process that was proposed by Padilla and Perez (2003). Consistent with Padilla and Perez, the emergent model supports the role of pragmatism in behavioral and attitudinal adaptations to a new cultural environment. Participants acquired, or expressed a need to acquire, English language skills to function competently within the new cultural environment. Participants also indicated the need to develop social support networks as well as the propensity to experience a shift towards a more individualized identity. Participants also interacted with members of the new cultural environment to learn about social dominance structures and better understand the social stigma placed on various groups within the United States. These findings are supportive of Padilla and Perez’s description of individual changes in a new cultural environment, but this research also extends the capacity to explain the mechanisms of the acculturation experience. The development of greater explanatory power can be attributed to the presence of cognitive dissonance that appears to have impacted the participants’ shared experiences.

7.1 Cognitive Dissonance: A Driving Force in the Acculturation Process?

The key category, Cultural and Social Assessment, was characterized by the recognition of similarities and differences in the new cultural environment. Cultural experiences that were inconsistent with the expectations of the participants appeared to cause higher levels of agitation and distress than cultural experiences that were consistent with expectations. More specifically, participants appeared to become more distressed when they engaged or encountered behaviors, values, or attitudes that did not
align with their previously held attitudes and beliefs. This incongruence is emblematic of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), a well-established concept in social cognition literature that has historically been used to describe decision-making and motivational processes of North American (primarily U.S. and Canadian) samples (Heine & Lehman, 1997).

The application of cognitive dissonance theory remains relatively unexplored in international populations and is almost non-existent in the consideration of international students’ adaptation to a new cultural environment. Based on the work of Hiniker (1969) and Markus and Kitayama (1991), Heine & Lehman (1997) observed that the lack of cognitive dissonance research with international populations may be due to cultural differences in the conceptualization of self. Since Festinger first introduced the concept of cognitive dissonance, the characterization of the concept has increasingly emphasized ego management (Aronson, 1968; Greenwald & Ronis, 1978; Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992 in Heine & Lehman, 1997). This shift has made the concept of cognitive dissonance more relevant in decidedly individualistic populations. Members of individualistic populations emphasize independent thinking and identities that are at least partially distinct from other members of the cultural group (Triandis, 1996), a notion supported by Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) conceptualization of independence and interdependence.

Many participants in this study came from countries that traditionally emphasize a collective group identity, a fact that was made explicit in their shared experiences. When participants assessed their new cultural environment, they not only encountered a new set of cultural behaviors and norms, but they also encountered a culture in the U.S.
that placed a greater emphasis on individual identity. The new behaviors and individualistic orientation were, at least to some extent, incongruent with the prior cultural experiences and expectations of the participants. As participants interacted with the new cultural environment, they recognized that certain behaviors did not lead to the same results as those that they obtained when they enacted the behaviors in their culture of origin (e.g., methods of establishing and growing friendships). The incongruities between their expectations for behaviors and the consequences of their behaviors resulted in cognitive dissonance, a condition that Festinger (1957) indicated was accompanied by a negative emotional state. According to cognitive dissonance theory, reduction of the negative emotional state is a strong motivational factor. Festinger (1957) posited that there are three main methods of reducing the negative emotions that accompany cognitive dissonance: alter a dissonant element, identify consonant elements, and minimize the importance of dissonant elements. These strategies lead to changes in actions, beliefs, and/or perceptions of actions. In this research, participants demonstrated a propensity to alleviate the dissonance that they experienced by altering dissonant elements. For example, some participants who indicated that they wanted to speak English well (attitude) but could not do so (behavior), enrolled in classes to improve their English language proficiency. Other participants indicated that they felt insecure in the United States (attitude) but continued to interact with members of the new culture (behavior). Participants continued to interact with members of the new culture, recognized that inherent aspects of their culture were valued by U.S. citizens, and used that knowledge to alleviate the feelings of insecurity. Perhaps the most salient demonstration of the reduction of dissonant
elements involved the development of a more independent self-identity, evidenced by
the Individual Growth category. Individual Growth, one of the four key categories in
the emergent model, was characterized by four elements: increased self-sufficiency,
increased assertiveness, increased maturity, and increased understanding of self.
Development of these characteristics represents a shift towards the individualistic end
of the collectivist-individualistic continuum. This shift could arguably be motivated by
a desire to reduce cognitive dissonance, or more specifically cultural dissonance, that
arises when international graduate students from a collectivist group identity enter a
largely individualistic environment.

