PASSPORT TO CAMPUS: INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF CULTURE AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

TAMARAH Y. DIXON

DR. THALIA MULVIHILL--ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2014
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many individuals have assisted me throughout this writing process that the challenge to fit all of them on a single page is notable in and of itself. Without all of the support that I have received during this whirlwind of a time, I am not sure what I would have done. With each interaction, my enthusiasm and interest in this topic was ignited, and I very much appreciate all of the individuals who have listened to me ramble about my topic and endlessly prattle on about my successes, challenges, and desire for desserts as I worked through this project. In no particular order:

To my Family, you are an unbelievable support system who has not only assisted me through the process of writing this thesis, but also throughout my graduate experience. Every care package, Facebook chat, and phone call (even in the middle of the night) has been such a memorable gift, and I cannot thank you enough. You believed in me when I was doubtful, challenged me when I was uninspired, and were patient when I just needed to process through my emotions. Mom, Dad, Tiphani, and Tyler, you all have been my pillar of strength throughout this whole process, and no amount of thanks can truly convey my gratitude.

To my SAAHE friends and colleagues, you all have been an amazing support system that I could not have done without. Your willingness to sit and collectively “nerd-out” with me about research with as much enthusiasm as some talk about sports truly indicates the caliber of professionals we are all striving to be. From late nights chatting, to our shared new residence in the library, you have not only pushed me to succeed, but have kept the process inspiring, fun, and enjoyable. Thank you so much for all of your help.

To Matt and the Park staff, thank you for your patience, concern, and constant check-ins on my progress. I appreciate your willingness to excuse communication delays so that I could dedicate time to finishing my research. Matt, you were never far away with an excellent pun, or handful of peanut butter cups to keep me grinning all the way through. You and the Park staff have been so kind and considerate during this process that I cannot thank you enough.

To Dr. Mulvihill, thank you for all of your help in crafting this research into what it is today. You listened as I worked through research topics, narrowed them into themes, and finally produced it in a tangible form. From talking me through my challenges, answering my frantic emails, and pushing me forward with kindness and words of encouragement, you have truly been fantastic to work with, and you have inspired me to continue to actively pursue scholarship as a professional. Thank you so much for everything.
ABSTRACT

THESIS: Passport to Campus: International Student Experiences of Culture and Gender Stereotypes

STUDENT: Tamarah Y. Dixon

DEGREE: Master of Arts in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education

COLLEGE: Teachers College

DATE: July 2014

PAGES: 126

Female international students expressed heightened challenges adjusting to host culture because of new identity formation and differences in gender roles (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009). These challenges may be exacerbated by negative perceptions held by American students who have limited understanding of cultures outside of those found in the U.S. (Hsieh, 2007; Rose-Redwood, 2010; Zimmerman, 1995). The intersectionality of international student status and gender creates a unique student experience, yet limited research exists on this subject (Bigelow, Childs, Diamond, Dickerson & Haaken, 2000). By interviewing eight female international students at a Midwestern university, the researcher attempted to shorten the gap in research. Major themes connecting the female international students’ experience included expectations of gender roles, relationships, and indicators of cultural change. This research also offered suggestions for professionals in applying this research to practice.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities in the U.S. are made up of students from a myriad of backgrounds and personal contexts. As with the popular allegory of the snowflake, no two students are exactly alike, though many may come from similar geographic regions, hometowns, and socio-economic backgrounds. It is from this diversity of backgrounds that the college culture is created. Students, faculty, and staff members collectively create the environment in which students learn and develop. The existence of campus diversity is so prominent, a significant amount of research has been conducted to examine the types of students who make up the college and university population.

To accommodate this diverse population of students, student affairs professionals at institutions of higher education have created several offices for which students of various self-identified demographics can visit for assistance on related challenges. Examples include multicultural offices for students to connect with members of like-cultural backgrounds (typically domestic); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) organizations to support students through personal, social, familial, and professional challenges as related to LGBTQI identities and federal TRIO programs to assist students from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds, such as low socioeconomic status, or minority status graduate successfully. These resources are essential for students to successfully graduate, as they provide outlets for students to explore and express their identities. The vast majority of these organizations are catered toward domestic students, and international students are often lost in the shuffle of organizational opportunities.
International students make up about 4.6% of the U.S. undergraduate student population (Branch-Brisoso, 2009). Having international students on campus increases the cultural diversity on campus, and positively benefits the campus community. Students who engage with international students are more prepared to interact with members of a more global society, and have a more positive campus experience overall (Rose-Redwood, 2010).

The contrast of cultural identities among students at a college is exemplified in no clearer of a comparison than between domestic and international student populations. While domestic American students possess a significant amount of individual variance, international students come from geographic and cultural contexts distinctly different from those in the U.S. International students reported facing significant challenges associated with attending U.S. institutions of higher education, including how to view the teacher-student relationships, classroom instructional format, and even potential religious influence within the classroom (Gertzog, 2011).

Though international students have reported significant challenge with adjusting to culture in the U.S., it is important to note that the majority of research on international student adjustment has been conducted on international students as a collective. International students come from a variety of cultures and identities, and research does not leave room for within-group differences. In particular, the within-group identity gender has met limited exploration. Gender is among an increasingly popular element of discourse, and has been woven into many discussions about the landscape of higher education, student affairs and student campus experience. Gender is defined as a socially constructed set of norms associated with an individual’s sex (Thomas, & Society for Research into Higher Education, 1990). Like other diverse social institutions, college campuses can be a catalyst for the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. According to Harris and
Struve (2009), gender stereotypes for masculinity can be represented through dominant male figures on a college campus, and can have a tremendous impact on the culture of the campus itself. While many institutions attempt to maintain an environment where students are able to obtain equal opportunities in education, research indicates male students are more likely to be favored in classrooms and post-graduation careers (Thomas, & Society for Research into Higher Education, 1990).

International student populations have surged, but importantly, the number of female international students attending colleges and universities has also significantly increased. Female reformations of stereotypical gender roles have been occurring across the world. Female students have been pursuing education, leadership roles, and more direct opportunities to achieve excellence equal to or above their male counterparts. This push for female success has been represented through international student numbers globally. Between the years 2005-2006, 44% of international students attending U.S. colleges and universities were female (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009). As such, it is becoming increasingly more important to examine the climate in which these female international students are entering. Are the colleges and university atmospheres prepared for the leadership potential, drive and passion of the incoming group of female students, or are they continuing to support cultures where traditional female roles are expected? Their adjustment to U.S. colleges and universities are significantly more challenging than the adjustment challenges their male counterparts experience (Bonazzo & Wong, 2009).

Identities such as country of origin and gender have impact on campus experience, as outlined in the above research, and most importantly, these identities are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the interaction of these two identities can create a highly individualized experience, vastly different from the experience a student may feel with the presence of one of these
identities separately. As such, the interplay of these two identities may create a more potent experience of discrimination and oppression. This interplay of identities is intersectionality, and has a tremendous impact on individual experiences. Failure to understand the interplay between these identities can result in simplification of students’ academic experiences (Grant & Zwier, 2011).

**Significance of Study**

Considering the challenges met by international students studying on college campuses as related to social integration with American students, and the role gender (particularly female gender) plays on classroom and educational achievement in college, it is worth further study of how the interaction between both identities might change their college experience overall. Research indicates gender can play an important role in international student perceptions of campus experience, as students of different genders can perceive similar lived experiences differently (Bigelow et al., 2000). Female international students are reported to have more challenge with adjusting to a host culture because gender role expectations within their home countries contrast greatly with studying abroad and their host countries. Such information is particularly impactful when examining how gender might affect the interaction of international students with American students at U.S. institutions (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009).

Intersectionality theory asserts individuals possessing two oppressed identities experience a unique set of challenges greater than the sum of challenges each identity faces. In the context of this study, the challenges of international students, and the challenges of female students are different than the challenge of female international students. Female international students are known to have more difficulty adjusting to host countries than their male counterparts, as female international students also face identity development and role confusion in addition to culture
and transition shock (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009). Gender discrimination is often applied to female individuals; however, culture can also play a role in how discrimination is experienced. These experiences create an opportunity to more critically assess social justice issues, and how to assist individuals with overcoming obstacles (Symington, 2004). The limited research on the intersectionality of culture and gender suggests a need to close the gap in research and improve the experiences of international student populations, a population increasing in numbers, and importance on institutional culture.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how female international students interpret cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students within U.S. institutions of higher education where they study. Given female international students may have a more challenging time adjusting to host culture (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009), and the propensity for American students to apply stereotypes to international students (Rose-Redwood, 2010), the researcher seeks to determine what international students interpret as stereotypes, and how the application of these stereotypes affects female international students’ campus experience. The research will close gaps in existing literature focusing on the intersecting nature of culture and gender on international student experiences, and provide recommendations for student affairs professionals, faculty, international students, and American students. The following research question and sub-questions were established to create a road map for which this study was directed.

**Research Question**

The following research question and sub-questions guided this qualitative research study. After a thorough examination of the literature describing intersectionality theory as it relates to culture
and gender, the following question and sub-questions were designed to allow the female international students to describe the uniqueness of their own experiences, as well as find generalizations about how stereotyping behavior can affect college experience.

- **RQ:** How do female international students perceive the cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students?
  
  - What are cues female international students interpret as identifiers for culture and gender differences?
  
  - How do female international students view these perceptions as related to their experience on campus?

The initial research question inquires how international students perceive the cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students. Intersectionality theory is complex and can be highly individualized, especially when considering international students can come from a wide variety of cultural identities that can intersect with their female identity. By allowing the international students to determine how they perceive their own unique experiences with stereotyping as a function of their intersecting identities, the complexity of intersectionality can be further explored.

The first sub-question asks what cues female international students interpret as identifiers for culture and gender differences. International students do come from a variety of different cultures that are often vastly different from American culture. As such, each culture has its own set of beliefs and expectations about various behaviors. By requesting international students discuss their own awareness of culture and gender differences, the international students can indicate their own cultural intelligence and ability to adapt from culture and transition shock. They can also demonstrate understanding of host-culture-home-culture differences and
stereotyping behavior. An international student who possesses low cultural intelligence does not have the capacity or the willingness to be aware of cultural differences and may have negative opinions about cultural practices (Harrison & Bower, 2011). For example, an international student may encounter individuals from a host culture who value eye contact during conversation, but the international student’s home culture may dictate that eye contact is a symbol of disrespect. If the international student does not have high cultural intelligence to recognize the meaning of eye contact in the context of the host culture, the international student may interpret the action as being rude, or discriminatory. Allowing international students to describe their awareness of cultural differences ensures that the international student not only recognizes cultural differences, but can articulate what the differences might mean in the context of the host culture. This will assist in determining what specifically is stereotyping behavior.

The last sub-question asks how international students view these perceptions of stereotyping affect their experiences on campus. While international students may be able to interpret cues of gender and cultural stereotyping, allowing them to describe how these experiences have affected their campus experience overall assists in guiding future research. This question will also assist guiding student affairs professionals, faculty members, American students, and international students themselves in creating a more positive campus environment for international students studying abroad in the U.S.

The research questions provide the roadmap for how this study will be conducted. Importantly, knowledge of the researcher also provides further insight as to why this study was created, how the study was conducted, and the lens through which the data was interpreted. Providing this background information also assists in controlling for credibility, where the reader can understand the researcher’s attachment to the data (Shenton, 2007).
Researcher Background

I have worked with residence life operations in both formal and informal capacities throughout my undergraduate and graduate career, which ultimately led me to my final year in my Master of Arts program in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education. This unique combination of academic coursework and formalized professional work encourages me to explore the lives and motivations of students as they progress through college. In this capacity, I have had the opportunity to work with a number of students hailing from backgrounds similar to, and distinctly different from my own. Some of the most memorable students with whom I have worked have backgrounds most unique: international students. Some of my most cherished experiences and relationships have been built through the conversations, programs, and experiences I have had with my international friends.

I was unable to participate in a formalized study abroad experience during my undergraduate career, but as soon as I was able to take part in an international internship during the summer between my first and final years of graduate school, I quickly committed to crafting an internship that would grant me opportunities for cultural exploration and international relationship-building. Building my own international experience, I chose, and was accepted into Incheon National University (INU) in Incheon, South Korea. I had been to Korea a few times prior to this internship for personal enjoyment, and found I had a particular liking to my general experiences of the culture: friendly, and generally helpful people, a surplus of opportunities to practice my nominal knowledge of Korean language, all the kimchi and samgyupsal I could ever ask for, and outlets to express my rapt fascination with the Hallyu wave. This internship lasted far longer than any of my other trips abroad, and I went without the accompaniment of anyone with whom I was familiar. It was a complex, anxiety-producing, and challenging adventure that
helped develop a dormant interest in the way international students make sense of their lives on campus.

During my internship, I worked in the office of International Affairs where I assisted with international institutional research, observed institutional, and inter-office hierarchy, and assisted with community outreach programs. Though I learned a lot about some of the major focuses of international programs in Korea, I learned the most from my casual interactions with students and planting myself on a city bus and letting it take me around the city for a few hours. I spoke with students at length about their experiences at INU, their aspirations, and how they viewed international students attending INU. Korea is fairly homogenous in cultural breakdown—the predominant ethnicity in Korea is Korean. The INU international student campus population was generally comprised of Spanish students, a few students from the various countries in the Middle East, Austria, a student from Russia, and then me, one of two individuals from America.

I was the only non-student freely interacting with students and faculty in fairly casual settings though. I quickly learned where social expectations in South Korea are more stringent compared to American standards, where they were more lax, and where all expectations of social standards were completely contrary to anything other social norm I was accustomed to. I learned how to master using jeotgarak (Korean chopsticks) and a spoon simultaneously, how to properly serve grilled beef at a retirement party, keep my formal, and informal speech patterns in order, and of course, how to get from point A to point B using a subway-bus system combination. I had the opportunity to talk casually with several students about life in the U.S., which was fascinating. Most were interested in hearing about my perspective on New York City, New, York, and the general environment in California. Having been to neither for longer than it took to catch a connecting flight, I could only infer from stories I had heard. I listened to (and tried to
assuage their fears from) what life might be like in the United States, including language proficiency concerns, interacting with members of the opposite sex, and, interestingly, American perceptions of Koreans. As an American in Korea, my constant focus was how to denounce any stereotypes Americans, (moreover, African-Americans) might have from Koreans, including, but not limited to brashness, indiscriminate gun-slinging, hypersexualization, and the uncanny ability to know the lyrics and dance to, every rap and hip-hop song ever produced. It had not really occurred to me until then what fears these students might have about their own cultural stereotypes once they studied abroad from Korea to a university in the U.S. It was in my role as a residence life staff member at a Midwestern institution that I started to wonder about the conversations I was having with my students; listening to their fears, their perceptions of what life might be like in the U.S., and how to best get a cultural experience without feeling overly burdened by societal expectations.

A Korean female student with whom I was talking disclosed to me significant discomfort with interacting with members of the opposite sex. She was wondering if her generally flirtatious and happy nature might be perceived as overly romantic. Was it okay to be friends with male students? How would female students perceive her relationships with male students? She also disclosed a particularly interesting stereotype she thought to be true: African-American men enjoyed romantic relationships with Asian women, because African-American men perceived Asian women to be exotic. I hardly had personal experience from which to draw from (I identify as a heterosexual African-American female), but I did find this perception of perception to be quite interesting. I tucked this parcel of knowledge away, reminded the student learning to interact with others in a host culture was a wonderful part of the experience.
Leaving this conversation, my mind began to spin about the cultural perceptions students might face when studying abroad to the United States. If students were this fearful of stereotypes before even boarding the plane, what were their experiences like once they began their study abroad program in the U.S.? What did they perceive a Korean international student looked like in the American mind? I began a thorough investigation of the literature related to female international students and their unique experiences studying abroad, and determined a significant gap in the literature existed. This research project was subsequently formed to assist in filling the gap in literature, as well as determine what implications the findings might have on the student affairs profession, international students, and American students themselves.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersecting nature of culture and identity is complex, and can be highly individualized depending on how the individual experiences the intersectionality of their culture and gender. As such, the following literature review will highlight critical elements of the intersecting identities. To do so, the literature and interpretation of the data will be framed through intersectionality theory, gender theories, cultural theories, student development theories, and literature about international students’ experiences in the U.S. overall.

International Student

International students attend American institutions of higher education for a variety of reasons. Many attend to gain English proficiency, while others attend in an effort to gain cultural experiences (Chang, 2011). International student status can vary in a variety of contexts. For instance, any individual who has experienced stay in a country not of their home origin can in fact be a student, regardless of the presence of a physical educational institution. In the global classroom, the world in which the individual chooses to surround themselves is a classroom of sorts, rich with opportunities to learn. For this study, individuals who were participating in a classroom experience were chosen with the specific purpose of understanding what international student experiences might be like within the culture of a college campus. College and university campuses provide unique opportunities for cultural learning when they combine curricular, in-class, and co-curricular, or out-of-class, learning experiences. It is international students’ experiences in this area that will be explored. During this time, international students may attempt to positively acculturate into the host society, speak the language of the host culture, engage in pop culture, and historical culture of the host land (Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008).
Gender

This study focused on the experiences of female international students, and given the literature describing the role gender plays in campus experiences, it is worth studying the interaction of these identities to give context for what these experiences might be. The definition of gender has changed extensively throughout literature, and has incorporated a number of nuances. In an effort to contain the focus of the study, the following definition and assumptions of gender will be used. According to Thomas and Society for Research into Higher Education (1990), gender is socially constructed assignment of roles and assumptions, where differences in sex (based on individual sexual organs) are entirely socially constructed. Gender studies also encompass the study of inequality in some capacity, including jobs, power status, and how these statuses are achieved.

