Sojourning in the Margin: Living as Wives of International Students

Mengchun Chiang

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SOJOURNING IN THE MARGIN:
LIVING AS WIVES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Mengchun Chiang

December 2014
SOJOURNING IN THE MARGIN:
LIVING AS WIVES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

By

Mengchun Chiang

Approved August 8th, 2014

Leswin Laubscher, Ph. D.
Associate Professor of Psychology
(Committee Chair)

Suzanne Barnard, Ph. D.
Associate Professor of Psychology
(Committee Member)

Lori Koelsch, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology
(Committee Member)

James Swindal, Ph. D.
Dean, McAnulty College and Graduate
School of Liberal Arts
Associate Professor of Philosophy

Leswin Laubscher, Ph. D. Chair,
Psychology Department
Associate Professor of Psychology
ABSTRACT

SOJOURNING IN THE MARGIN:
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By
Mengchun Chiang
December 2014

Dissertation supervised by Leswin Laubscher, Ph. D.

Whereas concerns for international students frequently appear in existing literature, little attention is paid to wives of international students (WoIS). This study aims at describing and understanding lives of WoIS in the United States as sojourners in the margin. The research begins with a literature review and an examination of theoretical frames: from the cultural shock literature, acculturative stress literature, to atheoretical studies; and from cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, to indigenous psychology. Methodologically, this study is qualitative in nature, utilizing interview data from WoIS. In addition to a description and interpretation of the WoIS’s narratives, the study also wrestles with how the stories are made to mean. As such, Silverman’s (1994) textuality serves as methodological guide. Illustrative themes derived from a hermeneutic analysis include a change of the anchorage from self to the husband, loss and longing, having time/losing time, role negotiation, individuality/collectivity, embodied
consciousness, and marginalization. An inter-textual reading that juxtaposes the narratives of participating WoIS and the literatures on theories of culture and gender is performed to interrogate textualities of culture and gender. Textualities of culture occur in multiple in-betweens: in-between culture as a variable and as a function, in-between thinking through and thinking beyond others, in-between the colonizer and the colonized (i.e. in the colonized condition), and in diaspora. In parallel, textualities of gender falls in the locus of in-between, residing at the hinge between material bodies and discursive bodies, between the power and the restraints of the formation of gendered body, in-between a discursive truth and fiction about gender, in-between subjecting and subjugation, and between the essentialist and radical constructionist views of gender. The multiple textualities of culture and gender are what make the lives of WoIS and differential representations of their cultural and gender ascription à la their narratives comprehensible and sensible. The contribution of this study is to provide descriptive narratives of the lives of the WoIS from their point of view, simultaneously, to offer a space where culture and gender ascriptions of WoIS can be thought otherwise, such that a fuller understanding and the various readings of WoIS remain comprehensible.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, whose unwavering encouragement and silent shielding has fostered my ability to imagine and practice the impossible: things that are beyond the limits of conceivable thought within the scope of the time and space in which she lives.
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This dissertation would have remained a dream had it not been for the generosity of the
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Last but not least, I cannot find words to express my gratitude to my partner, Jeremy
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The number of international students studying at universities in the United States has been growing every year since the 2006/2007 academic year. In the 2012/2013 academic year, there was a growth of 7% of the total number of international students as compared to the prior year (Institute of International Education, 2013). The number of international students is now “at a record high” according to the Institute of International Education’s (IIE) latest press release (2013), with international students comprising 4% of the total U.S. higher education population. Translated from the percentage, and in sheer numbers, the IIE reports nearly a million international students (819,644) studying at United States colleges and universities in the 2012/2013 academic year (IIE, 2013). Of these international students, many are accompanied by their families; and based on a quarterly report using data from the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (USICE, 2014), a total number of 144,318 “foreign dependents” was documented as of January 2014. The foreign dependents are either the spouse or qualifying children of a student visa (F-1 or J-1) holder.

Spouses of International students are different from immigrants because the spouses stay in the U.S. for a short period of time, and many of them do not have a visa that allows them to work legally. Yet, they are clearly not tourists either, most often staying longer than the customary three months allotted to tourists as temporary visitors, and both engaging in and being subjected to experiences that are different from that of the tourist or “temporary visitor.” The United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) officially classifies spouses of international
students by the “Non-immigrant” designation, defined according to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as a foreign national who requests temporary entry to the United States for a specific purpose (Mongar & Barr, 2010). USCIS data further shows that students, their spouses and children comprise 45% of the total number of non-immigrants (other non-immigrant examples include athletes, exchange visitors for specific academic or cultural purposes, religious, military or diplomatic personnel, specific business purposes, and tourism).

International graduate students at American universities are granted either F-1 or J-1 visas, and their spouses and children, who are called the students’ “dependents”, are granted either F-2 or J-2 visas respectively. The length of stay of the “dependent” varies based on the duration of stay of the “principal students.” An average of 260 days spent in the U.S. is noted for an average “dependent” person (USCIS, 2006). Different types of visa statuses carry different rights, restrictions, and obligations. For instance, a spouse who accompanies an F-1 student (i.e. an F-2 non immigrant, that is), cannot apply for work authorization, and can only stay in the U.S. as long as the “Duration of Status” of the corresponding F-1 is valid and in force. J-2 visa-holders, on the other hand, can be authorized to work with the permission of USCIS under the condition that their income from such authorization is not needed to support the J-1 “principal alien.”