The interaction of cognitive dissonance, situational variables, and individual
variables continually impacts the way in which international graduate students identify
with their culture of origin and their new cultural environment. This research provides
evidence supporting the notion that it would be incorrect to characterize acculturation as
a static state that is attained once a certain amount of cultural learning or exposure is
amassed. The emergent model highlights the cyclical and incessant nature of the
international graduate students’ interaction with their new cultural environment.
International graduate students assess their new environment and demonstrate a
capacity to develop new behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes to function more efficiently
in that environment. Once they introduce those new behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes,
they reassess their situation. This reassessment leads to numerous outcomes including
continual modification of the behaviors or maintenance of the new behaviors. This
process of modification continues because of the ever-evolving cultural context,
introduction of new cultural information, and interpretations of that cultural information.

This study presented the first theory-building investigation of social cognitions involved in the acculturation experience of international graduate students. The research, based on an extensive review of participants’ responses to open-ended questions and follow-up interview questions, provided a thorough and culturally competent delineation of the acculturation experience. One potential limitation of the study involved the use of only one interviewer for the follow-up interviews. The research team leader, the only research team member with advanced training in clinical interview skills and counseling, was the only member of the research team to conduct the follow-up interviews. Observers of the follow-up interviews were used to help identify potential confounds, but it is still possible that experimenter effects influenced participants’ responses.

A second potential limitation of the study is the nature of the sample, which was composed of twelve international graduate students from seven different countries. This sample contains characteristics that impact the transferability of these findings. Of the twelve participants, no students came from the continents of Africa, North America, or Australia, and all participants were graduate students between 24 and 32 years of age. These factors undoubtedly had a unique impact on their acculturation experiences in the U.S.

A third potential limitation of this study concerns the perspective from which the research team leader approaches the topic of cross-cultural contact. Cross-cultural interactions are viewed as enriching opportunities that promote individual growth and
cultural competence. These sentiments undoubtedly influence the manner in which the research was conducted and may not be shared by future researchers.

Finally, the stated tasks of involvement in this research may have impacted the individuals who decided to participate. The tasks required international graduate students to report on their experiences in the United States in both verbal and oral forms. Participants with experiences that differed from the emergent findings may have decided not to participate because of the format, content, or forum for sharing their experiences.

After considering the potential limitations of the study, it must be emphasized that the emergent theory represents the convergence of common, shared experiences that resulted from this particular sample of international graduate students. Samples composed of individuals from different national backgrounds, age groups, or student status may potentially vary. The results of this study will be added to future research in efforts to create an increasingly robust foundation of knowledge and make necessary modifications to the model.

7.2 Implications for Future Research, Practice, and Training

The emergent model emphasizes a number of factors that influence the overall experience of international graduate students in the United States. These factors have palpable implications for research, practice, and training.
7.2.1 Implications for Future Research

As the first step in the research program, this study answered some questions and raised several others that have direct implications for the future of this and other research programs. First, the methodology used in data collection was very successful in providing participants with an opportunity to formulate well-developed responses. Written, open-ended surveys provided participants with an opportunity to precisely state, edit, and revise their thoughts. The follow-up interview sessions were also successful in helping participants to represent their experiences as precisely as possible. Use of this combination for future data collection should continue to yield a rich supply of participants’ responses. In addition to the written surveys and interviews, the inclusion of focus groups as a third data collection element may also be helpful in identifying convergent factors that emerge from participants’ responses.

Second, data collection focusing specifically on the various elements of the emergent model would aid in the development of the model’s descriptive, explanatory, and predictive powers. This should be accomplished by using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed model approaches. Existing measures of cognitive dissonance, language proficiency, social support, self-esteem, attribution, and well-being should supplement original, open-ended interview and survey questions. Measures of acculturation, heretofore limited in considering the totality of the acculturation experience, should also be included to synthesize a method of comparing and contrasting prior research and this newly begun research program.

Third, the expansion of this study’s sample is necessary to further explain the acculturation process of international graduate students. This expansion should be
accomplished through the recruitment of additional students that represent the countries
of origin for the participants in this study. Increasing the participant base will provide
greater robustness to the emergent model. Additionally, participants should also be
recruited from other countries of origin to make the model more transferable to other
international graduate students.