In a higher education setting, gender discrimination can occur within the classroom. Examples included instances where professors were less likely to read the work of female students, and female students were less likely to be hired for professional jobs. To accommodate this existence of gender inequality, female students may choose to switch between masculine and feminine characteristics in order to make themselves more marketable for certain opportunities. (Thomas, & Society for Research into Higher Education, 1990). Gender stereotypes in the U.S. generally dictate females should be homemakers, while males produce financial security for the home. In recent years, gender roles have shifted such that female individuals have taken on more stereotypically masculine roles, and vice versa (Spisak, 2009). For example, female students are taking on more leadership roles, developing more confidence, and taking on experiences divergent from what traditional gender roles dictate. This includes studying abroad (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009).
Research conducted by Harris and Struve (2009) suggested college campuses can also perpetuate concepts of gender and masculinity. Identifiable campus leaders (e.g., fraternity members, athletes) can influence how the concept of gender and masculinity are portrayed. In this way, it is important for colleges and university faculty and staff to be aware of the activities, backgrounds and cultures of their students and provide diverse faculty and staff as examples of appropriate incorporation of masculine identity.

Gender identity as expressed by international students is not a heavily researched area; however, some research has shown examples of gender identity in contexts abroad. According to Lehre, Hasen & Lake (2009), male and female students at a European school scored significantly differently on academic examinations. After a reformation of the academic grading system, potential gender biases were revealed, and students began succeeding at a more equal level. While the students surveyed at this institution were European students attending a European institution, it does indicate that gender bias is not merely a problem facing U.S. institutions. Students overseas are aware of gender bias in the classroom. As international students attend U.S. institutions of higher education, they may be aware that gender can play a role in academic success.

**Culture and Transition Shock**

Culture was described by McAnany (2009) as a set beliefs, philosophies, traditions, values and patterns of individuals within a group. Spisak (2009) further expanded the definition of culture, where culture was created by the human participation in the observed culture itself. In this way, members of the cultural body are responsible for creating, and shaping how culture is viewed. Because of the highly fluid and interpersonal connection to the formation of culture, there exist multiple perspectives of what critical elements of culture are. As such, it is entirely
possible for presumed members of a particular culture to harbor and internalize negative and distorted feelings toward their own ethnic groups as they are expressed within culture.

Furthermore, a single member of a culture does not serve as a representative of the whole culture. Such distortion of culture and ethnic expression is the result of myths, stereotypes, and it is important for those individual factors to be brought to light in an effort to dispel them. It can be difficult to bring about awareness of cultural myths, as some of them are ingrained in the U.S. education system when interacting with members of different cultures. As such, has become even more important to interact with care and sensitivity toward these issues (McAnay, 2009).

McAnay (2009) further explained culture in the context of individual identity. Culture is a summation of individual identities, the similarities of which are expressed as an element of a collective unit. Education is necessary to promote the transformation of individuals, as well as the cultures they subscribe to. In research projects where cultural context can provide information about an individual experience, it is important to realize how the individual perceives themselves in that culture impacts their experience. While some generalizations about cultural practices can be made, individual personalities and identities have significant impact on lived experience.

Importantly, international students existed within their home culture, but transitioned themselves to exist in a new culture when they studied abroad. The transition process between two cultures and resulting stress is called transition shock, and has produced a significant amount of challenge. Transition shock was described by Stoian (2009) as transition challenges met as a result of changing geographic or cultural areas of familiarity. This change in atmosphere can occur in individuals moving from one community, region, or country to another. Culture shock is a component of transition shock that focuses specifically the challenges met from changing
international cultures. According to Kelly and Moogan (2012), culture shock is a loss of signs and symbols new members of a culture experience during their initial stages of interacting with that culture. International students attending U.S. colleges and universities may not be aware of various social cues and expectations needed to successfully interact, and may discover the existence of these signs and symbols in unexpected ways. While the terms transition shock and culture shock have subtle differences (i.e., transition shock describes the transition process overall, and culture shock describes transition challenges as they relate to culture), both are often used interchangeably as they both describe a similar set of adaptation challenges experienced by those moving locations.

Most international students reported feeling lonely and isolated because of academic, social, and language differences. This transition can indeed affect academic achievement, well-being, and mental health, but international students rarely seek out services provided by the university. The lack of resources could be because of several factors, including preference to receive advice and assistance from close family and friends, or lack of familiarity with the various resources. Depending on the culture of the international student, they may or may not be familiar with counseling services or other services as an option for assistance with adaptation (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

Culture shock is a natural part of the study abroad experience that most international students experience when attending their host institution. Studying abroad does take a significant amount of personal energy and resilience. Willingly uprooting oneself form a culture which they have grown accustomed to and forcing themselves to quickly immerse themselves into a completely different host culture is not only physically, emotionally and cognitively challenging, it also requires the shifting of an individual’s existing identity to incorporate the identity of a host
culture (Zhou, Jundal-Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008). International students studying abroad at their host institution are required to weave cultural practices into their own practices to successfully function within the new culture. This charge may be especially taxing for female international students who are not only having their cultural identities challenged, but also their gender identities as well. Many female international students were taught to prepare for motherhood marry, or participate in other activities that promote nurturing behaviors. Studying abroad distracts from that goal, and forces them into a role of independence and leadership quite abruptly. They may have grown accustomed to, or even appreciated their home culture’s view on female roles, and may not be prepared with accepting the challenges of adopting viewpoints from other cultures on cultural practices and female roles (Lee, Park, & Kim, 2009). To successfully acculturate and ease themselves through culture shock, international students need to be resilient and build strong social networks with members of the host institution (Zhou, et al., 2008).

Interacting with members of the host culture has both positive and negative effects related to culture shock, including creating relationships with other members of the student community, or building positive relationships with faculty and friendships with students. Of course, the forming of these relationships depended heavily on the personality of the international students. Introverted students were not able to form friendships as quickly as extroverted individuals, and most international students relied heavily on formalized programs to build connections (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). While interacting with members of the host society has shown to increase academic performance, provide emotional benefit, and assist international students in adjusting to the new culture, interacting too frequently can potentially
invite the application of stereotypes held by the international student on cultural practices of the host culture (Zhou, et al., 2008).

Another notable element of culture is cultural intelligence. As described by Harrison and Bower (2011), cultural intelligence is the ability to adapt to different cultures. This indicates someone’s ability to understand differences in cultural cues to successfully function within the host culture. Cultural intelligence is different from language ability, as it is based in an individual’s ability to emotionally, motivationally and psychologically adapt to handle the challenge of learning to adapt to a new culture. Such examples of cultural intelligence might include knowing important elements of cultural practices (e.g., the procedures of a traditional Korean wedding, or understanding what family expectations are in Iran), having the capacity to research cultural practices prior to investigating them, or possessing general awareness and appreciation for cultural differences. Culturally intelligent individuals demonstrate willingness to interact with individuals within the host culture and adopt important physical and behavioral cultural practices. Individuals with high levels of cross-cultural adjustment might find it easier to adjust to the differing cultures, norms and behaviors found in the new host culture. This may include adding new behaviors and norms into their own previous beliefs. High cultural intelligence can also assist with alleviation of culture shock.

**Intersectionality theory**

A fuller treatment of this area of the related literature will appear in Chapter three; however, a brief description will be given here. Intersectionality, the guiding theoretical framework for this study, notes elements of oppression are not limited to individual identities such as age, sex, and race. Discrimination and oppression are represented through an amalgamation of identities interacting in diverse ways. Intersectionality was first explored
throughout the 1960s and 70s during the feminist movement, where women of color began to notice distinct differences between the representation of female oppression among themselves and their White/Caucasian counterparts. Race provided a significant difference in the experience of female oppression, presence of privilege, and life experiences. Failure to understand the importance of intersecting identities presented through discrimination offers ample opportunities for misunderstanding of student need, and over-simplified assessment of equity in and education (Grant & Zwier, 2011).

In the context of this study, intersectionality played a crucial role in understanding the interaction of gender and international culture on perceptions of stereotyping held by female international students. While modern views of gender identity are viewed predominantly through a U.S. structural lens it is important to recognize gender varies among cultures and among individuals. It is crucial then, for the narratives from the participants to indicate how gender and culture are relevant in their own educational, and life experiences.

**Female International Students Attending U.S. Colleges and Universities**

Students enter and exit institutions of higher education on a fairly frequent basis for a variety of reasons. For traditional students attending American institutions of higher education, this traffic is largely attributed to graduation, transferring institutions and attrition. The introduction of international students and study abroad programs lend a new perspective for which international students sojourn through this academic thoroughfare. International students are among a unique population of students within academia, and have increased in population over the course of the last several decades.

The post-9/11 socio-political political climate yielded tension between the U.S. and other countries. For a time, the U.S. was a generally unwelcoming environment for international
visitors (Chandler, 2004). As such, numbers of international travelers and students decreased sharply because of immigration restrictions, and perceived hostility. Interestingly, college and university protocols themselves were largely unaffected by the international-U.S. political climate, so when students were able to surmount the tightened immigration standards, they could enter colleges and universities without incident. International student admittance quickly grew back to its pre-9/11 numbers. According to Crocket and Hays (2011), between 2006 and 2007 alone, there was a 3% increase of international student enrolment. In fact, by the year 2009, despite the crushing blow to international admittance into U.S. borders, regular attendance numbers were back up to where they had been prior to 9/11 (Branch-Brioso, 2009). The number of students studying abroad has increased to over 150% since 9/11, putting the number of students attending U.S. institutions at over a quarter of a million (Harrison & Bower, 2011).

The swift stabilization of international student numbers can be attributed to one of the reasons why international students regularly enter universities. U.S. education is increasingly sought out in an effort to bridge international-U.S. relationships, particularly because international students are seeking U.S. careers and success attributed to the ‘American way of life’ (Crocket & Hays, 2011). Education has become an international enterprise. Institutions of higher education all across the world are encouraging students to participate in international and exchange programs, in no small part because of increased globalization in professional arenas. Globalization requires cultural proficiency, which is gleaned through international interaction through personal and physical methods. This means classroom and immersive learning are necessary (Andrew, 2011). International programs assist students in becoming more global citizens, where they learn to appreciate and accept diverse perspectives (Jessup-Anger, 2008).
This is true in both a U.S. and international institutional context. Experience with international students, and international relations have increased in preference for applications for both international and domestic professions. In fact, international experience has become such a commodity, international students made up 4.6% of the U.S. undergraduate student population, and contributes 13 billion dollars to the U.S. economy each year (Branch-Briosos, 2009). According to Crockett and Hays (2011), 2,500 U.S. institutions admitted students from 186 nationalities, where India accounted for 14% of all international students. Chinese students, followed by South Korean and Japanese students made up the next largest set of nationalities (IIE, 2007). Most popular courses of study were business management, engineering, physical and life sciences, social sciences and mathematics.

The increase in international students attending U.S. colleges and universities has led to an increase in attention of international student experience. Student affairs professionals are concerned with the academic experience and performance of students already in the U.S. Their experiences assist in recruiting the following cohort and cohorts to come. International student support is quite different from the needs of domestic students, and support measures come in the form of increased international student programming, international student orientation ceremonies, and international student-specific residence halls. Still though, international student attention pales in comparison to that of incoming-first year students. Most counseling and on-campus resources are reserved primarily for domestic students (Crocket & Hays, 2011).

**Female International Student Challenges**

International students reported they met a number of challenges while studying abroad in the U.S. This included language barriers, academic concerns, discrimination, finances, social adjustment, homesickness and career concerns. These stressors most often presented as physical
illness, loss of appetite, sleep, low stamina, headaches, and other physical maladies. Psychological concerns included anxiety, depression, inferiority, grief, and social withdrawal. Furthermore, when international students returned to their host countries, many expected to keep the relationships they fostered when they left, but many of the relationships were lost once the international students returned to their home countries (Crocket, 2011). Further examples of reported challenges included feelings of stress to improve their own language while having to compete in the classroom with native English speakers. International students found difficulty learning from a U.S. instructional style, compared to the instructional style at their home institutions. Compared to significant amount of group work, and oral presentations, international students expressed difficulty understanding how to be successful in the classroom environment (Bigelow, et al., 2000).

These challenges were reported in more frequency and intensity in female international students. Female international students also reported difficulty adjusting to the host culture, but their adjustment challenges were more significant in part because of contrast between expected gender roles of their home institutions, and their current roles in their host institution. In most of the reported international students’ home cultures, nurturing and caring were considered their primary roles as members of society. Pursuing significant educational endeavors such as studying abroad distracted from that role fulfillment which led to identity development challenges and significant anxiety (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009).

Social interaction was reportedly an aid to the challenges of living abroad, as it provided an opportunity for students to engage with and understand some of the cultural challenges they were faced with. Students reported this interaction allowed them to incorporate the host country’s practices into their own schema of identity. Students reportedly found that their
original concept of their ethnic identity was fluid and subscribing to an identity was a choice that could ultimately change the nature of their original identities and value sets (Andrew, 2011). This identity formation was particularly challenging for female international students, where there was significant contrast between identities acquired in their home countries and their host cultures (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009). International students from Asian countries in particular experienced more severe incidents of identity formation challenge, as students from Asian countries also had to combat stereotypes such as obedience, submissiveness, quietness, and subservience (Hsieh, 2006). Regardless of country, number of times attending the host country, or proficiency with language, students commonly reported difficulty interacting with staff, faculty, and interpersonal relationships with peers (Bigelow et al., 2000).

As presented in the above research findings, challenge areas with international students can be significantly impactful on their ability to successfully navigate through the host culture, particularly during their stay at college. Special note is given to the challenge of surmounting discrimination, and perceived discrimination based on race and ethnicity, which can affect educational success, health, and well-being. Americans often hold skewed understanding of cultures and customs, often as a result of nationalistic tendencies (Hsieh, 2007; Rose-Redwood, 2010; Zimmerman, 1995). Furthermore, American students often hold negative perceptions of international students’ English abilities, and these perceptions could have negative outcomes in international student experiences, such as depression, and lack of willingness to participate in class. This may hinder an international student’s ability to weave the host country’s practices into their own identities, which is a critical component of successful adaptation to the host country. International students who are not sufficiently acculturated may experience trouble communicating their self-images. They may feel uncomfortable building relationships with
individuals in the host culture, and may feel differences between their individual self-concept and the self-ascribed to them by American individuals (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). As noted previously, these challenges were exacerbated in female international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities, where their development of identities was significantly different than the identities they had grown in their home countries.

**Student Development Theory and International Students**

As students entering colleges and universities, international students are subject to development through college, just as traditional American students do. As Heggins and Jackson (2003) asserted, Perry’s student development theory and transition theory provide an important perspective through which international student college experience can be explored. Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) theory of development, noted individuals moving through their time in college do so through seven vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. While individuals may move through these vectors at different rates and in a different order, the goal is to move through all seven vectors to achieve successful development through college.

With particular focus on international students, Chickering and Braskamp (2009) wrote, “An essential learning and developmental goal—which we call global perspective—can be enhanced if it is further interpreted within the context of educating students to be citizens of a global society” (p. 27). Glass, Buus, and Braskamp (2013) further noted global perspective allow individuals to incorporate multiple perspectives into their development, which can assist in the development of a more authentic, interpersonal self. This development created the
opportunity to truly form an identity, incorporating college experiences into fundamental characteristics that make up their true self (Lee & Maguire, 2003).

International students may be attempting to develop their identity by moving through Chickering’s (1993) vectors, but the international students must do so by building positive relationships between faculty, other international students, and American students. They must also be willing to accept difference, participate in co-curricular and curricular activities, and engage in dialogue with others about culture differences. As with American students, international students must also transfer through various stages of development while attending college and universities (Glass, Buus & Braskap, 2013).

**Cultural and Gender Forms of Stereotypes and Discrimination**

Stereotypes were the focus for which to determine international students’ experiences with domestic students but stereotypes are often transformed into discrimination, which may be how international students describe their interaction with stereotypes. As illustrated by previous research, discrimination can significantly impact international student experience on college campuses. Interestingly, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, American college students did not report significant differences in their view of international students, or international populations (Lange, 2002). While 9/11 did not specifically have an impact of American students’ perceptions of international students, they still often hold negative biases about international students’ abilities with language, and discriminate them because of this. Given the impact of discrimination on international student experience, it appears as though the actual presence of discrimination is not necessary, but rather, the *perception* of discrimination needs only to exist (Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008).
Cultural discrimination can negatively influence international student perspectives, where they perceive themselves as having lower work competence and social efficacy. Such feelings can contribute to depression. Low self-concept and low life-satisfaction have been attributed to academic, relational, and physical difficulties (Reynolds, 2005). As Shammas (2009) noted in an example of Arab-Muslim, Arab non-Muslim, and Non-Arab Muslim students at a community college, perception of cultural discrimination resulted in their tendency to cling together as opposed to interacting with other American students. As was mentioned in previous research, interaction with other members of the host culture is critical to successful adaptation.

Discrimination by international student gender yields similar results, through a different pathway. Individuals studying abroad know only (for example) gender as it has been structured from their home institutions. Gender has different meanings across culture, and limited understanding of gender as a social construct could give them an incorrect or skewed perspective of what gender means and how it is formed. Gender identity is formed through a variety of contexts, and can include an individual’s gender, race, and sexual orientation. Study abroad experiences might cause a student (when presented with experiences outside of their own) to truly examine their own identities, and what those identities mean to them (Jessup-Anger, 2008). Furthermore, female students studying abroad face compounded instances of culture and gender stereotyping, where stereotypical female behaviors such as obedience and submissiveness, and nurturing contrast leadership and determination often attributed to studying abroad. Combating these stereotypes has caused significant strain on female international students (Hsieh, 2006; Lee, Park & Kim, 2009).