Similar to that of a F-2 visa-holder, the duration of the stay of a J-2 visa-holder is determined by the period specified on their corresponding J-1 holder’s SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitors Information System) form (Baker, 2008). Overall, more women than men are “dependent” spouses entering the U.S. with dependent F-2 or J-2 visas (Baker, 2008; Sakamoto, 2006). Yet, their great numbers and a certain visible presence notwithstanding, little is known about this group of women, both as neighbors and as academics.
Although international students have been the focus of many studies (McKinlay & Pattison, 1996), for example on aspects of cultural adjustment (Kagan & Cohen, 1990), or academic progress (Jochems & Snippe, 1996), to mention just a few, very little research has focused on the experiences of the spouses of international students. Often the international student has a rather circumscribed, academic task—to study and successfully complete his or her program—while spouses play a variety of roles, and are expected to take responsibility for several tasks, such as child-rearing and basic household maintenances, schooling of children and everyday living activities such as buying groceries, paying bills, or otherwise seeing to the effective maintenance of the family. However, whereas the student has an academic network and institution that may provide a social and/or support outlet, most of the spouses, who are predominantly women, are disconnected from those institutions, and are often almost exclusively dependent on their husbands. Due to of the legal status of the dependent visa, international spouses who travel to the U.S. with their student counterpart essentially give up their right to have a career, alongside giving up their home culture, friends, family, and any form of institutional affiliation. It is also notable that the spouses of international students, despite being disconnected from formal institutions, and “ready” social networks, are often also the ones that interact most with neighbors, school officials, and the general public. In spite of the paradox of being institutionally disconnected while intimately connected in the world, and in spite of the multiple transitions that occur during the spouses’ sojourn, the fact of the matter is that these spouses occupy a unique space, a liminal space almost; formally they are not immigrants, refugees, nor international students, and academically and culturally they are seldom seen or acknowledged, making them a twice-marginalized group, so to speak.
Problem Statements

At a very basic level, this study aims to make these spouses, and wives in particular, of international sojourning students visible—to shine some academic light on what it is like for WoIS to live in locations that are both transient and in transition, and to do so with particular reference to the converging points of culture, gender, race, nationality, and institutional social status. In doing so, this study proceeds from the personal perspectives (face-to-face interviews) of several WoIS’s experiences. This study first offers a descriptive account of these women’s lives, hopefully in a way that captures some of what their lives are like, particularly as it relates to the notion of various and different margins—for example of culture (host and home), gender, race, and others.

The second objective of this study is to engage with the interview and textual data in a qualitative and interpretative analytic, subjecting it, on the one hand, to a theoretical dialogue with existing literature in the areas of psychological, cultural and gender theories, and on the other to an analytic textual reading that may offer new meanings or findings specific to this group and “data set.” By wrestling with how the narratives are made to mean, the study offers an academic analytic for the ways in which the lives of sojourning WoIS are impacted. Put another way, the study wants to tell the stories of the participants, and do so “in their voice”, which is to say getting their story straight and largely as they “intended.” But it also wants to subject the stories to an academic and research analytic, and as such it is also about what the stories conceal, what the manner of the telling reveals, what the researcher believes certain utterances to mean, the processes and dynamics by which the stories are made to mean, and, by the benefit of more than one story, what a group of stories reveals, looked at “from above”, in a manner of speaking.
Organization of Chapters

This dissertation is comprised of a total of seven Chapters. Chapter one introduces the subject matter in a general manner, while Chapter two turns to the academic literature. It turns out that three dominant academic discourses frame the study of WoIS, to wit that of cultural shock, the discourse of acculturative stress, and an atheoretical, variable-driven experimental discourse. In addition to the major themes and interests of the literature, this chapter also locates the existing literature within larger historical and social context, and provides initial reflections on the dynamics of foci and meanings in the existing literature on WoIS.

Chapter three continues an academic exploration of theoretical frames with which to consider the cultural-crossing experiences of WoIS, this time also introducing the assumptions and tenets of cultural- and indigenous psychology, alongside that of cross cultural psychology. Specifically, as this study focuses on Taiwanese WoIS, a brief review on Taiwanese Indigenous Psychology is included here.

Chapter four addresses the methodology of the present study. This chapter delimits and gives justification for the methodology and methods of the present study. It answers the questions of why human science psychology and why/what kind of qualitative research, specifically that of hermeneutic semiology and textualities.

Chapter five functions as the “result” chapter of a typical research dissertation, incorporating the “result” of the stories told by the participants, as well as a hermeneutic analysis of the narratives of the participating WoIS. Meaning making structures and devices, as well as themes derived from the narratives of the participants are illustrated here.

Chapter six functions as the “discussion” chapter of a typical research dissertation. With two foci of discussion on culture and gender, it serves as a response to the research interest in the
intersect of culture and gender on the experiences of WoIS. The format of the discussion is by way of making visible the textualities (of culture and of gender) in the multiple texts summoned throughout this dissertation.

Chapter seven, the concluding chapter of this dissertation, engages reflexively with the whole of the dissertation, inclusive of the author’s insertion of autobiographical material with which to engage with various elements of the text/dissertation on the lives of WoIS.
CHAPTER TWO
TRACING THE LITERATURE

Literature on wives of international students (WoIS) has been historically scarce, perhaps because of “the absence of official acknowledgement of institutional responsibility for this group,” as suggested by Schwartz & Kahne (1993, p. 461). Although research on WoIS continues to be modest, the last three decades have seen a little more research activity, primarily around the notions of cultural shock and acculturative stress. In addition, some research has rendered data on WoIS almost incidentally, and obliquely, from interest in assessing the well-being of the international student, and to the extent that such an array of variables involve the broader family of the sojourning student. Another recent research strand explores an analysis of social structure and its relation to gendered power-relations, and to other forms of social oppressions, with some representation of WoIS therein.