Last, the views that counselors, administrators, and educators maintain of
international graduate students and their adaptation to life in the United States should
eventually be introduced in the research program. Introducing such data points will
allow for assessments of cultural competence to be made and provide data for
institutional and public policy decisions.

7.2.2 Implications for Future Practice

Results of this research are preliminary and, therefore, do not provide specific
guidance on how to supplement current strategies in clinical practice. The research
does, however, provide tremendous insight regarding the individual experiences of
international graduate students. The findings of this research reinforce the importance
of cultural competence in clinical practice. Supervisors, clinicians, and trainees should
work to establish methods for becoming further informed of the changes that
international graduate students experience as they adapt to life in the United States.
Education of cross-cultural issues through continuing education courses, workshops,
and travel to national conferences will further equip the scientist-practitioner with the
knowledge and skills to deliver culturally appropriate and competent services.
7.2.3 Implications for Future Training

This research emphasizes the importance of understanding individual and group characteristics – knowledge that is as important to delivering competent service as understanding etiologies of psychological disorders and efficacious treatments. Developing appreciation, insight, and the vocabulary to discuss the needs of clients is critical to the overall success of establishing and maintaining helping relationships (Ivey & Ivey, 2003). The information and skills needed to become culturally competent is not, however, learned in a classroom or found in a textbook. The development of cultural competence is often acquired experientially. To become knowledgeable and skillful in working with international graduate students, trainees and program directors should make concerted efforts to create situations where trainees interact with individuals from diverse national, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, age, and educational backgrounds. Allport (1954) suggested that intercultural encounters promote exchanges of cultural knowledge and can rectify uninformed cultural assumptions. Creating opportunities for contact provides trainees with the opportunity to become personally and professionally comfortable in cross-cultural situations.

One specific method of promoting cross-cultural contact is the Multicultural Immersion Experience (Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997). Multicultural Immersion Experiences require trainees to become fully engaged in an environment that they perceive to be significantly different from their own cultural of origin. In ideal training situations, trainees live in community with the cultural group that they have identified as being different from themselves. Trainees engage in the daily experiences of the
community, contributing to the collective efforts of the group. Inherent in the training experience is also the notion that trainees relinquish their cultural identity, at least to a degree in which they will not impose their wills and values unconditionally on the new cultural group. The Multicultural Immersion Experience provides an opportunity for trainees to broaden their worldviews, develop skills of cross-cultural interaction, and, in general, become better prepared to serve the diverse client base they serve in clinical settings. To better serve international graduate students, departments should establish semester or year-long immersion experiences in foreign countries. This type of training could be effective as a component of a semester of coursework abroad or a standalone field research experience. In either capacity, the potential benefits to international graduate students in clinical, educational, and social settings, are significant.

7.3 Conclusion

Participants in this research shared experiences regarding their adaptation to life in the United States. The participants were eager to share their experiences in order to contribute to the greater understanding of the acculturation experience. Contributing to psychological research was meaningful to the international graduate students, but representing the views of fellow international graduate students was equally, if not more, important. Participants expressed a sense of continuity with fellow international students and exuded a sense of purpose in sharing their stories so that they could advocate for other international graduate students on campus at the University of Notre Dame.
In addition to having rigorous academic requirements, it became evident that international graduate students cope with many cultural changes and face a variety of social challenges when they decide to study in the United States. It also became evident, however, that international graduate students develop sophisticated behaviors and relationships to cope with the challenges of their new cultural environment. This research underscores the importance of continuing to investigate the acculturation process in basic and applied research. Better understanding of the challenges and strategies to overcome cognitive dissonance associated with cultural changes will provide counselors, educators, and administrators with the knowledge to effectively support the growth and development of international graduate students.
APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please respond to each item by checking the appropriate box with the mouse or by typing your response in the box provided. If you have any questions, please ask a research team member.

1. Male ☐  Female ☐

2. How old are you?

3a. Where were you born?

3b. What is your nationality?

3c. What is your ethnicity?

4. Martial status (check one):
   Single ☐  Dating ☐  Engaged ☐
   Married ☐  Divorced ☐  Widowed ☐

5. How many children do you have?

6a. How many months have you currently been in the United States?

6b. Have you been to the United States prior to graduate school?
   If so, when?
   For what reason?