Limited research exists on the specific roles gender discrimination plays on international students studying abroad in the U.S., so for illustrative purposes, American students studying
abroad in international cultures are used as a reference point. According to Jessup-Anger (2008), research suggested American female students might find it more difficult to explore their gender identities in other countries with perception of harassment by perceptibly male individuals in their host countries. When studied, American students perceived their experiences would be different if they were of male gender. Because of emotional homesickness, and home American students studying abroad perceived emotional homesickness, intolerance of food, and negative relationships with other females on the trip were more common in women. Females also reported feeling pressure and intimidation by the male faculty members, as they perceived female faculty members to be more understanding and nurturing. Male students felt a duty to protect the female members of the tour group, and were even encouraged to do so by some of the faculty facilitators (Jessup-Anger 2008). A few countries were mentioned as having particularly strong relational differences when presented with gender. For example, in a study on Korean international students, male Korean students reportedly adapted better when other Korean male students were present within their academic majors (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009).

While studying abroad has led to positive results in female international students such as feelings of self-confidence, creation of cross-cultural affiliation, and development of international networks, it is necessary to examine how to more positively contribute to the experience of female international students by examining the contexts in which stereotyping occurs (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009).

**Summary**

Institutions of higher education support a wide variety of students from diverse backgrounds, perspectives and needs. International students studying at U.S. institutions are among this diverse body of students, who offer a unique perspective with challenges that may be
markedly different from international students. Challenges of particular note include adaptation to the American culture, language barriers, and homesickness/cultural sickness. Furthermore, cultural discrimination may be a contributing factor to experienced challenges. While stereotypes and discrimination do indeed differ in meaning, international students may determine examples of stereotyping may include acts of discrimination.

Among pervasive identity challenges students within the higher education context face are gender differences. While colleges and universities are diverse social institutions where faculty and staff provide resources to combat female gender discrimination, students within them are not immune to discrimination practices in the classroom, or socially. Similarly, female gender stereotypes are not necessarily acts of discrimination, but instances of gender stereotyping described by international students may indeed be acts of discrimination. Research has indicated significant impact of culture and gender on college campus experience, specifically the impact of culture stereotype and gender. Female international students are more likely to experience anxiety and challenge with adjusting to host cultures because of the interaction between international student status and gender stereotyping. This study seeks to find the intersection between culture and gender stereotypes, and how these experiences have impacted international students on college campuses.
CHAPTER III

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter three will provide an overview of the guiding theory used to analyze the experience of culture and gender stereotyping of international students on college campuses. This chapter will also provide the guiding theory through which data was analyzed, review the statement of purpose and research question, as well as provide specific information related to data collection.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how female international students interpret cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students within U.S. institutions of higher education where they study. Given female international students may have a more challenging time adjusting to host culture (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009), and the propensity for American students to apply stereotypes to international students (Rose-Redwood, 2010), the researcher seeks to determine what international students interpret as stereotypes, and how the application of these stereotypes affects female international students’ campus experience. The research will close gaps in existing literature focusing on the intersecting nature of culture and gender on international student experiences, and provide recommendations for student affairs professionals, faculty, international students, and American students. The following research question and sub-questions were established to create a road map for which this study was directed

Research question

The following research question and sub-questions guided this qualitative research study. After a thorough examination of the literature describing intersectionality theory as it relates to
culture and gender, the following question and sub-questions were designed to allow the female international students to describe the uniqueness of their own experiences, as well as find generalizations about how stereotyping behavior can affect college experience.

- **RQ:** How do female international students perceive the cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students?
  
  o What are cues female international students interpret as identifiers for culture and gender differences?
  
  o How do female international students view these perceptions as related to their experience on campus?

The research question and sub-questions provide a roadmap for the direction of the research, and a thorough description of the rationale behind why each research question and sub question were chosen is provided in Chapter one. The following section will detail how the research was conducted, including the research methodology, and guiding theory.

**Research Design**

**Research Methodology and Guiding Theory**

The challenge of conducting research of this nature is in no small part because of the variety of cultures, identities, and individual contexts with which individual participants subscribe to. The very participants have traveled to the U.S. from countries vastly different from one another, and from the U.S. Within those countries, individual participants maintain identity both woven into and separate from general cultural features of those international countries.

**Phenomenology.** Given these considerations, this study is qualitative and phenomenological in nature. A phenomenological study examines commonalities in lived experiences of individuals as they have gone through a specific phenomenon. The phenomenon that individuals can
experience can vary, such as insomnia, fatigue, or participating in a certain class. In this case, the phenomenon being studied is studying abroad to a U.S. university. Phenomenological studies allow the participants to explain why they experienced the phenomenon and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2007).

Important characteristics of phenomenological studies includes finding commonalities between individual experiences of the phenomenon by using a participant pool ranging from three to fifteen individuals, depending on the phenomenon being studied. In this instance, eight female international students who experienced the phenomenon of international study at a Midwestern university were studied. Phenomenological studies may also involve the researcher in some capacity to demonstrate their own involvement and connection to the study. This is helpful for the reader to determine author trustworthiness, and connection to the material (Creswell, 2007). The researcher background section and discussion on trustworthiness throughout chapter III will assist in clarifying the researcher’s personal involvement with the study.

Lastly, phenomenological studies involve specific data collection and data analysis procedures. To allow the participants the opportunity to share their specific experiences with the phenomenon, interviews are typically used. After interview data has been collected, the researcher will chose quotes, or other meaningful information from the interviews to allow show commonalities between participant experiences (Creswell, 2007). For this study, semi-structured interviews were utilized. This provided the opportunity to allow some uniformity among the interviews, as well as allow the interviewer the opportunity to implore participants to more robustly explain their experiences. Though the questions were tested on non-participating members of the group before they were asked of the participants, language barriers were a
significant challenge for several of the participants. This semi-structured approach allowed the researcher to use metaphors, and alternative methods to explain the questions. Furthermore, as listed in the data analysis section, codes, and themes were found from the participant interviews to determine what specific challenges female international students faced as described by the literature. It also assisted in closing the gap in existing literature.

**Intersectionality.** Intersectionality theory was developed during the Black Feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s, and describes how oppression is experienced with multiple disenfranchised identities. The identities this theory centered on was the unique sense of oppression felt by Black women that was beyond the scope of what either focus of oppression (i.e., racist and sexist) created (Grant & Zwier, 2011; Smith, 2013).

Intersectionality theory involves four central tenants: gaining understanding of the lived experience of people of color, seeking to understand the complexities of individual and group identity, revealing power, oppression and inequality, and promoting social justice through a holistic lens (Ireland & Jones, 2013). Lived experiences involve understanding exactly how gender and other identities create unique experiences for the individual by allowing the individual to describe their own stories and the specific ways in which the intersectionality of their identities are revealed. Group and individual complexities describe how the individual views themselves as a member of a specific identity in conjunction with their own unique experiences. Lastly, intersectionality as a means of creating better developed promotion of social justice includes examining intersectionality of identities to challenge social and political expectations. Legally, intersectionality has not always been a consideration in describing experiences of oppression and discrimination. In fact, existence of both oppressed identities could leave the needs of both unsatisfied in the legal system. For example, in 1964 after the Civil
Rights Act, all Black women hired at a General Motors Corporation were laid off. Plaintiffs claimed that the action was both racist and sexist (i.e., all Black men were not fired, and not all women were fired), yet the courts ruled that sex and race related discrimination could not be combined (Smith, 2013).

Beyond the legal sphere, research on the synthesis of oppression also lacked intersectionality as a focus. Most research on sexism used White females as participants, and most research on racism used Black males as participants. Research focused on separate experiences, but not how these two identities created a unique experience for the individual (Smith, 2013). Research on intersectionality theory increased since its development in the 1970s, where it started to encroach on other areas of ethnicity, diverse languages, economic inequality, and language differences (Budryte, 2013).

Gender discrimination is often applied to female individuals and race but language, sexual orientation, class, culture, and geographic location have often played a role in how discrimination is experienced. This layer of identities creates a complex experience of discrimination toward women, which is not as simple as to merely increase the burden of the experience of discrimination. It does not imply that one group has more privilege or victimization than another, but rather, the differences of these experiences create an opportunity to more critically assess social justice issues, and how to assist individuals with overcoming obstacles (Symington, 2004).

Intersectionality also allows the exploration of identity formation on a global scale. With international students arriving from a variety of cultures with distinct histories, social expectations, gender and the various layers of identity can be presented in multiple ways. It allows women from across the world to explain how the intersectionality of their cultural
identities and find strategies for improving human rights on a global scale such as the intersection of gender and ethnic nationalism. While discrimination is a founding element of intersectionality, increasing study of the role intersectionality plays in international experiences does not only benefit reduction of discriminatory practices, but also assists in studying international collectivistic tendencies, cultural differences, and the application of government policies that further marginalize individual experiences of oppression. Intersectionality is complex, diverse, and deep (Budryte, 2013).

Intersectionality creates such an individualized experience that is inherently becomes impossible to predict exactly how the intersection of two identities (e.g., international student culture and gender) will impact their experience. There is an underlying message of social change in intersectionality theory. Researchers can begin to use the individual stories from participants to begin searching for signs of how intersecting identities can impact campus experience. With knowledge of how intersecting identities play, policy makers, international students, American students, and student staff professionals can begin to make more informed decisions about policies, and assessing campus climate. Continuing research in this area can only increase international student acclimation to campus. It is critical then, for researchers to include intersectionality into research on human cultures. Posing similar questions to individuals of different frequently oppressed identities can indeed produce significant difference in answers and descriptions of experiences. Intersectionality must be treated as a synthesis of identities rather than an “additive” of identities, as the interaction of two identities does create does make the experience more meaningful and more complex (Budryte, 2013).

Intersectionality was chosen as the theoretical framework because it most openly promotes thinking differently about how identity and subsequently power are viewed. It allows
for the complex understanding of the intersection of identities, and how these intersections create
a greater experience than two parallel identities. This is critical for student affairs practitioners to
investigate as they attempt to create more inclusive campus cultures, as they can make more
informed decisions about how campus environments are experienced by students with multiple
intersecting identities. Furthermore, intersectionality fits very well in the qualitative research
design, which promotes individual storytelling to produce data that can be applied more
universally. Intersectionality describes how individual identities intersect to create complex
individual experiences. These experiences can then be synthesized to create a base of influences
impacting female lives (Symington, 2004).

Methods

The following section will detail the specific procedures used for data collection and data
analysis. This will include the population of students for the study, sample, and data analysis
procedures.

Population

The population of students used for this study were female international students from
countries of origin outside of the U.S. Inclusion criteria used to derive the sample included:
being age 18 years of age or older by U.S. age standards. International students often study
abroad after completing some or all college at their home institution, so traditional age brackets
of college student demographics did not apply. Participants must have also been in the U.S. for
30 days or more to have enough time to acclimate to courses and institutional culture, and must
have intended to be a matriculated student for at least one academic semester. International
students could have been from any country, so long as the U.S. was not their country of origin.
This assisted in collecting a wide variety of perspectives in hoping of finding some general
examples of what international students perceived to be considered stereotypes. As such, the following section will describe the sample that was obtained.

**Sample**

The researcher used selective sampling and "snowballing," as described by Bogdan and Bicklen (2011) to recruit participants. Here, the researcher visited common locations on the participants’ campus, and asked international students in the area if they were interested in participating in a research study recounting their experiences. These locations included International Center sponsored programs, and common spaces on campus. The Researcher also visited the “International Conversation Hour,” an event for international students to visit with one another and domestic students in an effort to practice English and make friendships with domestic students. The researcher collected contact information from these individuals, and sent subsequent emails to schedule times for interviews to take place. The Researcher also successfully recruited one participant through colleagues and domestic students who recommended several students who might be interested in participating. Through this method, the researcher was able to successfully interview eight students.

The researcher realized a significant challenge in recruiting participants was international student response to recruitment methods. Several students who desired to participate in this study brought along companions who were also interviewing. Potential reasoning for why this might have occurred will be discussed in the analysis section but the researcher will note given the small number of participants recruited, and participants’ tendency to bring friends, this behavior might indicate international student unfamiliarity with participation in research of this nature. Through these techniques, the researcher was able to interview eight students who attended their university as either undergraduate or graduate students. The sample for this study included
students from Tajikistan, Brazil, China (though one Chinese student was culturally Uzbek/Turkish), Taiwan, and Iran, and South Korea.

**Data Collection**

The following section will describe the sampling techniques and the semi-structured interview procedures that were used to generate the data. International students who the researcher was recruiting received an introductory letter from the researcher (Appendix B), and scheduled an interview with the researcher. The researcher set up a time to interview. Each interview session was designed to last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour (60 minutes), where participants engaged in dialogue with the researcher about their experiences as international student at their institution. After being briefed on the study, participants were each given an informed consent form (Appendix C), which they were able to read and sign. The researcher also briefly recited the informed consent form orally so the international students would have multiple opportunities to gain the information. After signing the informed consent forms, the participants were asked various questions related to their perception of gender and cultural stereotypes by American students (Appendix A). The interviews took place in-person in a mutually agreeable location. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews and offered the participants an opportunity to review the information, or “member check” the information (Carlson, 2010; Shenton, 2007). This allowed the participants to add or modify any information during the interview process, especially if they desired the opportunity to clarify communication challenges presented with the verbal interview.

The interview questions consisted of 17 semi-structured questions or prompts which were pre-organized and categorized by way of a priori codes developed from the literature review (Appendix A). Question section one requested demographic information (i.e., age, country of
origin, sex, length of time studied at their institution, and whether or not the participant studied
abroad to any other countries prior to attending their institution). Question section two requested
information related to the participants’ culture, (i.e., items the participant considered important
elements of their own culture, reason for studying abroad at their institution, any positive or
negative challenges experienced while studying abroad at their institution, expectations of
interactions with American students, whether or not the participant felt as if any stereotypes were
being applied to them on the basis of their culture).

An unanticipated, but interesting phenomenon occurred, in which many of the
participants brought along a companion to interview along with them. Some participants brought
them along in an effort to assist the researcher with data collection, and others brought them
along as a means of support. To accommodate the guests, the researcher offered to interview the
guest, as long as they met the inclusion criteria set forth in IRB approval, and completed the
Informed Consent process. In this way, the guest portion of the sample was derived by way of
snowballing techniques. During interviews with co-interviewers, the researcher asked the
questions to each participant in alternating sections. The researcher asked a set of questions in a
particular section to one participant, and then asked the same section to the participant’s guest.
Four of the total interviews were conducted in this method.

The researcher also gathered interview data through a recording device that experienced
significant technical difficulty, to the point the information could not be recovered. The
researcher used notes taken through the interviews, and was able to salvage much of the
information gathered during the interview, then used member checking to verify the information
was indeed correct (Carlson, 2010; Shenton, 2007). Some participants did not offer changes in
responses. Participants’ names were kept confidential, and will be described using pseudonyms.
**Data analysis**

This research is qualitative in design, where data is organized and gathered from open responses from participants. Data was analyzed through a priori coding, and posteriori coding (Bridges, 1997). First, the researcher found a few codes identified by the literature, such as challenges international students were most likely to have on a college campus, examples related to gender identity, moments when culture and gender played a role in campus experience, methods of acculturation, and elements of culture shock. Creating a list of codes prior to reading the transcripts allowed the researcher to get a sense of how to guide the international students’ interviews, should they deviate from the questions. The researcher was also able to ask questions for clarity on topics related to their challenges on campus to effectively utilize the participants’ time, as well as find points of connection through the literature and international students’ lived experiences. The researcher then critically examined each of the transcripts and member-checked interviews to determine more codes based on words used by the participants, and described experiences. Examples of a posteriori codes included experience of discrimination, interactions with faculty and staff, positive and negative experiences on campus and reasons for attending campus. These codes were then compared to the research question and sub-questions to find relationships between the research question and the data, and were categorized into six major themes. These themes were opportunity, power distance, cultural awareness, relationships, gender roles, and co-interviewing. Examples of how coding was conducted are presented in Table 2 and Table 3. When constructing Chapter IV where evidence of these themes was described, the researcher selected transcripts to illustrate how the themes were determined based on the participants’ responses. Chapter five will outline connection to the research, future directions for the research.
Table 2
A priori coding to themes examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information from Literature</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cultural intelligence (Harrison & Bower, 2011) | - Adaptation  
- Awareness of difference within a culture  
- Willingness to adapt to cultural practices  
- Knowledge acquired about host country | Cultural Awareness |
| Female international student challenge (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009) | - Identity formation challenges  
- Gender expectations  
- Experience of anxiety | Gender Roles |

Table 3
Posteriori coding to themes examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information from Interview</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “In China, females is not that outgoing . . . we keep silence to show respect when we talk with elder people” (Focused, Transcription). | - Female submission  
- Respect for older students  
- Respect in communication | Power distance |
| When international students came to the interview locations, many attempted to bring partners with them to interview | - Fear of researchers  
- Apprehension  
- Partnership | Co-interviewing |

Establishing Trustworthiness

To control for validity and reliability, and establish trustworthiness, the researcher has utilized the frameworks established by Shenton (2004) to ensure that the data was collected and assessed to present the truest representation of the findings. There are four Issues common in establishing trustworthiness were controlled for during the study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each issue will be explained in detail below.
Credibility

Credibility is the establishment of internal validity, where the test or assessment measures what the test or assessment was created to find. Methods to control for credibility include adopting research methods that have been proven successful in qualitative investigations. This means testing measures have been tried multiple times and have produced results that created the outcome that the researcher desired multiple times (Shenton, 2007). For this study, a phenomenological study design was chosen, using semi-structured interview questions. Phenomenological studies generally require interviews to allow participants to explain their experiences with a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The research study was designed to allow the participants to explain their unique experiences with studying abroad at a U.S. university as female international students. This method of data collection has proven to give the desired outcome of hearing the participant stories, as the critical part of the data collection involves the participants giving their stories through interviews.