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to WoIS, and aims: 1) to trace the major themes and interests of that literature in order to provide an academic context within which to situate the present study; 2) to also locate the existing literature within larger historical and social context, as the literature reveal not only academic trends, but also socio-cultural ones; and 3) to provide initial reflections on the dynamics of foci and meanings in the existing literature on WoIS.

An Initial Study

As far as I was able to trace back, the first study on WoIS was a doctoral dissertation in the field of Education, conducted by Nancy Toman Baldwin (1970), who was a former counselor
for international students. With essentially no previous literature to build on, Baldwin (1970) began her study on WoIS by sketching the emergence of married students (as opposed to single ones) at universities within the context of the postwar days of World War II. She noted, “the GI Bill, enabled veterans to return to the colleges and universities” (p. 33), and many veterans were married with families. Baldwin contends that the legacy of the GI Bill persists beyond the end of WWII, and into the 1960’s, such that universities were “forced to recognize that the married student is not an oddity, a temporary post-war condition, but rather a reality of life” (Baldwin, 1970, p.33). Within this historical context, institutions of American higher education began to officially house married students on a consistent basis. Similarly, where international exchange was concerned, increasing numbers of married international students began travelling to the U.S. to pursue advanced education in the post-war era. Yet, to the extent that international spouses were represented in systematic research, it was primarily for the ways in which they impacted on the search for variables with which to predict or chart successful coping for foreign students in America (e.g. Hull, 1978).

Emphasizing WoIS, and after gathering data from various sources (such as surveys and semi-structured interviews with 56 WoIS, as well as entering into WoIS’s “subculture”), Baldwin’s (1970) study painted a complex picture for WoIS. She notes, “there was no single problem that could be identified as ‘the problem’ of all international student wives. The women were dealing with a complex of problems, different and uneven, of major importance to some, trivial to others” (Baldwin, 1970, p. 143). Looking back, the notion of “a complex of problems” predicates the diversity of subsequent research on WoIS, each with different foci, many perhaps resulting from its importance to the author of the study.
Indeed, much of Baldwin’s findings keyed many aspects of subsequent studies on WoIS (regardless of their citing Baldwin or not). For instance, Baldwin (1970) keenly observed,

The international student wife is in an unique position. She is a sojourner in a strange country. She is not a tourist. She is a transient, a long-term visitor who will return home when her husband’s objectives are realized. Neither he or she is sure when that will be. She is in a temporary system that tends to postpone living. It is important to assist her in functioning fully and in being able to develop meaningful relationships whose losses she can endure. (p. 10)

Baldwin’s perceptive observation delineates a contextual fabric (spatially, temporally, and relationally) in which WoIS live, and points to a fundamental dilemma that is shared among many sojourners, namely, “to develop meaningful relationships whose losses [one] can endure” (p. 10). In her analysis, Baldwin (1970) found that WoIS “seem to resemble most wives in a mobile society” as “their problems and anxieties tend to stem more from the mobility than from their cultural background or their fringe participation in the student community” (p. 133). Although cultural variations and limited social engagement were noted, Baldwin put more emphasis on the importance of “adjustment to the roles of wife and mother” (p. 15) in addition to adapting to a new location. As Baldwin’s study was anchored around the notion of “cultural adaptation,” psychological elements (e.g. trauma, stress, self-concept, etc.) were implicated in her assertion that “the change in culture and role involved trauma and stress… The degree of stress seemed to depend on the individual wife’s concept and expectations of herself and her own ability to adapt” (p. 143). Baldwin presented clearly the interrelationship between social-cultural change and individualized perception and experiences.
Yet, for all her groundbreaking and quite sensitive observations, Baldwin (1970) concludes rather reductionistically, in an intrapsychically “blaming”, and even patriarchic, by today’s standards, manner that WoIS can be categorized into two “kinds” (the “Model Wife” versus the “Secondary Pattern Wife”) based on “the way that each sees herself” (p. 146). The “Model Wife” is the one that remains content with, or comes to a content acceptance of, her identity and role as a mother and a wife, and “The Secondary Pattern Wife” who continues to struggle to “find out who she is” because “she does not know who she is or who she wants to be” (p. 147). As much as this report is pioneering in its early attention to WoIS, and even sincerely attempted to reflect upon participants’ self-reports during the interview, typifying their responses into a causative or categorical intrapsychic motivation, as Baldwin does, may well concede as much, if not more, of the researcher’s cultural, gendered, and theoretical position—one which presupposes an internal subjective “truth” and origin from which the social is mastered and understood. Additionally, one may question, for example, how it is that conforming to contextual demands are designated as “Model” ways of response, as opposed to authentic struggle considered “Secondary”; or with the assertion—outside of any consideration of politics or a broader context—that the struggle of the “Secondary Pattern Wife” points to “a tragic waste of human potential [because] little is expected of [these wives and] their own expectations are minimal” (p. 149, Baldwin, 1970). By all accounts, Baldwin’s (1970) notion of “cultural adaptation” (p. 143) remains an individual choice because its success is considered on the basis of one’s perspective of self (e.g. “the way that each sees herself”, p. 146).