7a. What is your native language?

7b. What other languages do you speak fluently?

7c. What other languages do you read fluently?

7d. What other languages do you write fluently?

8. What degree are you seeking at Notre Dame?
9a. What is the best estimate of your parents’ yearly income before taxes (please indicate currency used)?

9b. What is the best estimate of your household’s current yearly income, before taxes, in the United States? (Note: Household refers to you and your spouse or you and your partner if you live together)

9c. What was your household’s yearly income, before taxes, in the year before coming to the United States for graduate school? (Note: Household refers to you and your spouse or you and your partner if you live together)

10a. How would you describe your current school environment?
- I am the only international student in the environment
- People are mostly from the US
- There is an equal combination of people from the US and from other countries
- People are mostly from countries other than the US
- Everyone is from a country other than the US

10b. How would you describe your current housing arrangement?
- I am the only international student in the community/ environment
- People are mostly from the US
- There is an equal combination of people from the US and from other countries
- People are mostly from countries other than the US
- Everyone is from a country other than the US

10c. How would you describe your current social environment (e.g., church, clubs, organizations)?
- I am the only international student in the environment
- People are mostly from the US
- There is an equal combination of people from the US and from other countries
- People are mostly from countries other than the US
- Everyone is from a country other than the US

11. How would you describe the primary community in which you were raised?
- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban
- Other (please explain)

12. What is the highest education level obtained by your mother (or female guardian) and father (or male guardian)? For mother check “M,” for father check “F”:
   a. Elementary school ..........................  M[ ]  F[ ]
   b. Some High School............................  M[ ]  F[ ]
   c. High School Diploma/equivalent ..............  M[ ]  F[ ]
   d. Business or trade school......................  M[ ]  F[ ]
   e. Some college ................................ M[ ]  F[ ]
   f. Associate or two year degree .................  M[ ]  F[ ]
   g. Bachelor’s or four year degree ..............  M[ ]  F[ ]
   h. Some graduate/professional school ..........  M[ ]  F[ ]
   i. Graduate or professional degree .............  M[ ]  F[ ]
APPENDIX B
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Instructions: Please respond to each question as completely as possible. Note that the boxes will expand as you enter text.

1. How would you describe your experience in the United States to this point? Please explain, using examples if necessary.

2. Please provide a brief background of where you have lived by addressing the following questions:
   2a. Where were you born?
   2b. How would you describe your birthplace?
   2c. Where do you consider “home”?
   2d. Where else have you lived?
   2e. How would you describe these places?

3. Why did you decide to study in the United States?

4. In what ways have your experiences in the United States been similar to experiences in other countries where you have lived?

5. In what ways have your experiences in the United States been different than experiences in other countries where you have lived?

6a. To what extent do you feel you have control over the outcomes of social situations you encounter in the United States? What do you attribute control to in these situations?

6b. To what extent do you feel you have control over the outcomes of academic situations you encounter in the United States? What do you attribute control to in these situations?

6c. To what extent do you feel you have control over the outcomes of family situations you encounter in the United States? What do you attribute control to in these situations?

6d. How does your sense of control in the United States compare to your sense of control before coming to the United States?

7. How does your experience in the United States impact the way you feel about yourself?
8. What *has helped* you to become better at interacting with people and carrying on with your daily life in the United States?

9. What *would help* you to become better at interacting with people and carrying on with your daily life in the United States?

10. What *has hindered* your ability to become better at interacting with people and carrying on with your daily life in the United States?

11. What *obstacles have you overcome* that have helped you to become better at interacting with people and carrying on with your daily life in the United States?

12. How have you changed as a result of living in the United States?

13. Please explain any other significant experiences regarding your time in the United States that you would like to share.
APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, SAMPLE

1. You mentioned that you “could not imagine your kid growing up here and becoming something distinctively different than what you are (and that’s definitely what’s going to happen to him/her).” Could you talk a little more about that?

2. You indicated that no experience has been similar to your time here in the US. Could you discuss this a bit more?

3. In terms of differences between here and other countries you have lived, you stated “people have different expectations.” What do you mean by that?

4. You said that being here in the US makes you “feel that you can now do a lot more.” Could you talk a little more about this?

5. You mentioned that you “regard a lot of things important that were not important before.” Could you talk more about some of these things that have become more important?
REFERENCES