Another important method of establishing credibility is familiarity with the participant research pool (Shenton, 2007). The researcher did have an abroad experience as detailed in the researcher background section, and did mention this to the participants in the recruitment letters and during some of the preliminary discussion. In this way, the researcher has experienced some of the challenges associated with culture and transition shock, and was able to handle the research questions with sensitivity. The researcher did notice hesitance of some participants to give information anyway, which may have been because the international students were shy, or unfamiliar with research studies of this nature. The researcher realized the importance of establishing trust with the participants early on, and this may continue to be a challenge with international student populations in future studies.
Lastly, the participants were asked to be honest during their interviews, and were encouraged to do so with the establishment of informed consent forms (Shenton, 2007). International students were asked to be truthful in their responses to the questions, and were also informed that any identifying information given would be removed from the study to ensure confidentiality. They were also informed they could remove themselves from the study at any time, and were also given an opportunity to review their own interviews after the interviews to provide any further insight they might want to add or change. The opportunity to review the information, or “member check” allowed the participants to see if their own words matched what they wanted to convey (Carlson, 2010; Shenton, 2007). This was especially important for international students who may have possessed challenge with language.

**Transferability**

Transferability is external validity, where the findings of the study may be applied to other studies or situations (Shenton, 2007). While qualitative studies involve small sample sizes, and may then create difficulty with transferring the information collected in the small sample size to larger groups, the inclusion of a future directions section and implications section can allow readers to determine where the findings of this study might impact populations with similar characteristics to those in the study. The researcher has also provided a section for future research, where research that follows can continue to develop the study to cater to individuals outside of this study.

**Dependability**

Dependability indicates whether or not the research conducted could be repeated to the same results. This measure of trustworthiness is challenging for qualitative research, where the data collection procedures, participants, and study design are all created to give a specific
snapshot of the participants in a moment, and assumes that different participants might give different results. Though this is so, some measures can be taken to ensure that the study can be reproduced to give similar results, taking into account the individual participants might change some of the results (Shenton, 2007). To control for dependability, the researcher has ensured that the design was strategically done. That is, qualitative and phenomenological design were studied and planned. Data gathering techniques were described in detail in Chapter three, and research was done on data gathering techniques to ensure that the data was done so in an ethical, standardized way. The researcher also provided an evaluation of the project throughout chapter five, detailing limitations, challenges, and effectiveness of the overall research study.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the perceptions of female international students have about the various cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students within U.S. colleges and universities where they study. Participants were recruited through two methods: firstly, the researcher requested interviews from female international students by attending cultural events international students frequently attended, or visiting other spaces on the college campus international students frequented. Secondly, the researcher used “snowballing” to request international students and domestic colleagues to recommend international students who might be interested in participating in the study. Through this method, the researcher was able to collect eight viable interviews. The researcher used member checking to allow international students the opportunity to review, add, remove, and modify the information given during the interview. Prior to the interviews, the researcher used the literature to guide a priori coding, where several codes based on literature were determined (Table 2). After interviews were collected, the researcher reviewed transcripts, and determined
more codes through a posteriori coding (Table 3). These themes were then compared to the research question, and further broken down into six themes: opportunity, power distance, cultural awareness, relationships, gender roles, and co-interviewing.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

After reviewing the transcripts, there were an abundance of themes found. A priori coding based on the literature review was conducted, and then posteriori coding was used to determine codes after reading through the transcripts. Firstly, each participant was asked general demographic information pertinent to the study, and some general questions were asked about their perception of the culture from which they came, and their perception of gender (Appendix A). The name of the institution, any relatives mentioned during the interview, or defining places were also removed or assigned pseudonyms to keep the confidentiality of the participant. This chapter will highlight important findings found in the transcript by listing the theme found, and providing examples those themes from the transcripts.

Participant Descriptions

Partnership: Partnership was a 22 year old female from China, who had attended her institution for three years. This student had been to U.S. institutions previously, as she had studied in high school and junior high school in boarding school. Interestingly, she described China’s culture as similar to the U.S. culture. She noted differences in food, but in general felt people were polite. She noted Chinese individuals believe in respect, especially between younger and older individuals. She chose to come to the institution as per recommendation from her professor, and was pleased to find this institution provided her with a significant number of scholarships to assist her financially.

Underdog: Underdog is a 28 year old female from Iran, who had come to her university in August 2012. She was a graduate student, and finished her undergraduate degree in Iran. Her time at her university was the first time in which she had studied abroad. Underdog described
Iran as a vibrant country rich with various regional traditions. Clothing, expressive dances, and excessive traffic were mentioned, as well as the importance of hierarchy between elders and the youth. She described Iran as having a rich, but tumultuous history. She also noted family and relationships were of utmost importance.

Focused: Focused is a 27 year old female student from China. She was in her second year of attendance at her university at the time of the interview. She described her home country as being very different than the U.S. The strongest adjustment was the difference between U.S. individuals and Chinese individuals, where Chinese individuals do not make eye contact as students do here in the U.S. She also very much missed the availability of snacks for sale in local street vendors. She chose to come to her university because her home university had established a study abroad program relationship with the host university. After some work with American and Canadian individuals at her place of employment in China, she thought studying abroad would be beneficial to her in her future careers.

Scooters: Scooters is a 27 year old female from Taiwan, who began her career at her university in 2012. She had been at her host university for four academic semesters at the time of the interview. She studied abroad in the U.S. before her time at her current university. Scooters mentioned Taiwanese individuals are heavily influenced Buddhism, followed by Tao, and Christian ideologies. Often, new couples, and families visit temples to provide insight on the success of relationships, and offer prayer. A wide variety of festivals and celebrations are also centered on Buddhist traditions and Lunar Calendar celebrations.

Minority: Minority is a 19 year old female from China; however, she also provided a glimpse into cross-cultural relationships, where she is of a minority population in China--Uzbek and Turkish. At the time of the interview, Minority had been at her university for three months,
beginning her term at her institution in August, 2013. This was the first time she was in the U.S., or anywhere outside of China.

Participant 3 discussed how she is from the country of China, but her heritage is very much similar to Turkish heritage. She mentioned with some humor that even individuals from China often assumed she was from another country. She speaks Chinese, but her first language is Uyghur. She noted regional specialties in her area, such as seasonal fruits, dances, and special holidays related to the changing seasons.

**Finding Home:** Finding Home was a 20 year old student from South Korea. She had studied at her institution for two years, and had never studied abroad at any other institution of higher education previously. She had been to the U.S. for several years, as her family had moved her and her sister to the U.S. to study abroad when she was 13. She described South Korea as smelling heavily of cigarette smoke, and garlic. Several churches were near her, which were noted by several red crosses. She mentioned restaurants, mountains and water were notable landmarks. She noted female South Koreans were generally very thin. She noted an important cultural element different from the U.S. was when females were married, they did not adopt the last name of their husband, but were expected to contribute to family gatherings and holidays. Finding Home also noted Koreans seemed to be very involved in family gatherings, and were not as individualized as Americans seemed to be.

**Reserved:** Reserved is a 20 year old female from Brazil. Her study abroad term at her university began in August 2013, and she had been at her university for three months at the time of the interview. She had not studied abroad to any other country. She described Brazil as vibrant, and happy, where friendship, physical touch (e.g., hugging) and freedom were general elements of the Brazilian culture.
Extrovert: Extrovert was a 20 year old female from Tajikistan, who had been at her university for one year and three months prior to the interview. Her time at her host university was the first time she studied at an international school. When asked about what visitors might expect to see in Tajikistan, she mentioned respect for the elderly and family closeness were among significant elements of Tajik culture. Her culture is very strong with Persia’s, though they are not the same; it is an easy reference point for others to follow. Table 1 shows a more concise listing of the participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underdog</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scooters</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>China (Uzbek/Turkish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Home</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserved</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrovert</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes

After examining the participant interviews, the researcher found codes identified by the literature, such as challenges international students were most likely to have on a college campus, story examples related to gender identity, moments when culture and gender played a role in campus of experience, methods of acculturation and elements of culture shock. Creating a list of codes prior to reading the transcripts allowed the researcher to get a sense of how to guide the international students’ interviews. The researcher then critically read through each of the transcripts and member-checked interviews to determine more codes based on words used by the participants, and described experiences. Examples of a posteriori codes included experience of discrimination, interactions with faculty and staff, positive and negative experiences on campus
and reasons for attending campus. These collections of codes were then compared to the research questions to find relationships between the research questions and the data, and were categorized into six major themes. These themes were opportunity, cultural awareness, stereotypes and discrimination, romantic relationships, gender roles, and co-interviewing (See Table 2 and Table 3).

**Opportunity**

International students studying abroad at U.S. universities often do so for a variety of reasons. While all students interviewed attended the Midwestern University to obtain some form of education, doing so enabled them to fulfill both social and occupational opportunities. Such information is necessary to set the context of the nature of their interaction with domestic students.

Partnership had this to say about why she decided to attend this university to her through her study at her present institution:

My piano professor and scholarship. I went to the high school and studied at Michigan, and he give master classes there. And he looked to be, a very um. . . he seemed to be a very good professor and he is. And, the school gave me a lot of scholarships, that’s why I came here. (Partnership, Transcripts)

Partnership discussed opportunities to learn and grow as an individual, which she would not have been able to do had she not gone to this Midwestern institution:

And since I meet so many people, my value can change too. And also, there’s just more, I feel that as I grow older. . . .I feel like I’m not as simple as before. Like, so many things come into my mind. . . .I have to be more self-controlled better on like time management
and I didn’t feel so in high school because in high school I did not understand how I could do that before. (Partnership, Transcripts)

Underdog described opportunities to come to the U.S. Members of Underdog’s family were professors who teach at a university in her home country. She chose to come because she felt as though she could not live in Iran. As a woman, she felt there was no future in knowledge, nor could she use it in any professional capacity. She noted in Iran, going to school would have been useless because of few opportunities for women. In Iran, she would not be able to get a job. In previous job search attempts, Underdog recalled being too blunt (as a female) during her interviews, and was not asked questions related to her academic and professional experience, but rather, how she practiced religion. She mentioned with enthusiasm she planned to stay in the U.S. forever. She had terrible nightmares she would not be able to come back to the U.S. after returning home to Iran. (Underdog, Interview notes)

Underdog’s transcripts were particularly interesting, as she specifically attended the Midwestern university for academic and occupational freedom, rather than any particular desire to acculturate into the U.S. culture. In this arena, acculturation was not a focus, but rather a secondary experience coupled with her desire to study. Underdog was very focused on learning and being able to work, so her interactions with American students were limited to in-class interactions and a few co-curricular activities she was willing to participate in. As further transcripts are provided, it is important to note her educational goals when interpreting her views on experiences of cultural and gender stereotyping.

Focused was similar in intent as Underdog, where she too interacted with students as an unexpected byproduct of the department she worked in. She noted:
Actually, in my department, I am the only Chinese student so I have no choice [to interact with American students], I can only...at the first time, I can only hang out with American students. That is a good chance for me to feel American culture and begin to know what they like, um...but after a while, maybe one year, I also begin to hang out with Chinese students because we need help with each other. Some students when they just come here, I can remember the first time I came here, I feel helpless, so we help them to get into American life so, I now, I think I pay much more time with Chinese students now.

(Focused, Transcripts)

Focused had not initially come to the U.S. to learn to interact with students, but embraced this opportunity when she felt she had no other choice, and when Chinese students also began to interact with her. Scooters also shared the opportunities she was afforded coming to the U.S. She was able to attend the Midwestern university because her father had studied in the U.S., and her father’s professor’s friend suggested Scooters also prepare to attend. Scooters also desired to learn more English, experience a more diverse arena in the U.S., and make friends from different universities both in the U.S. and from other countries. The reason she felt compelled to study abroad in the first place was because from her perspective, those who studied abroad were generally perceived better in Taiwan. She reflected on the experience of some of her colleagues, and noted even students who studied at prestigious universities in Taiwan did not get jobs. Socially, it was an expectation students study abroad if Taiwanese individuals wanted to have successful careers. This perspective is valuable because unlike Underdog’s experience, she entered the U.S. for far less restricted opportunities, and may have felt more at ease to interact with domestic students.
Minority responded to questions about her reasoning for studying at her current institution by stating she, “Wanted to improve English and learn” (Minority, transcripts). In this instance, Minority expressed a general willingness to learn. During the interview, she seemed excited to talk about her time at her current institution, signifying an internal interest in learning both academically, and from students around on campus. Cultural exchange seemed to be particularly meaningful to her, despite her few words. Highlighted here, Minority was among students who felt that studying abroad enabled her more opportunity to learn scholastically, and interact with American students.

Reserved was very quiet throughout the majority of the interview, and had few words to say about her study abroad reasoning. She mentioned her government in Brazil chose where she would study. She sent in an application to be able to study in the U.S., and the government was able to choose where she was to spend her time studying. She was not sure why her current institution was chosen, but seemed to enjoy being there. While Reserved did want to study abroad, she did not have much of a choice in which university she would attend. Her academic path was not tremendously altered because of the school, so she had more potential to interact with students as well.

Finding home had perhaps, one of the most unique perspectives, as her family dictated this need for opportunity:

Everyone in Korea is really, really smart, and they like to compete a lot. And I mean, it has to be competitive because not a lot of people get to go to college . . . My parents wanted us to have more opportunities and have better education and not worry so much about competing with others. Um, I don’t know, really stress about good grades, so I think that was good. (Finding Home, Transcripts)
While Finding Home expressed her reasoning for coming to the U.S. was vested in the need to avoid competition present in the academic structure of South Korea, she did not seem bitter at all about this experience. In fact, she seemed quite keen to the idea of coming to the U.S. to focus on her studies here. She spent a significant amount of time in the U.S. previously, which afforded her ample opportunities to interact with domestic students, and describe her experiences with stereotype and gender.

Reserved seemed pleased to be studying abroad, but perceived no discernible opportunities to be available. Extrovert, conversely, had always planned to go abroad with the specific purpose of learning about American culture. Extrovert discussed ample opportunities to socialize create associations with organizations on camps, and advised other international students who studied abroad in the U.S. to take advantage of opportunities to build connections with other students outside of their home countries. Extrovert seemed to study abroad with the purpose of learning about culture. She noted she had a significant amount of acquaintances from several countries all around the world, and enjoyed finding these relationships. This perspective is notable, as it illustrates the amount of interaction she had with individuals from different cultures and genders, to which she had opportunities to realize potential areas for stereotyping.

**Power Distance**

Power distance was an interesting and unexpected theme expressed several times throughout the interviews, in both interactions with individuals inside and outside of the participants’ countries of origin. Power distance is the understanding that there are differences in the distribution of power among members of a group, culture, or community. In contexts with low power distance, group hierarchy is limited, where members of the group converse for decision making and task management on a more equal level. High power distance arenas
generally indicate that there is significant hierarchy between members of a group or culture, where subordinates have a specific role, generally through the direction of those with more power. Depending on cultural practices, high power distance can be a desired trait, but in general, the U.S. is considered a low power-distance culture (Paulus, Bichelmeyer, Malopinsky, Pereira & Rastogi, 2005). Power distance was described through a variety of situations.

Partnership and Minority did not offer any commentary on the matter, but Focused did describe how her Chinese cultural norms related to hierarchy made it difficult to interact with students in the host culture. Focused said, “When I come here... I am not familiar with and cannot say to 'hello' to others. In China, females is not that outgoing... we keep silence to show respect when we talk with elder people” (Focused, Transcripts).

Focused alluded to the existence of a power distance relationship with older members of society, and with female members of society. She noted that Chinese females generally behave in a more reserved manner than their male counterparts in an effort to show respect. She felt intimidated by status as well, as though she was more comfortable with female faculty members, she was hesitant to interact with them because of the power distance between student and professor. She explained her role in Chinese society was significantly different than her role in American society, and coming to the U.S. has assisted her in learning to be more outspoken about her preferences in day-to-day interactions. This example of power distance seems to also be a function of gender roles in China.

Underdog noted existence of power distance related to family structure in Iran versus family structure in the U.S. Underdog mentioned when she sat with family, family members talked with one another more often than she observed in the U.S. There was a distinct hierarchy with older individuals in Iran that was also not present in the U.S. Underdog noted, “The way
that you are supposed to speak is different than casual. There are important, different ways of addressing older family members with language. Language becomes significantly more formal” (Underdog, Transcripts).

Underdog also admitted she had difficulty interacting with faculty who challenged her skills. Underdog noted the hardest classes she had to handle were the courses she took her first semester at the Midwestern university. During her first semester, she felt very discouraged by a faculty member who she perceived to unfairly critique her capacity for learning. She recalled the faculty member encouraged her to take an easier course, and insisted she would not do well scholastically. Most notably, the faculty member compared her to the lack of success some the Saudi-Arabian had experienced during their time at the Midwestern university. Underdog recalled feeling discouraged and disappointed, and uncomfortable speaking up about how unfairly she felt that she was assessed. Underdog took the class anyway and mentioned with excitement that she did excel in the course and subsequently became the faculty member’s favorite student. Here, power distance was represented through the student-professor relationship. While student-professor relationships are generally fairly high in power distance, Underdog’s feelings of discomfort were likely intensified because the power distance between faculty and female students was much higher in her home country.

Underdog later described how power differences might exist between men and women in Iran. She noted her experience would be different if she as a boy, but it would not be as much fun. She noted, “I have no desire to be a boy, because I believe in female power” (Underdog, Transcripts). She noted she would not have as many restrictions as a boy. She would be able to walk anywhere in Iran without covering her hair, and was happy she did not have to do so here. She mentioned plans to stay in the U.S. to continue to take advantage of her freedom.
This glimpse into Underdog’s perception of power again provides context for the nature of her interactions with domestic students. In the above listed example of the interaction with her professor, and her experience as a female in the U.S. compared to her home country of Iran, it is suggested Underdog was more likely to interact with members of the same gender that were around her age group.