Perhaps another way of reading Baldwin’s work on WoIS though is to situate the textual quality of her work on the basis of its derived implication for the current work. For instance, her study is of a broadly humanistic psychological sort, and attempted a richer, and broader
theoretical location than the bulk of the reductionist studies that were to follow; additionally, perhaps influenced by the increasing attention to women’s and human rights issues in the aftermath of feminist and civil rights movements in the 60’s, her study acknowledges a neglected community, and attempts to foreground their struggles and concerns, even as she does so within the language of “cultural adaptation” and as socially expected and normative roles (as mothers or as wives) continue to serve as points of reference.

**Discourses: Framing the Subject**

Coming to the topic of WoIS as a researcher who wishes to understand various ways in which this subject has been addressed in the past, I proceeded to survey all or as much as the existing written academic accounts on the subject of WoIS that I could find. In doing so, I discovered that the bulk of the literature could be organized in terms of three broad approaches or “discourses”—the discourse of cultural shock, the discourse of acculturation as adjustment, and a host of research articles I grouped under the atheoretical label.

The term “discourse” is used intentionally here (and throughout this dissertation) following the Foucaultian tradition. The notion of “discourse” is most directly and extensively introduced in Michel Foucault’s book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/2002). In this book, Foucault put forth the premise that systems of thoughts and knowledge (which Foucault calls “discursive formation” or “epistemes”) are governed by rules beyond those of grammar and logic. The rules of governing discourse (i.e. discursive formation) give rise to conscious operation of individuals (i.e. thoughts, feelings, and conduct) and define a system of conceptual possibilities. Simply put, a discourse is what determines the boundaries of thoughts and knowledge in a given physical domain and time period.
As the present review communicates the three major discourses around the academic engagement with WoIS, readers may notice tensions between those discourses, or a sometime “disjointed” feel to the enterprise. This feeling may well offer a glimpse into certain power-relations at work inasmuch as “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). Chapter Three provides further context to the review presented here, and the reader is beseeched to trundle on, so to speak, as that chapter will situate the review here in terms of the current study, critique, as well as alternative directions this research/dissertation aims to open up.

The Discourse of Cultural Shock

The term “culture shock” was coined by anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960), who described it as a condition “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 177). In Oberg’s view, the experience of a new culture brings with it an unpleasant surprise or shock that occurs alongside a disjuncture between expectations and reality. A predictable symptom pattern and adaptive process is the consequence, and a whole academic literature has arisen around this basic premise of an adjustment process to “cultural shock.”

For international members (i.e. students, scholars, faculties, staff) of university and local communities, there is a wide range of potential challenges that exist interpersonally as well as intrapersonally as a result of cultural shock. Interpersonal challenges may emerge out of situated concerns regarding specific environmental factors, such as cultural differences, language, classroom experiences, and difficulty in social interactions (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). For international students, studies have found categories of demand faced by them including
financial and social support (e.g., Arthur, 1997), academic pressures, relationship problems, stereotypes/prejudice/discrimination, familial concerns, securing employment after graduation, and readjustment to the home country (Lin & Yi, 1997).

The “disease model” of cultural shock is often derived from intrapersonal challenges. Literature on international students have identified a host of problems characterized by psychological and physiological symptoms such as irritability, loneliness, anxiety, homesickness, alienation, feelings of helplessness, withdrawal, frustration, and depression (Lin & Yi, 1997; Oberg, 1960; Ross & Krider, 1992) as a result of cultural shock. Furthermore, research has reported consequences of cultural shock including a loss of identity (Brinson & Kottler, 1995) or a sense of inferiority (Sandhu, 1994). The utmost representation of the disease model inherent to the cultural shock literature is found in the direct attribution to the process of culture change of serious mental health crises such as suicide attempts and schizophrenia within the international student population (Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, & Baron, 1991).

Whereas a vibrant literature examines the culture shock experience for sojourning international students, the wives of these students are largely invisible in this literature, leading De Verthelyi (1995) to call them “the invisible sojourners.” De Verthelyi’s (1995) study found that “Gender-role orientation and work/family values were a key factor in the degree of cultural shock” (p. 387). The same result was found in Mitrushi (2009)’s study conducted in Ames, Iowa among 89 international students’ wives from twenty different countries. Echoes of Baldwin’s (1970) typology, noted above, are found in De Verthelyi’s research, who remarks that “The degree of acceptance, or rejection of the more traditional role as a homemaker (and mother) during the stay was the most important variable affecting the psychological well-being” (De Verthelyi, 1995, p. 404) of WoIS. A core premise of the current study should be noted already,
namely that the structuring discourse of culture shock and disease, and the normative ascription of intrapsychic types from the 60’s and 70’s has not gone away, but finds continued, albeit slightly modified, expression in studies as recent as that of De Verthelyi (1995) and Mitrushi (2009).

Similarly, Bennett (2002) explored the mediation effect of electronic communication on the experiences of cultural shock. Proposing a developmental model of acculturation, Bennett argued that WoIS want to maintain a healthy amount of communication and connection with a human community, especially during the first six months of their new life in a new country. Conducting analyses of variance to determine whether WoIS’s experiences of cultural shock changed over time, Bennett (2002) concluded that electronic communication plays a mediating role in ameliorating feelings of cultural shock. Benign as it may seem, this study takes as its unquestioned departure point the cultural shock assumption of surprising and stressful experiences in the new culture to be “treated” in prescription and suggestion, or otherwise ameliorated for its supposed threat to psychological wellbeing.