Scooters described somewhat similar hierarchical differences in Taiwanese and U.S. cultures between ages as well. Scooters mentioned an important cultural practice included assisting elder members of society across the street. In the U.S., she noted it was common for people to ask before assisting the elderly, but in Taiwan, it was an expected behavior. Even Extrovert offered a similar perspective to those of Underdog and Scooters where respect for elders was paramount. In Tajikistan, she mentioned there were sets of words used specifically when addressing elder members of society, unlike in the U.S., where language across ages is fairly similar. Furthermore, the elderly were considered always correct, and could not be argued with.

Reserved offered an entirely different perspective of power distance and hierarchy. She mentioned Brazil supported a relatively low power distance, were Reserved described individuals as frequently happy, willing to take care of one another, and share hugs. Power distance in general was pretty low in Brazilian culture which primed Reserved for more interaction with American students. Reserved was very shy so her interaction style did not afford her the opportunity to interact with many students in the U.S. This supports important information related to cultural that members of a specific culture do not necessarily serve as representatives of the entire population, and behaviors are also influenced by individual decision making (McAnay, 2009).
Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness was a prevalent theme when participants were asked to describe their interactions with U.S. students. This theme described the international students’ awareness of cultural differences between their home countries and the U.S. Interestingly, most of the participants did not detail any specific experiences with culture shock, but they were able to articulate notable differences in the U.S. culture. This theme was important for several reasons. Firstly, it indicated international students’ ability to recognize the difference between cultural practices and individual experiences. As noted by McAnay (2009,) though individual people may be members of a particular culture, they may choose to express their culture in ways that are different than what the majority express their cultures. Furthermore, individual personalities and behaviors may also be very different than what general cultural practices dictate. Secondly, cultural awareness showed cultural intelligence, which is the capacity to learn more willingly about a host cultures. International students’ willingness to understand cultural practices in the U.S. on a deeper level than whether or not they liked a particular practice showed their willingness to participate in cultural practices, and truly understand why certain behaviors in the U.S. existed (Harrison & Bower, 2011). Thirdly, this theme provided the backdrop for how international students were exposed to, and determined the existence of stereotypes. If international were more willing to interact and explore culture, they were given more examples to experience stereotypes by American students. They were also able to interpret the application of stereotypes as either U.S. cultural norms, or individualized experiences that did not affect their opinions on their study abroad experience overall.

Partnership, expressed similarities between the cultures:
A lot of my friends would ask me . . . how do you think how China is different from the U.S. culture, culturally speaking, or what. . . I don’t feel people a big difference between culture. I just feel like people have common emotions and ways of treating each other and I really couldn’t think anything other than food difference and language. I feel although we may be from different cultural background, different countries, all mental things are the same. (Partnership, Transcripts)

Partnership also mentioned some subtle differences she noticed in culture related to communication:

American friends are more like open, like what I said before. I feel, even among ourselves, Chinese people . . . they were more shy . . . like, [Researcher], like I feel like you are very pretty . . . I feel like my friends in America, are more like, if they feel you are pretty, you are cute, you are smart, they will tell you openly. It’s like, very, very . . . passionate. . . . it’s not saying my friends in China are not sincere . . . they’re not as open as friends in America . . . we prefer not to criticize others in a very strict ways. Like if one is lazy, we probably won’t say ‘Oh you or Lazy.’ . . . We probably will go around like ‘Oh I understand, you have so many pressures blah blah blah blah’ and then finally reach the point. (Partnership, Transcripts)

Partnership’s insight was especially interesting, as she noted expressions between countries can come from a similar place of purpose, but are expressed in different ways, such as how to express feelings about others. Her interpretation of core human motivations indicates that she might be less likely to interpret incidents of stereotyping as U.S. cultural norms, but rather, individual opinions without negative intent.
Underdog also discussed cultural awareness as related to interacting with American students. She mentioned it was very difficult to interact with American students because they had already created relationships with other American students, and when they did take time to get to know her, they frequently referenced pop culture in their communication. From her perspective, it was very difficult to relate to popular cultural icons. She was fearful of reaching out to American students because of these communication challenges, but was able to do so in more formalized contexts such as participation in student organizations and volunteer work at the university international center.

While Underdog admitted she was not aware of students’ pop culture references, she also noted American students generally did not realize she spoke Arabic. She also noted American students either did not know where Iran was in relation to the rest of the world, or assumed she was from India. She has also encountered students who believed the Middle East was country rather than a geographic region, and found these mistakes to be both funny and annoying.

Underdog’s descriptions of cultural awareness were related to American students’ own knowledge of cultural awareness rather than her own awareness of American culture, her observation does match the research in two notable ways. Firstly, the observations as they are reflect the research that American students have a fairly limited view of international cultures (Hsieh, 2007; Rose-Redwood, 2010; Zimmerman, 1995). Secondly, it indicates her cultural awareness. Underdog mentioned she realized most American students did not know much about her home country, so she was prepared to have to explain where she was from, and was no longer surprised when she had to have these conversations. In this way, she began to acculturate to U.S. culture by accepting these explanations as part of a normal experience.
Focused offered her perspective on cultural differences through interacting with faculty in a host country, as well as academic structure:

I remember very clearly the first time I turn in my paper to my professor, and she told me she cannot understand what I'm going to write . . . . In China, our writing logic, you needn't point out what you are going to write in the first paragraph. You needn't do that. But what you need to do is give the conclusion. You can analyze it step by step, in the end, you give the conclusion, but here, you will be failed. (Focused, Transcripts)

Focused went on to discuss how this difference in academics, and disagreement with professors on how these papers should be arranged almost resulted in her poor performance of the course. Focused’s challenge with differences in instructional design is consistent with the literature, where international students felt significant anxiety about academics, and English proficiency (Crocket & Hays, 2011). Focused also mentioned her interactions with other American students socially. She described some social interaction differences between China and the U.S.:

When you walk on the street in China . . . In America, a lot of people slow down to look at you, but in China, because we have a lot of people . . . if you are not familiar with each other, they won't say hello to you, because they have really a lot of people. . . . When I come here . . . I cannot say to 'hello' to others. In China, females is not that outgoing . . . we keep silence to show respect. . . . Yeah, say hello the first time...so, I think that's a change I think. (Focused, Transcripts)

In this example, Focused again mentioned the propensity for female Chinese individuals to show reservation out of respect, but in this example, she discussed this tendency to be more closely related to cultural practices in China as well as power distance.
Focused went on to discuss how she might have interactions with American students, and discussed her opinions on these cultural exchanges:

I can remember clearly the first time I joined a party, and every um...I'm the only Chinese student, and all the others are American, playing a boring game...it's very...just guess people's names. I feel, how can they play for this game for a whole night? Ah, and they are really good at dancing . . . . in my culture, the female is not always dancing in the public anywhere. Another thing I remember, is. . . . when they [American students] laugh, I don't know why they laugh. Maybe some sentence from a movie they saw in a movie when they were young, but we never saw that, so we don't know why they laugh. (Focused, Transcripts)

Focused had other examples of cultural differences she observed from her interactions with other Chinese students:

I also know some Chinese boy, when they want to play basketball, they play at night. Because a lot of Americans are a lot stronger and taller. . . I know a lot of Chinese boy play with Chinese boy. They seldom play with American students. A lot of girls play with American girls . . . . Some students tell me they also think the professor thinks they're stupid because of language, but they think they are smart enough to study here. But they don't know how to handle these...how to get along professors. Actually language you can learn from school, but the culture you should feel by yourself. (Focused, Transcripts)

Focused’s account of Chinese students paying with American students indicates difference in cultures. While students from countries such as China are often smaller in physical stature, her notes about male Chinese students being fearful of American male students indicates
that lower rates of interaction might not just be limited to difference in culture practices. Differences in physical appearance seemed to be another area of challenge that these particular international students found difficult to become accustomed to.

Scooters expressed similar concerns related to cultural differences with American students, particularly in regard to facial expressions. Scooters described being afraid of speaking with American students because she could not decipher facial expressions. When she spoke, she recalled being uncertain about what certain facial expressions meant, and became very self-conscious about speaking, as she worried American students were not able to understand her. Because she was so fearful of communication challenges, she chose not to speak to American students at all, until she began making meaningful connections in the classroom. After surmounting these challenges with facial expressions, she noted that American students were perceptibly friendly, curious, and asked to know more about her, because, just as Underdog, few Americans actually knew where Taiwan was located.

Scooters’s examples of facial expressions are very much in line with the literature, in that international students often felt uncomfortable communicating with members of the host country, which could be related to culture and transition shock (McAnay, 2009). English language proficiency was among a communication challenge international students expressed having difficulty learning, but facial expression and other cultural cues are also elements of effective interaction with members of the host country.

Minority expressed interesting observations related to cultural differences, as her home country is China, though she is from a minority population of Uzbek/Turkish. She had challenges explaining to Chinese individuals in her home country that she was from China, so she very much understood the difficulty American students had understanding her country of origin as
well. Minority, stated, “American students find it strange that where [I am] from. Because sometimes [I] is speak [my] main language and sometimes speak Chinese” (Minority, Transcripts). Minority’s experience in particular really highlights the importance of understanding culture as it relates to an individual, and as it relates to the entire cultural community. As with many members of an international home country, members may be active participants in collective cultural practices, or may not participate in all because of personalities, or, in Minority’s case, multiple cultures that she is a member of (McAnay, 2009).

Finding Home spoke at length about differences in cultural practices from her home country of South Korea and the United States related to language:

There are some words or phrases that I would be able to say and communicate in Korean that I cannot in Korean, but I cannot in English, so when I am talking to someone, I can’t really express that idea to them because there really is no way of saying it. (Finding Home, Transcripts)

In this instance, language is also part of a culture, where proficiency in the language does not necessarily translate to full understanding of certain words and phrases in the context of another culture. Finding Home also found differences in the attitudes of American students with whom she interacts:

They’re sassy. I hang out with a lot of sassy people. They’re sassy, they’re funny, some of them are really loud . . . a lot of them really know what they’re doing. They have certain goals in their life that they really want to accomplish. . . I feel kind of like an outsider, because I really don’t know what I’m doing. (Finding Home, Transcripts)

Finding home discussed general cultural differences in American students’ ambition. She
felt American students overall were more outgoing than South Korean students and noticed the manifestation of this outgoing nature in her friends in the U.S. Taking note that there are always individual differences between members of a culture, the contrast in general outgoing personality traits were what Finding Home really found different. This area of cultural awareness indicates Finding Home’s perspective when viewing her interactions with American students. As she stated, she felt as though she was not as focused or directive in her own life as her American acquaintances, and may have expected Americans to view Koreans through a similar lens.

When Reserved was asked about her perception of American culture would be like, she noted she used to watch movies about what the U.S. would be like. She did not know what things were true in the movies and which ones were not, but was happy to express approval in how football games in the U.S. were similar in popularity as to how they were displayed in movies. Interestingly, she did note American students did not have any cultural awareness concerns about Brazil. Reserved may not have talked with many American students to have enough knowledge to learn. Most of her acquaintances were international students from other countries. She herself participated in some Brazilian cultural displays hosted by student organizations in an effort to inform others about Brazilian culture. Reserved had limited interaction with American students, but she did indicate that most of her cultural knowledge came from American pop culture. Portrayal of American individuals in movies is indeed different to true American lifestyles in some ways, so her view of examples of stereotyping might have been viewed through a pop culture lens as well.

Extrovert energetically discussed her experiences of cultural awareness. She did assume Americans would be focused on studies, and also thought she would make friends quickly. Concerning American awareness of Tajikistan, Extrovert noted most American students did not
know where Tajikistan is, and assumed it was a third-world country. Her acquaintances did not seem particularly interested in learning about her culture either. To gain some form of cultural connection, Extrovert mentioned telling American students her home country was Persia for them to really understand parts of her culture, though that seemed to confuse her acquaintances even more. She has also experienced students asking her if she was from Iran.

Important cultural practices she noted were differences in timeliness, where American students tended to be very punctual. She noted with some humor that punctuality in Tajikistan was not expected. If individuals arrived between 10 and 15 minutes later than the proposed time, this was not a problem. It was difficult to get used to. She also described enjoying learning about the American celebration of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Black Friday shopping. She also enjoyed American foods such as apple and pumpkin pie, and peanut butter.

Not only did Extrovert’s detailed descriptions of differences between Tajik and American culture indicate her awareness of cultural differences, it also indicated her interest in learning and participating in cultural activities. As was expressed through previous examples of Extrovert’s propensity to interact with other members of the host society, her cultural intelligence is quite high, and indicates that she would be less likely to allow instances of bias and stereotyping to interfere with her experience in the culture overall (Harrison & Bower, 2011).

Stereotyping and Discrimination

Each participant was asked to identify what, if any examples of stereotyping occurred throughout their experience at their host institution. Incidents of stereotyping ranged from innocuous to troubling. International students discussed stereotyping in relation to their culture as well as examples of stereotyping in gender. Furthermore, discrimination and stereotypes are often paired, as discrimination can be a direct result of perceived stereotyping. Interestingly, a
few international students reported instances of discrimination, yet all noted having a positive experience of campus overall. Partnership mentioned her process of relating with students at her host university:

I don’t feel they like, treat me differently. Like, I don’t feel like treating me oh because you are an international student we’re treating you differently. If there is difference, they’re more like very nice, they understand that I cannot understand...they understand my language barrier, they will like slow down their speech, their speeches, and they will explain to me...actually, like they’re nicer to me because I am a foreign student, because they want to make sure I’m part of them. (Partnership, Transcripts)

In this instance, Partnership experienced stereotyping as related to being an international student. Because she was not from the U.S., she found that students assumed they would need to speak slower and more deliberately. This example of stereotyping resulted in positive relationships with Partnership and her American counterparts. She did note awareness of the existence of negative stereotypes:

[American students do] not have a full understanding of the culture...Like, whenever my friends talk to me, the others say that ‘Oh China is booming now, and the economy or the whatever’s the market is great,’ or they will say ‘Oh the cultural revolution, and other things” and...they were asking me...are people in China free enough, like can we have freedoms, speech freedoms...can they like express their will politically, or are the politics strict or controlling?...I can get a little bit mad when people feel China is that way...I love my country. (Partnership, Transcripts)

In this instance, Partnership described American students stereotyping dated Chinese cultural practices of intolerance, and assumed that most individuals in China were similar to that
Partnership described significant frustration and offense with this stereotype. Interestingly, some of the stereotyping that American students brought up inquired if Partnership in particular felt as though she did not have freedom or opportunities, which was likely an inquiry related to her being a female in China.

Scooters, was also vocal about experiences of stereotyping as an individual from Taiwan. Scooters felt students often assumed she was Chinese, and often made comments about her eating dog, when in fact, eating dog in Taiwan is illegal. While she herself did not identify as Chinese, she also felt uncomfortable when others try to correct those who thought she was from China, because it made her Chinese friends feel awkward. According to Scooters, there is still some political tension between China and Taiwan, and making clear separation might make Chinese students feel offended. Scooters also mentioned feeling troubled when American students and she would participate in group projects, where American students grouped together, and she felt left out. Classmates were unfriendly toward her, told her that her face was strange, and were generally unfriendly because she was an international student.

For Scooters, it seemed as though cultural stereotyping surrounded her Asian ethnicity rather than any specific stereotypes related to Taiwan. She also provided examples of stereotyping that involved both Asian ethnicity and gender. Scooters felt that American males looked at her and other Asian females strangely. She thought perhaps American men had an “obsession” with Asian women. She mentioned she often saw American men with Asian women because they looked like certain animated characters. She herself had been compared to animated characters, and felt very awkward and uncomfortable about this comment. Similar to the research, cultural stereotyping and social interaction can create significant challenge and anxiety in international students (Reynolds, 2005).
Finding Home had this to say about stereotypes:

I don’t think...I actually don’t think Americans have an idea about the difference between North and South Korea. So every time that I say I’m from South Korea everyone’s like “Which part? Is it the Commie Part?” They ask me a lot about that, I think. Everyone has this idea that Korea is like this communist country, you know? (Finding Home, Transcripts)

As represented here through Finding Home’s story, she was subjected to stereotyping as a student from one of the Koreas. Distinction between North and South Korean countries was not well understood by many of the American students she interacted with though she did note overall, her campus experience was positive.

Previously, Extrovert mentioned she had to give American students a culture of reference to allow them to understand she was in fact from Tajikistan. The country of reference she used was Persia. After she made these references, she remembered American student saying a few Persian words, expecting her to know what they meant. Other American students brought up religion, and assumed the only text she had read until coming to college was the Qur’an, and inquired as to why she did not wear a hijab. Extrovert further noted American students immediately made generalizations about her religion, inquired whether or not she celebrated the New Year, or if women stay at home while men worked. Extrovert listed these experiences and was perceptibly troubled. From her interaction with American students, her religion seemed to be their only point of interest in her conversations with American students about culture.

Extrovert’s experiences seemed to highlight two points in the literature. Firstly, it exemplified the general lack of understanding of culture by American students (Hsieh, 2007; Rose-Redwood, 2010; Zimmerman, 1995). In this example, though Tajik culture is heavily
influenced by religious practices, it is not the only element of the culture. Secondly, the literature also indicated cultural and gender stereotyping. In this example, the American students stereotyped Extrovert’s Middle Eastern culture where women stayed at home while men worked, and general subservience. Extrovert recalled this experience with significant frustration, which clearly indicated a significant impact on her college experience when relating with American students. As highlighted in the literature, this type of stereotype challenge is met by female international students studying abroad (Hsieh, 2006).