Day’s (2003) interdisciplinary dissertation engages a brief review of cultural shock literature, but her findings expand to other areas of cultural adjustment for WoIS, such as lack of adequate preparation for the sojourn, the difficulty with using English as a communicating tool at the beginning of the stay, and changes of WoIS’ identities that emerged through their sojourn. Specifically, she noted a perceived change in self-identity among WoIS related to the change from them being working women, to being unwaged wives. She also pointed out that the expectations of American culture are less the “fault” or “failure” of the wives themselves, than a consequence of its representation in the popular media and literature. Hence, for instance, several women in her study shared an “idealized version of the US in their mind” (Day, 2003, p.
and expected to arrive at a country with “only good things” (p. 46), only to find themselves disappointed after arriving in the U.S. with poor schools, prejudice, and a vivid contrast “between rich and poor” (p. 47). On the other hand, as some women expected to encounter mostly Caucasian faces during their sojourn in the U.S., many of them were surprised to find many people of other “non-white” cultures.

Yellig (2011) similarly ventures a little beyond the culture shock literature by conducting a phenomenological study to explore the impact of cultural influences on international students’ marital relationships, as well as the impact of marriage on their adjustment to the host culture. Her analysis indicates that “loneliness/homesickness, language barrier, and role shock” (p. 117) were some of the most significant challenges for accompanying spouses (including two males), particularly for those who had an established professional identity beforehand. Notably, Yellig’s study (2011) found that “participants from spiritually-orientated culture may experience additional culture shock in contact with the U.S. culture” (pp. 177-178). The participants of this study indicated that the “party culture”, materialistic orientation, and individualism (p. 178) in the U.S. society contradicts sharply with their cultural background in regards to spiritual beliefs. Increased closeness in the marital relationship and a tendency to guard against “negative” cultural influences were some of the themes that emerged from the participants’ responses.

While the abovementioned research engages in the discourse of cultural shock in discussing the subject of WoIS, all of them also included discussions on the multifaceted dimensions of WoIS’s sojourn, such as their experiences with identity-shift, their everyday struggles in adapting to a new culture, their psychological processes of meaning-making, and strategies that they have endorsed to cope with some of their difficulties. Like Baldwin (1970), while these studies remained within the discourse of cultural shock, all of them implicitly or
explicitly pointed to the intertwining relationships of gender and cultural ascriptions. For instance, Yellig’s study (2011) pointed to issues regarding gender and class difference as a form of cultural difference. All of the studies also made recommendations for changes in educational, institutional, and international policies, with the objective to lessen the degree of cultural shock for the WoIS.

The Discourse of acculturation as adjustment

The cultural shock view that assumes it a disorder of sorts, with sojourners from foreign countries being seen as troubled individuals, at worst, or struggling through a predictable “illness”, at best, has been criticized from various quarters, most notably the “acculturation literature,” of which the work of John Berry (1997) is arguably the most representative and influential. According to Berry, it is eminently more useful to think of the process and dynamic that sojourners undergo in terms of acculturation and acculturative stress. That is, the adjustment process is stressful, and it is the stress resulting from the acculturative demands that may cause problems and challenges. These challenges are thought to be responded to in one of four typical acculturation strategies, to wit assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. The assimilation strategy is characterized by a repudiation of the cultural identity of “origin”, and the adoption of values, behaviors, and cultural identity of the host culture. Opposed to the assimilation strategy, separation involves individuals holding on to their original cultures, and avoiding interaction with other cultures, and most particularly, the host culture. Integration posits a seemingly compromising “middle ground” as a strategy that attempts to maintain cultural practices and values of one’s original culture even as it is interested in, and adopts certain values and practices of other cultures, and the host culture, in particular. Lastly, when
individuals have neither interest in maintaining original culture nor interacting with the new culture, the strategy of marginalization is supposedly utilized (Berry, 1997).

Given the focus on the international student, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the earliest and more extensive (relatively, that is) literature arises from within universities, and from the way it affects the performance and wellbeing of the student. That is, inasmuch as wives have an impact on the achievement of their husbands (e.g. Kagan & Cohen, 1990), some researchers alerted universities to the fact that it made sense to offer holistic support to international students, inclusive of care for their family members. These early studies followed the discourse of acculturative stress as they assumed an inevitable stressful cultural transition, and they proposed programs to both assess needs and develop supportive programs for WoIS. For example, Ostler (1990) set up an English as Second Language (ESL) program for wives of international students, reasoning that such a program would both provide an official place of support endorsed by the university that aims at reducing feelings of isolation and facilitating the adjustment of wives, and offer skills for similar adjustment outside the university setting. Similarly, Kong (2003) integrated individual and focus group interviewing, journaling, and self-report measures to investigate the needs of WoIS in Canada. From the perspective of multicultural education, the study concluded with recommending an English as a Second Language Learning Community (ESLLC) “as a solution to the language learning needs and problems of spouses of international students" (Kong, 2003, p. 25).

Schwartz & Kahne (1993) endorsed the assumption of cultural transition and cultural adjustment to discuss ways in which support can be offered to international students and their spouses. Their study pointed out that the self-help groups of international wives may benefit from including the “active involvement of a professional familiar with the details of campus
resources and social life” (p. 451), and resources on how to locate these professionals in order to help ameliorate the problems these women may face.

Ojo (1998)’s study places some emphasis on the needs of WoIS by seeking to learn more about the conditions and the degree of cultural adjustments among WoIS from six different countries. She embarked on research that led to her categorizing characteristics of wives into three perspectives around the necessity of traveling, leading to the following conclusion: Wives who view travelling as a novelty and a way of self-learning were the most self-sufficient and independent group. On the other hand, wives who travel with their husband out of necessity were the least enthusiastic group during their stay in the United States. Traveling is perceived by the third group of wives in between the two antagonistic views as an important factor for the growth of the male scholar and the female spouse, leading these wives to report enjoying their stay during the sojourn.