Lastly, Finding home offered specific examples of the impact of the perception of discrimination. Focused described her experience:

There is a girl who is only Chinese girl in that...in her...in the whole floor, there is only one Chinese student. Once she open the door, she saw there is a plate with a one chicken leg. . . . she said she don't know how to deal with that, she thought it is some . . is not good. . . . I ask her whether she talk with her RA or her advisor or someone who can help you. She said that she never told others, she said that don't want to play with these people even American students, she doesn't know who did that. For a long time, she feels upset.

(Focused, Transcripts)

While the act Focused described may not have intentionally been an act of discrimination, this example reflected with the research where the perception of discrimination only needed to exist for the same negative perceptions of environment to be experienced (Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008).

**Relationships**

Relationships were also frequently addressed, and in most cases, significantly contributed to how international students perceived themselves in their host and home societies.
Relationships with romantic partners, family members, and friends required certain behaviors, which the international students recognized differences in expectations between cultures and genders.

Underdog discussed the relationships she had with her classmates at her university. Because she was majoring in computer science, a male-dominated field of coursework and professional work, most of her classmates were male. She noted with fondness most of her close relationships were with male students back in Iran. She recounted getting close with a few female friends in Iran, but she found that she was not as easily able to relate to them and their interests. Underdog recalled wanting to have deeper conversations in class, and then began to more actively pursue her relationships with male students in class. This in turn, led to her female classmates talking about her. This secured her in speaking with mostly male students. Interestingly, Underdog noted that once she came to the U.S., most of her friends outside of the classroom were female students from Iran.

Underdog’s relationship forming was quite consistent with the literature. She specifically attended the U.S. for educational and vocational opportunities, and thought little about really interacting with American students. As such, the relationships she formed were created out of opportunity and availability through the members of her classroom, which happened to be male. Personal relationships that she made outside of the classroom were female students from Iran, which is consistent with the literature. As Shammas (2009) noted, international students are more likely to associate with one another if they share the same status as an international student, country of origin, and gender.

Scooters found she was very uncomfortable talking with male students in general. She felt similarly about professors, preferring to speak with female professors. She noted she felt that
there was both distance and difference between herself and her male professors. Her assessment of relationships lends more insight into how female international students perceived their relationships with other genders. Scooters indicated she preferred to interact with female friends because she felt distance between herself and male students. Scooters’s experience indicates perception of power distance between herself and both individuals of the male gender, and professors. Power distance and perception of power between genders has had a limiting effect on her relating to others, which is consistent with the research (Paulus, et al., 2005).

Minority noted she had acquaintances with both male and female students equally. She noted making friends with males was a good thing because “boys are strong, and girls are always crying” (Minority, Transcripts). Interestingly, she also spoke about having more female friends than male friends. Reserved noted having a few American friends, with whom she usually cooked and went to the mall with. She also liked to participate in stereotypically masculine activities such as playing soccer and going to the gym. Extrovert engaged with friends of all types, which was indicative of her generally outgoing nature. She noted enthusiastically she had friends of all different genders and sexualities, religions and ethnicities. She exclaimed everyone had a different background, and she personally enjoyed being around a lot of different types of people.

Minority, Reserved and Extrovert seemed to be comfortable interacting with individuals from multiple identities, though all indicated the majority of their closest friends were female. While Minority and Reserved were more intentional with making relationships with other students, female international students did seem to gravitate toward those who shared the same gender (Shammas, 2009). Focused offered experiences with international students and relationships with American students on campus:
I hang out with American girls. I feel girls are much easier to express feelings. Yeah, boys kind of don't understand . . . . I feel like a big sister. So, what I do is help them [Chinese students]. Ah, I am also teaching [class] for this first semester, there are a lot of international students there, so the Chinese students know me there, so uh, that is the...so when they cannot go through the examination they will go to me. They will ask me a lot of questions . . . . I also give my experience and advice to them on how they should deal with professor. (Focused, Transcripts)

Focused discussed her relationships with other international students. Though they seemed to come to her for the purpose of gathering information on how to interact scholastically, the students who were attracted to her were Chinese. Furthermore, she noted having female acquaintances who were also American. Her experiences with members of her country of origin and with gender are in line with the research on this topic, where relation to others assists in safety and security within the host institution (Shammas, 2009).

Finding Home also gave excellent examples of her challenges getting to know people and form relationships. Though she had been in the U.S. for a number of years prior to coming to her host institution, she did remember some of those challenges as she attempted to relate to students:

Okay. Well, um...when I first came to America it was really hard because I was not fluent in English, and um, when I was 13, or 14 when I came here, and that’s when everyone is really mean . . . . And then once I made friends it was really weird because in Korea when you say really mean things to friends it’s okay, because it’s a sign of being friends. But here when you say something mean they’re like ‘psh, you’re so mean,’ and then walk away . . . . I really had to adjust to that and the culture . . . . In Korea when you’re friends
you hold hands, you hug them, and it’s really close. You go to the bathroom together, and things like that. But here, they’re like ‘you’re in my personal space.’ (Finding Home, Transcripts)

Finding Home had very direct examples of relationship forming differences between her host culture and her home culture. Relationship management was quite different in her home culture as compared to U.S. culture, where different actions meant the difference between close friendship and disrespect. Finding Home also described how her friendship demographics shifted when she attended her new university:

When I came to [host institution], it was really different because when I was in High School, we didn’t have a lot of Asian kids, so I used to hang out with a lot of White girls. So when I came here, there were a lot of Korean friends that I could meet . . . I started hanging out with . . . more Korean friends, so that was a really big change in my social life. (Finding Home, Transcripts)

The researcher inquired as to why she believed this to be true, and she explained:

Um...because once you get to college, that distinction of who you are is really defined . . . There are so many people that you can talk to, and you can make friends with, and then you know . . . who you are really similar with, so you hang out with the people that you can talk to and really understand, and hang out with (Finding Home, Transcripts).

Finding Home seemed to struggle with which group of individuals she most identified with, because she had grown up in both South Korea, and the U.S.:

I think it was...and I’m still trying to fit into both the American side and the Korean side, but as I’m growing up . . . I think it’s better to stay in the Korean community than the American community, because the American community is more . . . like, shutting their
minds in a way, they’re like setting their minds to the American way . . . I’m kind of more fitting into the Korean community more than the American Community . . . Korean friends are more welcoming rather than the American girls . . . when I’m with Korean friends, it feels more like I’m involved, like I’m part of them. (Finding Home, Transcripts)

Finding Home was similar to many of the other international students interviewed, where she made stronger connections with members of her own culture and gender, though she discovered her path of relating to members of the same culture differently than others. Finding home did not start relating with other South Korean students because she was fearful to participate in interactions with American students, but because she felt as though she did not belong with the crowd of American students after a time, and slowly started drifting away. Finding Home’s identity formation challenges may have had to do with her having been in the U.S. for a significant amount of time before attending college, so she may have been able to incorporate her South Korean culture and American culture more easily.

Gender Roles

Gender roles were among prevalent themes represented throughout the interviews. The researcher did ask international students if they would perceive their experience to be different if they were of the opposite gender (i.e., male) in an effort to determine awareness of gender stereotypes prevalent in U.S. culture, and of their host culture, but it also provided interesting information related to their own concepts of gender roles.

While Underdog, Scooters, and Minority did not provide any notable examples, other participants described how gender roles were presented in both their home culture, and in American culture.
Reserved discussed her friendships with American students. She mentioned friends from both Brazil and the U.S. told her she needed to stop playing soccer so often because it was a masculine sport. She did not elaborate on the subject matter, but she did note instances when her friends told her that certain conversation topics were not appropriate for women to have. She mentioned hearing American students tell her she should not associate with male students as much, or share opinions with them as openly because she was female, and felt uncomfortable interacting with male students in the U.S. Reserved also mentioned, “In all countries, it is easier to be a boy. Girls cannot do a lot of things, but as a boy it would be very different” (Reserved, Transcription).

Reserved’s experiences highlight some of the critical elements of the research questions regarding gender and cultural stereotyping. Firstly, she was found Extrovert noted differences in gender roles in the U.S., and found that she was unsure of how to interpret American students’ response to her study. She recalled that she was 17 when she arrived in the U.S., and American students regarded her as strange because she was so young. They assumed she was too young to be in the U.S. alone as a female. They asked her what her father thought of her being abroad. Extrovert also noticed when she walked past certain places on campus, male students would adopt American sayings, and greet each other by calling each other “Bro.” She also found that male Tajik students were interested in joining American fraternities.

Extrovert’s examples, described her experience of gender roles included appropriate behavior for young female students. While international students attending U.S. colleges and universities generally found difficulty relating to the often more relaxed gender norms, Extrovert provided an example where stereotyping in the U.S. was more strict than what she had expected.
Partnership also mentioned distinct differences between male and female roles, both in the U.S. and in her home country of China. She had this to say about gender roles:

So I feel like boys are more like gentlemen, I think that girls can be sometimes girlish a little bit and . . . very nice on the surface, and then when the turn back, they will ‘blah blah blah’ this bad thing. . . . Overall, I have more male friends than female friends, but the core friends, the best friends, are female. (Partnership, Transcripts)

Partnership also discussed the role of female students in China versus female roles in the U.S., and noted distinct differences in behavior:

Chinese girls seem to be more traditional and conservative, at least like sexually . . . I do have some American friends who are very, very great people, very great girls, but . . . they can have sex at such young age . . . in the environment I was brought up in, girls should not have sex before marriage, and I don’t feel that’s such a big thing here though. (Partnership, Transcripts)

Partnership further discussed the interaction of gender relationships. She herself had a boyfriend, and discussed how being in a relationship with a male student had altered her perspective on gender roles:

Girls in China when they’re in a relationship with boys, they’re more dependent, and myself too . . . but I feel like girls in America, no matter they in a relationship or not, they’re very independent. (Partnership, Transcripts)

The researcher inquired how Partnership might perceive her experience to be different if she had grown up as a male student, which was asked to determine their own perceptions of gender differences. Partnership had this to say:
With my Mom’s generation . . . more like men go off to work and women are more like the housewife, housekeeper in home, but now . . . . in my generation . . . we strive more independence no matter mentally, physically, or financially. (Partnership, Transcripts)

Partnership’s account of gender roles generally indicates Chinese females are more conservative than their American counterparts. Though she explained China was moving to a model of female power that was similar to the U.S., she noted several times that she wished she was a more independent person, which does fall in line with the research that indicates international students weaving in cultural identities into their previous identities (Andrew 2011). Furthermore, it illustrates the research describing how female students from other countries are beginning to embrace leadership roles (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009).

Focused noticed similar expectations for male and female individuals from China, where women depended on men when they were in a relationship, expected the men to purchase meals, and remain quiet as a symbol of respect. She learned that payment for meals was significantly different in China than it was in the U.S., where she discovered when she went out for friendly meals with male friends they expected her to pay for her own meal. As she talked about the differences in payment, Focused seemed to grow to understand payment of a meal was a cultural practice rather than a symbol of rudeness.

Focused further noted differences between male and female interaction:

If you [female] hang out with a lot of people, they should have some people say something you are not good . . . If I help you, whether others will think . . . I have a purpose. (Focused, Transcripts)

In this instance, Focused discussed an important implication regarding gender relations. In the situation described above, she mentioned male Chinese students perceived her to have an
agenda because she is friendly with others. While she has adopted a somewhat advisory role with other students given the length of time she has been with the institution, and some of the work she does in her graduate work, she is still concerned she is perceived negatively due to her gender. Culturally, this aligns with some of her earlier commentary about how Chinese women are expected to behave, such as being quiet, conversing only with those with whom they are familiar.

Finding Home discussed more formalized romantic relationships and some of the expectations as per the Korean culture. She had this to say about Korean marriages:

When you’re married, the girls are really involved in the husband’s family instead of your maiden family. So especially for like a traditional holiday you have to be at the family meetings, all the events and help out and do things. And she was telling me she was the worst daughter in law ever, because she missed the first holiday, and she’s not there to help out . . . It’s traditional for women to stay at home more than work, but now a days . . . the wives are working. (Finding Home, Transcripts)

Interestingly, a set of expectations for female spouses exists, which is not so unlike stereotypical roles for women in the U.S. Given the shift in women giving birth, as described by Finding Home, examples of women who contradict those stereotypes might be more common.

Finding Home further discussed her opinion on gender roles of American women she has interacted with here:

I feel that a lot of students, American students in particular have this idea that American women are more outspoken and louder than men, and I still do think that there is a stereotype of men providing for the family and women staying at home. (Finding Home, Transcripts)
As with the other participants, I inquired as to how she might perceive her experience if she was a male student, to understand whether or not she recognized differences in gender roles. Interestingly, she had the following commentary:

I feel like girls are really...I would have...If I were a guy, I would have been very scared of girls because they’re loud and they’re mean, and they have different opinions on everything, and they judge you a lot of times... Girls... do their hair, put on makeup, have this confidence when they walk out the door. (Finding Home, Transcripts)

Here, Finding Home discussed her own perceptions of female aggressiveness, and confidence, which might be due to her extended stay in the U.S., and predominant interaction with female students. Furthermore, this perspective may be a function of the negative experiences she had growing up with other female students.

I also inquired for Finding Home to expand on her experiences, if she so chose and she provided the following notes:

I think that a lot of Asian girls have this... have this um... they love superficial things. They like... they like expensive things. They’re not as real as American students as I’ve noticed.

A lot of American students, especially like, the girls, they don’t really care if they buy drugstore makeup, or a really high end brand. (Finding Home, Transcripts)

**Co-Interviewing**

While interviewing multiple participants simultaneously was unanticipated, it did provide an interesting slant to the previously found data related to international student hardiness, and cultural intelligence. As described in the literature review, cultural intelligence is the willingness of international students to attend cultures different from their own, and learn adaptive behaviors enable successful functioning within the host culture (Harrison & Bower, 2011). International
students who attended interviews seemingly indicate a fear in solo activities, and perhaps trace amounts of uncertainty with interacting with beings of the host culture. Furthermore, co-interviewing could be a symptom of culture and transition shock, as international students experiencing culture and gender shock have difficulty engaging with members of the host culture (Stoian, 2009). International students who desired to participate in the co-interviewing strategy were Underdog, who brought along Scooters, and Reserved, who brought along Minority. Partnership also attempted to bring along her boyfriend to the interview, but after discussing with her the exclusionary criteria (i.e., female international students), she willingly participated without his presence. International student interviewees did mention a constant struggle was to be outgoing enough to make international friends, so this tendency to request partnership could be related to this need for companionship during activities. Participants who did attempt to engage in co-interviewing were asked each set of questions separately, so each participant was able to form her own answer.

**Summary**

After examining the participants’ interviews, the researcher found cues identified by the literature, such as challenges international students were most likely to have on a college campus, story examples related to gender identity, moments when culture and gender played a role in campus of experience, methods of acculturation and elements of culture shock. Creating a list of cues prior to reading the transcripts allowed the researcher to get a sense of how to guide the international students’ interviews. The researcher then critically read through each of the transcripts and member-checked interviews to determine more cues based on words used by the participants, and described experiences. Examples of a posteriori coded cues included experience of discrimination, interactions with faculty and staff, positive and negative experiences on
campus and reasons for attending campus. These collections of codes were then compared to the research questions to find relationships between the research questions and the data, and were categorized into six major themes. These themes were opportunity, power distance, cultural awareness, relationships, and gender roles.

The theme of opportunity helped determine the nature of interaction international students would have with American students. Those who attended their university specifically for academic purposes (e.g., Focused and Underdog) had more limited interaction with American students, and those who attended with the purpose of meeting students from the host culture (e.g., Extrovert and Minority) were more willing and more prepared to interact with these students.

The power distance theme was revealed through posteriori coding of the data, where international students revealed significant challenges with power distance when relating with members of the opposite gender, and with faculty and staff. In most of the international students’ host cultures, interaction with faculty and staff was limited, so discussing grades or group projects with faculty was difficult for them to navigate. Furthermore, some of the international students came from cultures where interacting with male students presented opportunities for significant power distance, which made interacting with members of the male gender more uncomfortable.

The cultural awareness theme indicated international students’ ability to perceive differences in culture, and handle culture and transition shock. While none of the participants noted they experienced any significant culture shock, they were able to determine differences in cultural practices, where they were able to discern the differences between cultural practices and individual behaviors. This information assisted understanding the participants’ own
understanding of cultural intelligence. The stereotyping and discrimination theme indicated international students’ experiences with application of stereotypes and discrimination to their culture or gender by American students. This theme was the heart of the research study, and each international student was able to provide an example of how stereotyping affected them in positive and negative ways.

The theme of relationships provided information on how international students formed different types of relationships. In most romantic relationships surveyed, international students reported that females were generally more docile than males within the relationship, and they were overall more reluctant to form relationships with those perceptibly more powerful (physically, or in professional opinion) than they were. Gender roles was also a theme discussed, where female students highlighted their roles in their home institutions, and in their host institutions. As with gender roles, the female international students reported being generally more subservient in their host cultures than in the U.S. Lastly, co-interviewing was discussed where international students seemed to prefer to interview together. This indicated that international students seemed to find safety in interviewing one another.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the perceptions female international students have about the various cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students within U.S. institutions of higher education where they study. Many American students' perception of international students is gleaned from a skewed understanding of culture, which may result in applying stereotypes. The researcher sought to determine how the application of these stereotypes affects female international students’ campus experiences. Eight female international students from six different countries (Iran -1, Taiwan -1, Brazil -1, Tajikistan -1, China, -3 and South Korea, -1) were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were then analyzed to determine themes which were used to answer the research question and sub-questions. These themes were determined after condensing codes found in the literature and after analyzing the transcripts. The themes are: opportunity, cultural awareness, stereotypes and discrimination, romantic relationships, gender roles, and co-interviewing. As a reminder of the roadmap of the study, the research question and sub-questions were:

- **RQ**: How do female international students perceive the cultural and gender stereotypes applied to them by American college students?
  - What are cues female international students interpret as identifiers for culture and gender differences?
  - How do female international students view these perceptions as related to their experience on campus?
After examining the information presented by the literature and the transcripts, I will illustrate conclusions from this research project. Firstly, the general theme of the research question and sub-questions will be indicated, and then the literature and transcripts will be discussed in detail as to how the information supported or did not support the research questions.