To investigate the process of “assimilation” of Korean wives, Cho et al. (2005) revealed eight dynamic and recurrent ongoing phases to the basic social process of adjusting to life in the United States: preconfronting, confronting, discovering, undergoing crisis, seeking, reorienting, reflecting, and reconfronting. Using these phases of adjustment as yardstick and barometer, this study made recommendations for health care practitioners alongside culturally appropriate interventions for these women.

Operating within the discourse of acculturative stress, Bigler (2007) sought to use quantitative methodology to explore the relationship between acculturative stress and psychological distress among WoIS. Her study found a positive relationship between acculturative stress and psychological distress using hierarchical regression analyses. Also, her study found high and low levels of marital satisfaction moderated the relationship between
acculturative stress and psychological distress, while social support did not. In addition, a positive relationship was found between the amount of support programs offered by their husbands’ universities and spouses’ levels of perceived social support.

A recent study (Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu, 2011) integrated Hill’s ABCX stress theory (see Hill, 1949) to guide their exploration into Asian international graduate students and spouses. Students and spouses were interviewed, and data was analyzed phenomenologically, leading to the identification of unique stressors across three categories: “(a) loss of roles and status; (b) power imbalance in the couple relationships; and (c) feeling inadequate” (2011, p. 470), affirming the widespread assumption that WoIS experience acculturative stress not unlike their student spouses.

Incorporating the history of Chinese gender ideology, Zhang, Smith, Swisher, Fu, and Fogarty (2011) studied the effect of gender-role disruption on marital satisfaction among Chinese WoIS. The result from quantitative data indicates that “the mediation model did not hold up, since gender role disruption (independent variable) was not associated with marital satisfaction (dependent variable)” (p. 536). Based on their regression analysis, “self-esteem was significantly associated with marital satisfaction” (p. 536), and that although not significant statistically ($p = 0.06$), self-esteem appeared to be central in women’s adjustment to life in the U.S.

Cross-cultural comparison in the discourse of acculturative and adjustment

Another group of acculturative literature concerns adjustment processes from a cross-cultural perspective, focusing on the juxtaposition of adjustment problems and cultural differences resulting from cultural-crossing experiences.
Vogel (1986), who was a clinical social worker working with international wives, used the case of Japanese international wives to discuss “adjustment problems” by framing and illustrating cultural differences between Japan and America. While issues regarding communication problems, anxiety of living oversees, social isolation, and changes in marital relationship were identified as adjustment struggles, Vogel (1986) was especially attuned to the cultural elements of communication that is not limited to linguistic differences. She noted,

Sometimes what is labeled a language problem is really a problem of cross-cultural communication. Even with a patient who knows English rather well, the Japanese patient and the American doctor or nurse may have trouble understanding each other. As one Japanese man explained to me, he understood the words but not the meaning (Vogel, 1986, p. 275, italics in original)

Vogel’s note implied the intertwining relationship between culture and language, specifying that language often serves as a medium containing cultural differences irrespective of linguistic competency.

Liu’s (1992, p. 6) study on Chinese student’s wives in the U.S. also explored language as one axis across which cultural crossing is experienced. Using Gadamer’s interpretive methodology, Liu uniquely frames experiences of cultural differences among Chinese WoIS beyond national boundaries by interpreting subjective experiences within larger “social and cultural environments in which they have lived” (p. 8). For instance, Liu noted a different social expectation of women in Taiwan and in Mainland China in the 1990’s—that “Women in Mainland China are encouraged and pressured to work outside the home in order to gain economic power and independence” (p. 8) whereas women in Taiwan “are encouraged to… assume more traditional homemaker roles in the lives of their families” (p. 8). Coming from this
particular social-cultural condition, Liu found that many Mainland Chinese WoIS adjust to the loss of employment by trying to “improve their domestic roles. As a result, traditional female beliefs are revived” (1992, p. 38). Consequently, Liu’s study continues to find that Chinese WoIS had to adjust to lowered social status and undesirable employment changes, and that they shared feelings of insecurity, inferiority and incompetence (Liu, 1992).

To more explicitly discuss the adjustment process of Chinese WoIS, Lo (1993) uses the concept of “adjustment experience” broadly to “include the adjustment problems, the process of adjustment, and the means of coping” (p. 6). She identified “adjustment process” from a longitudinal design, outlined several myths of Chinese women's adjustment, their coping strategies, and from there the “main” cultural differences between Chinese and American cultures. For instance, Lo noted that while American culture encourages a legal and official process of help-seeking strategy regarding domestic dispute, women from Chinese culture implicitly carry a “hierarchy of help” system. That is, a woman suffering from domestic battery may first seek help from her family member, then from people from the same culture, and then from her husband’s immediate supervisor. These women are often surprised and frustrated when their husband’s American supervisor refers them to professional systems of support, deeming such a response “unhelpful” (Lo, 1993). While Lo’s study continues to outline similar adjustment difficulties of Chinese WoIS, her study breaks ground in that it also considers the WoIS as sojourners, broadening the term beyond the actual student spouse; moreover, her focus on the potential of domestic violence among WoIS, and the cross cultural difficulties in reporting and responding to such violence, is a similar first.