Conclusions

Cues of Culture and Gender differences

The international students I interviewed provided plentiful examples of experiences regarding culture and gender stereotypes. Before discussing their specific stories, I will revisit the definition of culture, and the definition of gender. Culture is described as human participation in a set of beliefs, philosophies, traditions and values (McAnay, 2009; Spisak, 2009). Gender is described as a set of societal expectations ascribed to individuals based on sex (Thomas, & Society for Research into Higher Education, 1990). Female international students in particular experienced the existence of these identities simultaneously, where they experienced challenges through study abroad more intensely than male students studying abroad. Research showed that female international students had more challenges adjusting to the host culture because they had to face cultural stereotypes, as well as identity formation barriers where their roles as females were often different than female roles in their host culture (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009). The international students surveyed were able to discern differences between culture and gender in the host culture. Most international students indicated significant difference with appropriate interaction for power distance.

Power distance describes an unequal allocation of power between members of a community, where certain members are in control and others (sometimes willingly) are subordinate (Paulus, et al., 2005). Addressing older individuals seemed to be a theme among
Underdog, Scooters, Extrovert, Focused, and Finding Home. This power dynamic seemed to be particularly notable in Underdog’s story, as she had the addition of power distance and gender in her home country. As she described in her experiences in her home country Iran where she not only had to show respect for the older members of society, but also felt she was unable to be completely free due to her status as a female. There was also evidence of power distance when interacting with faculty members, and members of the opposite gender. I found that most of the international students interviewed were visibly uncomfortable when discussing appropriate behaviors with individuals they perceived to have higher power. Recalling my own experiences while I took on an internship abroad, the Korean students I spoke with were very confused when I mentioned that I had several conversations with the president of my undergraduate university, or had regular casual conversations with my supervisors. U.S. society generally supports low power distance relationships compared to other countries, so their surprise in these interactions was understandable. Still though, the existence of power distance between themselves and differently gendered individuals with the same power status did indicate that female international students struggled with taking on the new identity of leadership, and combating stereotypes of subservience (Hsieh, 2006).

In general, the female international students described female members of their own host culture to be rather quiet compared to their American counterparts. Partnership discussed other differences between cultures, where American students were perceived to be more forthright with their opinions than students from China. Finding Home brought this theme forward with her opinion of the interaction between American women and other members of society. She noted American women tended to be more assertive than male students in general. While there is limited research discusses female international students’ perception of gender expression at U.S.
institutions according to Jessup-Anger (2008). American female students felt discomfort in exploring gender roles during their own study abroad trips. The information provided by Finding Home contradicts this research. Though this finding of difference does contradict the information expected from female American students, it does support intersectionality as a guiding theory. While it is possible to draw generalizations between the individuals of the same gender, it is important to remember there are distinct differences between members of the same gender, where different identities, beliefs and ideologies are expressed in different ways. The lens through which female individuals can be viewed is multi-dimensional (Spisak, 2009). The differences between the research and the findings from these international students could largely be because of difference in country of origin, and these expected differences between members of the same gender.

Research also discussed the difference between cultures might produce significant stress on international students, such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Crocket, 2011; Reynolds, 2005), and that these experiences were particularly potent in female international students (Bonazzo & Wong, 2007). Partnership also noted she perceived international student difference between American students to be purely surface, and internally, everyone had the same desire to be respectful. While this information does appear to contradict the literature, Partnership likely possesses a high degree of cultural intelligence, which allows her to successfully integrate into the host culture and adopt some cultural beliefs into her own existing schema (Harrison & Bower, 2011). She also likely surmounted culture shock and transition shock, and felt accustomed to interacting with individuals from the host culture to make these conclusions (Kelly & Moogan, 2012; Stoian, 2009).
Notable examples of gender and culture difference were also described by Focused and Scooters. In general, the female international students described significant discomfort when interacting with members of the opposite gender. While Extroverted and Reserved both described having multiple friends from both their home country and the U.S. who were male, overall, they predominantly had female friends. Scooters even noted her discomfort with interacting with male faculty, which is consistent with the literature describing female international student challenges with interacting with male faculty (Jessup-Anger, 2008).

Furthermore, the participants noted most of their friends were international students as well, both inside and outside of their home culture. In fact, Finding Home noted when she first came to the U.S., she made a number of American friends, but when she came to college, she became more drawn to students from South Korea, or other traditionally Asian countries.

This tendency for international students to group together very much reflects the research indicating international student tendency to group together (Shammas, 2009). In this instance, international students liked to group together both by the shared experience of being international students in the U.S., and by gender. Her realization of her need to establish an identity within the context of college is also reflective of Chickering’s student development theory, where students attempt to find their own identities (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Interestingly, the international students did not describe feeling significant culture or transition shock. When I asked follow up questions during the interview about experiences with culture shock, most of the international students noted that they did not feel particularly shocked by differences in the home and host culture. Most notably, Extrovert was excited she had not experienced culture shock. Instead she looked at differences in cultural practices as opportunities to learn more about the host culture. It is important to mention that the international students
might not have interpreted the meaning of culture shock as feeling a loss for home cultural norms (Kelley & Moogan, 2012). With this definition, it can be concluded that the international student tendency to participate in co-interviewing might have been evidence of culture and transition shock. When I interviewed the international students, a few students attempted to pair up, and Partnership even attempted to bring her boyfriend along. While all of the international students who participated in this study appeared to be relatively adjusted to their host institution, it was likely that they had never participated in research before. Participating in an interview with a researcher might have unintentionally created power distance, and the international students chose to bring friends along to feel more at ease (Shammas, 2009).

Overall, international students were able to accurately identify differences in culture and gender, represented through examples given in their narratives. Specific examples of cultural differences between the international students’ home cultures and U.S. cultured differed, but all examples indicated awareness of those differences. Because the international students were able to identify the differences between culture and gender, they indicated cultural awareness. Most of the international students were able to give examples of differences in respect, such as assisting elderly individuals across the street unprompted, speaking differently to elders in their home countries as opposed to generally casually as in the U.S. They were also able to explain offensive behaviors, such as the chicken bone left in front of the Chinese student’s door. Importantly, the international students were able to clearly tell the difference between intentional acts of disrespect, versus differences in cultural practices. The international students were able to give their own examples of perceivable cultural difference, as opposed to the researcher assigning meaning to the examples for the participants. The examples provided indicated the sense of awareness international students have about culture. Because most of the participants
still indicated positive experiences living in the U.S., their understanding of these differences also represented cultural intelligence. In this way, international students recognized cultural differences but still attempted to learn through these differences (Harrison & Bower, 2011). I felt that the international students interviewed had a very strong understanding of cultural differences, and was personally very impressed with their resiliency and determination to persist through college despite challenging cultural adjustment difficulties.

**Perception of Culture and Gender stereotypes**

The international student participants were able to discern differences between cultures, which represented their ability to comprehend cultural differences, were not necessarily inherently negative. Still though, they were also able to understand examples of cultural and gender stereotyping. While stereotyping did not seem to negatively affect their campus experiences overall, most international students expressed experiencing some element of cultural stereotyping, which resulted in a surmountable, yet notable challenge with interacting with students in the U.S. Interestingly, the international students did not appear to have any notable examples of stereotyping as related to their gender; however, there appeared to be significant commentary on the matter when the two identities interacted.

Underdog described her experience being stereotyped in class as a Saudi-Arabian student, which significantly impacted her academic experience. While she did describe having to prove to a professor she was not unmotivated such as the select students from Saudi-Arabia the professor referenced, she did describe the conversation causing significant anguish.

A common instance of stereotyping throughout the interviews was the tendency for international students having to describe American students’ inability to perceive the location of their home countries. Underdog noted a large number of students assumed the Middle East was a
country, while Scooters noted instances of students assuming she ate dogs as part of her cultural practice. Scooters expressed significant feelings of awkwardness when students were not aware of the political tension between Taiwan and China and tried to correct other students when they assumed Scooters was from China. These collective experiences signify a general lack of understanding by American students of other cultures.

Still though, acts of discrimination and stereotyping did negatively impact the participants. Scooters felt significant discrimination as an international student when students would not sit with her to work on projects. Scooters also felt more discrimination as an international student as a woman when she described her perception American men enjoyed interacting with women from Asian countries because they resembled popular animated characters. This example of discrimination seemed to be particularly representative of intersectionality because this experience was not only cultural, but also existed on the basis of gender (Grant & Zwier, 2011). Furthermore, her feelings of discomfort were possibly exacerbated because of her status as a female international student (Bonazzo & Wong, 2007).

Extrovert, who seemed to have a fairly positive outlook on her time in the U.S., described with some annoyance American students had assumed she only knew how to read the Qur’an, asked her to speak words in Persian, and made assumptions about her religion. She had been asked on several occasions why she had not worn a hijab, or if people in her home country allowed women to work. Partnership also described how American students assumed China was still the same China as it was historically, rather than appreciating all of the culture and gender movements of present-day China. Even Finding Home described some commentary from several American students when describing her home country of South Korea, where they asked “Is that the Commie part?” Focused offered the most impactful example of perceived discrimination
having a negative impact on their campus experience, when she told the story of the female Chinese student who found the plate with a chicken bone outside of her door. The student was so upset by the plate she was fearful of interacting with floor mates or discussing it with any of the staff.

Experiences such as these are indeed in line with the research described by Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, (2008). Perception of negative bias and discrimination can affect educational success as well as health and well-being. The international student who experienced the significant turmoil regarding the chicken bone is clear evidence of the existence of the impact of culture and gender bias, but other examples were just as telling of this implication.

Extrovert was approached by American students and asked why she did not wear a hijab. She was asked this question as a female, because hijab are typically worn by female individuals who celebrate related religions. These religions are generally practiced quite strongly in Middle-Eastern countries, so their application of the hijab was not necessarily an effort to gender stereotype, but was instead a presentation of both culture and gender stereotyping. Gender was generally coupled with cultural stereotyping in these instances. This example highlights the importance of using intersectionality theory when describing lived experiences. Extrovert’s experience with expectations to wear a hijab were a direct function of being a female, and a member of a culture different from the U.S., as such, her feelings about the matter are different from those a male student might experience.

While most of the international students spoke positively about their experiences in the U.S., when discussing these adjustment challenges and the existence of stereotypes, most were visibly annoyed, hurt, or disturbed by these experiences. Furthermore, many American students were not able to determine much information about the international student’s home. While this
is consistent with the literature where U.S. students are often culturally unaware, and stereotype other cultures (Rose-Redwood, 2009; Zimmerman, 1995), I believe it is important to note that Many Korean international students were unaware of American culture, and had little interest in learning about the culture prior to attending their university. American students and international students can assist in creating a more accommodating space for international study by becoming more familiar with countries outside of their own.

**Campus Experiences**

I asked the international students to describe why they came to their host institution to determine their goals with studying abroad, to determine how culture and gender differences might have impacted their expected study abroad experience. Though exploring the actual cues themselves provided some fascinating data, understanding how these cues impacted the female international students’ campus experience provided the most direction for how members of the campus community could assist in creating a more positive experience for female international students overall.

Intersectionality theory as a framework guided how this section of the data was assessed as well. While the female international student identity is a personalized lived experience, the stereotyping experiences are products of the interaction female international student have with American students. This means female international students’ campus experience is influenced by ‘double consciousness,’ or they are affected by the way they perceive others think about them. Double consciousness involves envisioning identity through the lens of others (Brooks, 2012; Upegui-Hernandez, 2009). As described earlier, International students undergo their own transition and development as college students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and female international students also undergo identity development unique to the female population, where
female international students attempt to break away from traditional roles and boundaries, develop leadership and assertiveness skills (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009). There is another identity, which is the identity developed through how they feel they are perceived by others. Though significant focus is on the identity development of the self, the female international students also develop identity based on how they are viewed by others. Some international students mentioned having experiences with stereotyping, discrimination, and lack of cultural awareness. Others were unwilling to interact with members of the host culture and felt depressed during the initial stages of their arrival to the U.S. Given some of the stories from their lack of interaction with American students, and feelings of exclusion, these depression and maladaptive symptoms could have been attributed to the double consciousness the international students felt, as they may have assumed they were not thought about positively in the eyes of their American peers. Interestingly, outside of a few incidents of stereotyping and discrimination from American students and faculty, overall, the international students did report having relatively positive experiences, which means double consciousness likely did not play a large role in their overall experience. This result could have been because of the intent for travel to the U.S. in the first place.

The participants came to the U.S. for an array of reasons, which correlated with how they described their time at their host institution (Chang, 2011). Underdog came because she felt she could not continue to be successful as a woman in Iran, and wanted to study at the U.S. for educational freedom. From this perspective, much of what she discussed was related to her experience with faculty members and classmates rather than friends. This negative experience with faculty and did seem to have the most negative impact on her during her time here, which does line up with the research presented by Bigelow et al. (2005). The comparison of her work
ethic of the select group of students from Saudi-Arabia by the professor related to the difficulty interacting with staff could also lead to negative experiences at the host institution. This was further supported by Scooters’ reluctance to interact with male faculty, and Focused’s interaction with faculty members when she was unable to structure her assignments as per their requests, and from the stories of her students’ inability to converse with faculty.

Scooters came to the U.S. because she felt as though it would give her an edge over the highly competitive academic and workforce atmosphere in Taiwan. Most of her examples of her experiences in the U.S. were related to her experiences in the classroom as well. Finding Home also came to avoid the competitive atmosphere of academia in South Korea. Participants such as Minority, Reserved, and Extrovert conversely seemed to come to the U.S. because of a genuine interest in learning about cultural differences. While there was an obvious intention to attend their host institution for some academic gain, these three participants in particular were interested in learning about culture. These individuals had the most positive notes about their experiences here.

Extrovert described having generally positive experiences on campus, despite the examples of stereotyping and discrimination. She talked excitedly about trying peanut butter and enjoying it. She also discussed participating in American customs such as Black Friday shopping. Participants such as Extrovert, Minority, Partnership and Reserved seemed to have the most success with positively acculturating into the host culture, as they intentionally sought out new experiences with members of the host culture. Extrovert in particular involved herself in many traditions and practices, which seemed to contribute to her generally positive outlook on her experience in the U.S. Such participation in cultural activities does lead to a more enriched, positive experience (Harrison & Bower, 2011). Partnership even discussed how coming to
college and studying abroad has helped her to think in more complex ways, and broadened her horizons.

Most of the participants in this study indicated they would have preferred to have gotten to know more American students. This was particularly evident in the answers to the questions requesting any advice they might offer to other international students coming in to study abroad. Most indicated the importance of making themselves get to know students by joining campus organizations, and not being afraid to get to know others. Most of the participants noted extreme hesitation with getting to know American students at first, but found after participating in activities with American students, their experiences had gotten a lot better.

Several of the participants seemed more comfortable interacting with one another rather than American students. This information does lend support for the Shammas (2009) research, which described international students’ tendency to surround themselves with each other rather than integrate with students from the host culture. In Shammas’s research, the international students were doing so as a result of experience of discrimination, which is not so unlike the experiences of the international students interviewed in this study. The international students also described a strong desire to get to know more American students, which they perceived to assist them in having a more positive experience in the U.S. This information falls in line with the research describing international students’ desire to maintain relationships made, and to successfully adapt to their campus. Still though, if international students did not willingly engage with members of the host culture, research indicates they are experiencing symptoms of culture and transition shock, and may have challenge successfully adapting to the host culture (Kelly & Moogan, 2012; Stoian, 2009).
Implications

The purpose of this research was to investigate perceptions of gender and cultural stereotyping from female international students studying abroad at U.S. institutions, and the collected data reveals much about how their experiences with this information shape their campus experiences. Most of these students described many situations and perceptions can be of great value to various parties among the university setting. Given the number of international students studying abroad to institutions of higher education, this information is valuable to student affairs professionals. Many of the international students expressed concern related to discrimination and stereotyping by their American student counterparts. While some of the items that they mentioned from the American students may not have intentionally been discriminatory, as represented through Lange (2002), the perception of discrimination needed only exist for the application of a negative experience by the international students. Awareness of these Many of the international students expressed concern related to interactions between themselves and other students on campus. With this knowledge, a number of implications can be found, as well as how members of colleges and universities can use this information to make a more accommodating campus environment.

- Student affairs professionals can then use this information to apply to cultural diversity programming for American students in an effort to provide self-awareness and sensitivity for fellow students.

- Student affairs professionals can more actively distribute relevant information related to discrimination to international students so they are more comfortable approaching others for help on dealing with these concerns. While gender discrimination and stereotyping alone was not a prevalent issue among the international students interviewed, there did
seem to be significant difficulty for international students to navigate gender differences between themselves and their American counterparts. As described by Scooters, she felt her status as a female student from an Asian culture subjected her to uncomfortable interactions between men and women in the U.S.

- Knowledge of gender roles in other countries would be beneficial for staff members who frequently need to interact with international students, as international students may respond better to the gender of some faculty members rather than others. The female international students described a general lack of comfort with interacting with members of the opposite sex.

- Student Affairs practitioners can use the information to find ways to make campus culture more accommodating to female international students, such as providing more formal opportunities for female international students to interact with American students. International students interviewed generally desired more opportunities to interact with American students.

- Given Focused’s example of her international friend who was unsure of whom to approach about the chicken bone found in front of the door, and her lack of willingness to approach anyone about it, student affairs professionals can begin to make services more accessible for international students. Including a list of relevant campus contacts, and bringing awareness of support centers would greatly assist international students with their integration on campus.

- Student affairs professionals can work with students to create a more inclusive campus environment, and find ways to manage incidents of cultural stereotyping and bias of international students.
• This research also has the potential to benefit American students. International students noted that many of the American students with whom they interacted did not know where their country or origin was. While it is impossible to learn the cultural nuances of every country, knowledge of other countries outside of the U.S. would benefit U.S. students in relating better with international students and broadening their own cultural horizons.

• This research can also be used to benefit academic affairs professionals and their interactions with international students in their classrooms. While there is expectation for significant difference in instructional style between U.S. faculty and international faculty, understanding these instructional and language differences exist can help professors provide more effective learning opportunities for international students.

• Male professors can understand the discomfort female international students might feel interacting with them, and all faculty members can know international students might need to take extra time to learn the expectations of academic writing in their courses.

• This research can also benefit international students themselves. As mentioned previously, most international students recognized it was important to interact with American students to garner a more fulfilling experience. Most of the international students interviewed came to the U.S. for academic or trade purposes, and many had not done much study of what the culture in the U.S. might be like prior to coming. While it is expected and encouraged for international students to experience significant cultural differences between their home institution and their host institution (sometimes to the point at which the differences are uncomfortable), knowledge of this information could help international students prepare for their own arrival. Knowing American students are not often fully informed about the cultural practices of the international students being
hosted within the country, they may have to prepare to more openly express their cultures, engage with American students, and more actively engage in opportunities to get involved with organizations on campus. The international students interviewed provided advice for those who would like to study abroad at a U.S. institution, and most advised international students make extra efforts to get involved in campus activities. Knowing it could potentially be difficult to get to know American students, international students would need to be prepared to take initiative in making relationships with American students.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was designed to investigate how culture and gender stereotyping by American students at U.S. institutions of higher education might impact female international students’ campus experience. While the students interviewed did provide significant insightful information, a number of limitations and delimitations exist in this study could be explored through further research.

Limitations

Limitations included hindering variables that were beyond the researcher’s control, such as the analysis measures, participants, and sample. Firstly, the measure used to assess international students’ perceptions of stereotypes might have benefited from language clarity. The measure was tested with American students; however, some of the language needed to be explained during the interviews so the international students could fully understand the meaning of the questions. The researcher had to spend significant time during the interviews to explain the meaning of some of the questions, which could have been avoided if the questions were presented in more simplified English.
Secondly, the sample size of international students was limited. Female international students are significant in number on the college campus in which the students were surveyed, but perhaps because international students were hesitant to respond to researcher requests, and because they were unfamiliar with participating in research, the number of interested individuals was significantly limited. The researcher was able to garner the interest of several international students, but the number of individuals who responded to requests to set up times, and appear for the interview was significantly smaller.

Thirdly, the sample of students was only represented through six countries from Eastern or Middle-Eastern countries. A larger pool of data could have been collected from participants from other regions such as Oceania, European countries, and African countries, had they elected to participate in the study. For future research studies, it may be relevant for researchers to more consciously seek out representatives from several nationalities. Alternately, researchers could limit the study to investigating one particular nationality to eliminate the problem of representation from several countries.

Delimitations

Delimitations were variables that the researcher made specific choices about using, and how those choices influenced the research. Firstly, the researcher chose to examine a pool of female participants to discuss how this specific gender identity and international study influenced their college experiences. While these female international student participants produced a significant amount of data, interesting findings might occur if the researcher had chosen to investigate an all-male population or mixed gender population as well. Gender studies often need to include male participants, as experiences of one gender are largely dependent on the experiences of another (Thomas, & Society for Research into Higher Education, 1990).
Secondly, the researcher chose to use a qualitative, phenomenological study. While this particular study structure did allow the participants to express their individual experiences, which were used to assess how their experiences on campus could be applied to creating a better campus environment, a critical challenge with qualitative research is using the information to apply to other areas (i.e., other college campuses) since the participants’ experiences are so individualized (Shenton, 2007). For future research, it might be relevant to attempt a quantitative, or mixed methods approach to examining female international students’ experiences on campus so that more universal themes and solutions can be applied to other universities in the U.S.

**Future Directions**

Further research in this area is indeed necessary, as represented through the testimonies of the international students surveyed, and the information gained through those testimonies. The numbers of international students on college campuses are plentiful, and exploration of their experience is indeed relevant as student affairs professionals look to admit more international students in the future. The researcher suggests interviewing more female students from a wider selection of countries to gain a more well-rounded view of the experience of international students, or selecting a single country of international student origin to study. Information found can then be compared to findings from several countries, which can assist student affairs professionals working with international populations prepare for interactions and experiences with members of individual countries. Furthermore, acts of discrimination and stereotyping can be assessed in ways that cater to the specific needs of members of specific countries, which can assist student affairs professionals in making U.S. campus cultures more welcoming.
As research in this area is increased, the researcher suggests being effortful in investigating why international students are coming to the U.S. to study abroad. There is a worldwide increase in creating connections internationally, and the participants in this study attended because they felt they would gain better educational opportunities, or because they were interested in exploring another culture for the sake of broadening their own personal horizons. Students who attended because they were interested in knowing students from a different culture were more open to interacting with American students, and participated in more activities. Investigating why they were coming to the institution would allow student affairs practitioners to really understand how the international students view interacting and getting involved with domestic students. They can subsequently assist international students in finding connection points with American students catered to their specific goals in coming to the U.S. university.

It would also be beneficial to incorporate an investigation of male students’ perceptions of campus culture. While this study examined female perceptions of gender and culture stereotype, as was supported through the interviews, gender roles in the U.S. are often starkly different than those in other countries. Male international students’ perceptions of campus might reveal information just as important as their female counterparts.

Lastly, considering the difficulty of garnering participants, it might be important to consider alternate methods of collecting data. Some international students seemed reluctant to meet with the researcher alone, so perhaps organizing a round-table or group discussion about the research topic might be beneficial in making them more comfortable with research participation. Furthermore, offering a mixed-methods approach to data gathering can allow the international students the opportunity to review the type of questions the researcher might ask.
(through use of a survey administered prior to any interviews or group discussion) to help them feel more comfortable and prepared to have conversations about their experiences.

As future research is collected and assessed on the experience of international students on colleges, the researcher recommends student affairs professionals encourage more research of this nature in the future. International students’ experiences of college campuses are shaped by the culture that the campus supports, as revealed through the interviews. More attention and interest into the experience of international students, as well as distribution of resources for the international students to get assistance can contribute to a more positive experience for both domestic and international students alike.

Summary

The international students surveyed in this study indicated they were aware of differences in culture, represented through their individual stories and quotes in Chapter four. Differences in culture were generally related to interaction with relationships with others and power distance. Furthermore, the international students did indicate experience of culture and gender stereotyping on their college campus. While it was difficult to determine if some acts were directly intended to be discriminatory, as noted by the research, if discrimination is perceived, the impact is the same. Much of the literature was in line with the individual stories of the international students, where gender did have an impact on their experiences overall. Examples of discrimination such as Scooters’s experience with male students stereotyping students from Asian countries, or the assumption of American students that Extrovert needed to wear a hijab reflected that experience of stereotyping were more impactful as female students.

Despite the existence of these stereotypes, overall the international students did not feel that their experience on campus was negative overall. Many international students desired to get
to know American students more closely, but their experiences on campus were generally positive save for the few incidents of discrimination. International students also appeared to be very shy, as evidenced by their lack of willingness to engage with members of the host country in informal ways, propensity to interview together, and fearfulness of how they would be perceived by the American students. With this knowledge, student affairs practitioners can begin to create formal programs to assist international students with their transitions. Furthermore, student affairs professionals can use this data to more accurately assess campus climate from the international student population, and connect international students with resources to they are more prepared to handle incidents of discrimination. Faculty can use the presented information to cater their interactions with international students, international and domestic students could use the information to become more culturally aware in general. While this research provided valuable insight into the experience of female international students, expanding the study to assess a higher number of students, and perhaps even include male students, can assist in creating a more positive campus experience for female international students.
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APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

**Passport to Campus: International Student Experience of Culture and Gender Stereotypes**

The questions for this interviewed were structured in such a way that they guide the conversation toward specific culture and gender stereotypes experienced by international students, while allowing significant opportunities for personal story-telling and interpretation to these very personal accounts of experience. The interview will begin with an overview of the study, an overview of my role as a researcher, and discussion about the informed consent materials. After any preliminary questions have been made, the interview will begin.

**Question Section 1: Demographic Information**
The first set of questions is designed to obtain some general demographic information. This information would be used to gain some perspective as to why the subsequent sections of questions are answered in a certain way. Furthermore, comparisons to experience can be made based off of participant's country of origin, age, etc.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your home country?
3. What sex do you identify as?
4. How long have you been at Ball State University?
5. Have you studied abroad to any other U.S. institution previously?

**Question Section 2: Culture Information**
The next set of questions is designed to obtain information about the participant’s perception of what their experience of what their experiences at Ball State might be. This is used to determine awareness of cultural stereotypes.

1. Can you tell me about some important values in your culture?
2. Why did you choose to study abroad at Ball State?
3. Can you tell me about some of your experiences as you adjusted to Ball State and U.S. Culture?
   a. Were there any challenges? Positive or negative?
4. What did you expect your interactions with Ball State Students to be like?
5. Can you tell me about any stereotypes that American students might have about your culture? If so, what might those be?

**Question Section 3: Gender Information**
This set of questions will be used to determine if gender stereotypes exist. Firstly, background information on the student’s home country’s gender roles will be discussed, then the student will be asked whether or not gender roles differ, and how those differences might have been presented during their experience at Ball State.

1. Can you tell me about the kinds of students you generally interact with.
   a. Here?
   b. Back Home?
2. Do you generally interact with individuals of the same, or different gender than you?
   a. Can you elaborate on why that might be?
3. Can you tell me about any stereotypes that American students might have about gender? If so, what might those be?
4. Do you perceive that your experience here might be different if you were of a different gender? If so, how? If not, why?

**Question Section 4: Other**

1. Are there any examples of the previous questions that you would like to share?
2. Any other information that you would like for me to know that would be important for this study?
3. Is there any advice you would give to students as related to culture and gender?
APPENDIX B

Introductory Letter to Participants

Hello,

My name is Tamarah Dixon, a graduate student in the Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education Master of Arts program. This is my second year in the program, and I hope to graduate in May, 2014.

As a graduate student at Ball State, I have had the opportunity to meet a number of students both domestic, and international, and I have developed a strong passion for international study, travel, and learning. This summer, I had the pleasure of participating in an internship at Incheon University, South Korea, in which I was able to work with Korean students wanting to study abroad to the United States, as well as international students wanting to visit other areas of the world. In this way, I was able to learn about some of the fears, challenges and concerns students felt when attempting to study abroad, and I wanted to learn more about some of those concerns.

Now that I am back in the United States, I became very interested in the experiences that international students here have, particularly when it comes to your interactions with American students, and how you feel American students perceive you and your culture as international students. I would also like to know about how you feel American students perceive your gender identity while here.

For my Master’s Thesis, I would like to investigate some of the challenges that international students have faced on campus, as they relate to culture and gender stereotypes. The specific purpose of this study is to identify what, if any, cultural and gender stereotypes international students feel are applied to them prior to, and while attending a U.S. institution. Many American students’ perception of international students is gleaned from a skewed understanding of culture, which may result in applying stereotypes. This research projects seeks to investigate international students’ perceptions of these stereotypes from their American counterparts. The goal is to gain insight into the experiences of international students on U.S. campuses as related to culture and gender stereotype, in an effort to improve campus atmosphere for these international students.

If anyone is interested, I was hoping to recruit participants for this study. The research study would consist of a 45 minute to 1 hour interview about your experiences so far in the United States as an international student, and what some of your feelings are about how your culture and gender are perceived on this campus. All information that is collected during this research study will be kept confidential, and any identifying information revealed in the interview will be assigned a pseudonym, to avoid any identification of you as the participant.

A few stipulations that I must mention, is that anyone willing to participate must be above the age of 18, (U.S. standards), and have been in the United States for longer than 30 days, with the intent to stay for at least one semester.
If you are still interested to participate in the interview, I would like to collect your email address so that we can schedule an interview time.

Also, if you know of any other international students who might be interested in participating in this study, please have them email me to set up a time to discuss my study, and, depending on whether or not they satisfy the participant requirements, set up an interview.

My email address is tydixon@bsu.edu.

Thank you!
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

**Passport to Campus: International Student Experience of Culture and Gender Stereotype**
Principle Investigator: Tamarah Dixon

**Study Purpose**
The purpose of this study is to identify what, if any, cultural and gender biases international students feel are applied to them prior to, and while attending a U.S. institution. Many American students’ perception of international students is gleaned from a skewed understanding of culture, which may result in applying stereotypes and bias. This research project seeks to investigate international students’ perceptions of these stereotypes and biases from their American counterparts.

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**
- Participants must be over the age of 18 to participate
- Registered as international, study abroad students at Ball State University
- Must have been in the U.S. for 30 days or longer
- Must intend to stay at Ball State for at least one academic semester

**Participation Procedures and Duration**
- The goal is to gain insight into the experiences of international students on U.S. campuses as related to culture and gender stereotype, in an effort to improve campus atmosphere for these international students. We look to understand any potential negative impacts this perceived bias might have on college experience.
- Participants will be recruited through two methods:
  - Firstly, participants will be recruited pending advisor permission to visit the “Cultural Adjustment Group for International Students,” a meeting for international students, dedicated to discussing transition and adjustment challenges. The researcher will ask for interest from individuals attending the meeting, and request individuals email the researcher to set up a time for a one-on-one interview.
  - The second recruitment strategy will be through requesting individuals from the group to send the researcher emails of individuals that might be interested in participating in the study, and eligible to participate. The researcher will then email these potential participants to confirm eligibility, and set up a time with willing recruits to conduct the interview.
- Each interview session will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour, where participants will engage in dialogue with the researcher to discuss their experiences as international students at Ball State. They will also be asked various questions related to their perception of gender and cultural perception by American students.
- The interviews will take place in-person in a location that is both isolated from the public, but also comfortable for the participant. The interviews will be recorded for transcription and synthesis processes later, and the researcher will also take notes during the interview in order to refer back to, in case any particularly interesting information is revealed. Each interview recording will be assigned an arbitrary number paired with the interview notes written by the researcher.
- After the interview, participants will have the opportunity to review, or “member check” the transcripts of the interviews taken by the researcher in order to change information, retract information, or provide supplementary feedback.

**Data Confidentiality and Data Storage**
- Participants will not be required to provide any identifying information, except age, and email address to determine eligibility for participation, and correspond with the researcher, respectively.
- Identifying information will be kept separate from any data collected.
• Data collected from the interviews will be stored in a secure, locked office that is accessible by the researcher. This data will be kept indefinitely, in the event that the study yields intriguing information, or evidence that the study is worthy of expansion or publication. At any time however, any participating individuals are free to withdraw permission to use of their data, and their data will be destroyed.
• All interviews will be recorded for the purpose of further analysis. As with other data collected for the study, any recorded or digital material will also be stored in this secure office on a password-protected computer.
• Member-checked information will also be stored in this secure office on a password-protected computer.
• Participants are able to leave the study at any time should they feel uncomfortable during proceedings.

Risks
• There are no anticipated risks from participation in this study. Participation in this research study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time (before, during, and after the study). You will not incur any penalty or prejudice from the investigator, should you choose to withdraw, and your information and responses will also be removed from the study.

Benefits
• Participating individuals will not receive any benefits from the study.

IRB Contact Information
For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu.

Questions regarding participation
Any questions about the study may be directed to the researcher, Tamarah Dixon or the faculty advisor, Dr. Thalia Mulvihill. Their contact information can be found below.

Consent
I, ________________, agree to participate in this research project entitled, “Passport to College Life: International Student Expectations and Realities of Culture and Gender Stereotype.” I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

_________________________________  _____________
Participant's Signature  Date

Researcher Contact Information
Principal Investigator:  Faculty Supervisor:
Tamarah Y. Dixon, Graduate Student
Student Affairs Administration and Higher Education
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Telephone: (816)520-4881
Email: tydixon@bsu.edu

Dr. Thalia Mulvihill
Division of Student Affairs
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Telephone: (765) 285-0001
Email: tmulvihi@bsu.edu
APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
2000 University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-0155
Phone: 765-285-5070

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE:</th>
<th>January 17, 2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TO:</td>
<td>Tamarah Dixon, Bachelor of Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FROM:</td>
<td>Ball State University IRB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE:</td>
<td>IRB protocol # 509939-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITLE:</td>
<td>Passport to Campus: International Student Experience of Culture and Gender Stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBMISSION TYPE:</td>
<td>Amendment/Modification</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTION:</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECISION DATE:</td>
<td>January 17, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW TYPE:</td>
<td>EXEMPT</td>
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The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on January 17, 2014 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

**Exempt Categories:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category 1:</th>
<th>Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.</th>
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<td>Category 2:</td>
<td>Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior</td>
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<td>Category 3:</td>
<td>Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 4:</td>
<td>Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or</td>
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if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

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<th>Category 5: Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under these programs.</th>
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<td>Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed which contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.</td>
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**Editorial Notes:**

1. Modification Approved

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact (ORI Staff) if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http://www.bsu.edu/irb) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

**Reminder:** Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.

Institutional Review Board

Office of Research Integrity