Understanding acculturative stress from the perspective of cross-cultural comparison is not all uncommon, considering the so-called “transport and test” value of cross-cultural
Nugraha (2004) consequently studied WoIS from twelve different countries, seeking to understand the effect of cultural dislocation on self-directed learning and educational behavior. His findings suggested that “cultural dislocation can indeed increase the need to learn” (2004, p. 188) because individuals generally desire to familiarize themselves with the new culture as a stress reduction strategy, hence they are more able to look at their own culture reflectively from a distance. Under this universal claim, Nugraha (2004) provided cross-cultural comparison, for example, that some Arabic-speaking women are able “to look at less rigid gender division of labor among their fellow Muslims from other countries and evaluate their own culture accordingly” (Nugraha, 2004, p. 188), pointing to the relationship between self-directed learning and individualized cultural background.

Using an ethnographic methodology, Pence (2004) investigated the experiences of Japanese spouses of international scholars, and like Vogel (1986), Pence (2004) highlights how cultural differences may be encoded in varied linguistic practices between Japanese and English. For instance, Pence (2004) noted that “strong emphasis on social harmony and interdependence among members within a group is also explicitly reflected in the communication patterns of the Japanese” (p. 36), and that “tendency toward non-confrontational style with an emphasis on consensus building is an obvious characteristic of Japanese communication” (p. 36). In contrast to Western perspective that “tend to individuality and independence,” Pence (2004) found that the cultural schemas unique to “Japanese socialization might be viewed as ‘antithetical to the expression of true self’ or as being superficial, insincere behaviors” (p. 38). The encoded cultural differences in the varied linguistic practices point to cross-cultural differences in the meaning-making process. Studies that proceed from an acculturative stress assumption deployed a wide variety of variables and investigations in order to chart the ways in which it impacts,
modifies, or mitigates acculturative stress—aspects and issues such as such as linguistic difficulty, communication barriers, need assessment, stages of assimilation, stress theory, and cross-cultural differences are but a few. Nonetheless, even as the acculturation literature seemingly provides some corrective to the disease model of culture shock, several critical observations are called for. To start, the culture shock notion is still operative, albeit in transformed or nuanced form. The assumption is still that there is a “correct” or “healthy” acculturative strategy over and above “bad” or “unhealthy” ones, that assimilation or integration is not only possible but desirable; that the acculturative process is an individual, psychological affair, and that its success is dependent on the psychosocial coping skills and/or resources available to the individual, and that the acculturative process can be predicted, follows a linear unfolding, and can as such be measured and predicted by some model and equation. Additionally, cross-cultural comparison continues to assume a universal process of acculturation (for a similar critique see Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 141), with modification mediated by culture as a variable. Culture, in the universal psychology that assumes a “proper” acculturation process, is often narrowly defined as the nationality of an individual.

**Atheoretical Discourse**

A third trend within the literature seems to be a host of “atheoretical studies,” where researchers correlate or run regression analyses on a number of variables supposedly related to, predictive of, or otherwise mediating either the acculturative or adjustment experience. Although many such studies incorporated the discourses of culture shock (e.g. Day, 2003) or acculturative stress (e.g. Bigler, 2007) as previously introduced, their goal is to correlate as many variables to acculturation or acculturative stress.
Fonseca (1995), coming from the discipline of developmental psychology, wished to study parenting stress among WoIS and their international-student-husbands. Using multiple regression, Fonseca found that “cultural misfit” was an important predictor of parenting stress for WoIS as compared to their student counterpart. In Fonseca’s study, the variable of “cultural misfit” is operationalized as “the degree of discomfort perceived by the participant caused by the differences between the participants’ culture and that of the U.S.” (p. 55). The result of the study indicates that among WoIS, parenting satisfaction is best predicted by depressive mood and cultural misfit (Fonseca, 1995). Consistent with Lo’s (1993) study, Fonseca (1995) found that the main sources of support for WoIS and their student-husbands are “relatives and friends in their home country, followed by students in their own country” (p. 115). Interestingly, Fonseca found gender differences between WoIS and their husbands on their attunement to their partner’s well-being, namely, “females made better predictions of their spouses’ well-being, while males’ evaluation of their spouses well-being was more related to their own well-being” (1995, pp. xii-xiii).

Lin (2006) examined East Asian graduate students and their spouses’ stress-mediating and adaptation-facilitating factors through selected variables, using an on-line survey with five different language versions. This study found no differences between the East Asian graduate students and their spouses’ life satisfaction scores, and that the variables of social support and having one child were significant predictors for life satisfaction scores. Specific results regarding WoIS from Lin’s study indicates that they were slightly more involved in social support interaction than their husbands; and that WoIS’s higher life satisfaction and lower sense of coherence indicated that they might be internally unsatisfied, but externally contented. In her
words, “the spouses might be experiencing negative energy from the temporary stay while living a life of material sufficiency” (Lin, 2006, p.65).

Martens & Grant (2008), using a survey and multiple quantitative analyses, argue that many WoIS are highly educated professionals who face a variety of unique cultural and situational adjustment issues. The most significant adjustment difficulty of these wives is related to the lack of further professional development. Therefore, wives generally prefer programming with a career development focus. An unexpected result in Martens & Grant’s (2008) study was the few differences between wives living in small towns and big cities in the United States, suggesting a more homogeneous experience or dynamic regardless of their temporary residential location.

A host of like studies operated under the assumption that sojourning experiences across cultures can be measured, that the instruments actually measure exhaustively and essentially what it purports to (culture shock, acculturative stress, acculturation strategy, or acculturation in general), that the process and dynamic is largely the same across gender or culture, for example, even though those “variables” may moderate the experience in quantity (that is, women, in general, may experience “higher levels” of acculturative stress than males, but it is still the same, intrapsychic, coping dynamic, irrespective of gender or cultural background), or that a universalized pattern of culture-crossing experiences can be identified. Therefore, as factors contributing to feelings of cultural shock are identified, these feelings can be programmatically responded to, and the person can be “inoculated” or “vaccinated”, so to speak.

Most of the studies reviewed above, and indeed represented in the broader academic corpus, are of a quantitative nature. There has been significant critique leveled at such research, for example, for its reductionist, individualistic, and linear manner of understanding experiences
of WoIS, for its universalized notions of culture and an ethnocentric cultural theory in understanding cultural-crossing experiences. Furthermore, whether or not culture can be understood as a fixed target of investigation is debatable, based on the ways in which “culture” is taken up by each study. In addition, because some studies focused on issues of mental health and applied their findings to health care providers, they failed to address the intricate relationship between the psychological well being of WoIS and their ascriptions to their gender and cultural role in a situated context.

Moving Beyond Cultural Shock and Acculturative Discourses: Discourses on Gender and Cultural construction

Against the dominance of cultural shock and acculturative discourses, several recent studies have nonetheless extended their discussion on WoIS beyond these discursive traditions, into areas concerning psychological processes, sociological structures, and explicit recommendation for immigration reform and policy changes (e.g. Bordoloi, 2012; Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2012). For instance, as a former advisor to international students, Urias (2005) framed his survey of WoIS and their spouses within a post-911 social context to analyze his own position, indicating that instead of acting as advocates, many international student service offices act more as enforcers of immigration regulations. Urias (2005) paid specific attention to domestic violence and gendered power-relation between WoIS and their student-husband, especially when WoIS were in isolation, and he offered strategies on ways to disseminate information regarding current legal protections afforded to nonimmigrants.

Rayman (2006) conducted a qualitative study investigating the social network and community of WoIS (Rayman, 2006). The study concluded that “three factors may help [WoIS]
to move from dependency to agency as well as connect them to the mesosystem level of interaction while also maintaining a sense of cultural identity. These factors are: a woman’s status as a mother, her access to structured community groups … and her use of the Internet.” (p. 52). This study allows for the theme of cultural identity to emerge alongside personal identity. Like other previous studies (e.g. Lin, 2006), identifying as a mother appears to contribute to a sense of moving from “dependency to agency” for the WoIS’s sojourning experiences. Raymen noted, “motherhood shaped the experience of life in Pittsburgh for those who had children” (Rayman, 2006, p. 45). Although Rayman’s (2006) study articulated a broader spectrum of experiences to international wives that included their local communities, which was previously ignored when the emphasis was only put on the cultural shock experiences, this study continues to assume a fixed notion of cultural identity, which is exemplified in Rayman’s proposing phases of cultural adjustment as a theoretical model for support and intervention.

Moving beyond fixed discourse of gendered and cultural studies concerning specific social phenomena such as domestic violence (e.g. Urais, 2005) or cultural identity (Rayman, 2006), recent sociological studies used WoIS to illustrate the intertwining relationships among social structure, gendered construction, and cultural practices. Kim (2006) conducted twelve in-depth interviews with Korean WoIS to focus on the gendered care-worker role these women were “forced” to assume during their sojourn as a result of social-cultural structure. The terminology of “care work” refers to house chores, cooking, child-rearing, etc., and generally to works that are subordinate and supportive (Kim, 2006). According to Kim’s (2006) analysis, because of the classification of “legal dependents” status for all accompanying family members of mostly male international students, the immigration system is embedded in “the conventional middle-class nuclear family structure, with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker and
reinforces patriarchal ideology” (p. 163). Contradictory views were expressed by Korean WoIS in Kim’s (2006) study: “While they speak highly of their roles as indispensable in their families, they feel that they are in a subordinate position serving their families as ‘maids’ and they are blocked from other alternatives besides unpaid carework” (p. 172). Kim’s (2006) keen analysis moved beyond cultural shock discourse and began to engage in gender and race construction as embedded in social-cultural transaction, using WoIS as an example. Similarly, Park’s (2009) recent study uses the constant comparative methodology protocol (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to conduct interpretive qualitative data analysis of the case of a Korean’s WoIS, Han Nah. This study revealed that “Han Nah’s identities are viewed as a site of struggle in multiple contexts” including being positioned by her parents as “a traditional Korean woman in the larger Korean patriarchal society, which in turn impacted her own decisions navigating through both Korean and U.S. educational and professional contexts” (p. 174) and that her own identities of motherhood and spouse had “influenced and somewhat superseded her professional aspirations, which led Han Nah to claim her dominant language and race in the Western educational system” (p. 174).

Coming from a similar focus regarding gender construction via cultural transaction, Sakamoto (2006) set out to study “psychological processes” of Japanese international sojourners (WoIS and wives of international scholars) from “family and gender perspectives” (p. 559). She introduced the notion of “cultural negotiation” as “the way in which individuals encounter, understand, (re)construct, negotiate, participate in, and redefine the multiple cultural contexts in their everyday lives” (p. 561), and added the element of transcultural family in the process of cultural negotiation. By way of deconstructing the discourse of acculturation, Sakamoto’s study on Japanese WoIS and other international wives highlights “how social regulatory powers such
as gender roles and the presence of and the dynamics within family/couple relationships are crucial factors in understanding individuals’ cultural negotiation processes” (Sakamoto, 2006, pp. 574-5).

Framing itself explicitly as a feminist study, Teshome (2010) looked into social and institutional factors affecting the daily life of WoIS. Her research is based on interviews with twelve women from eleven different countries, examining experiences of WoIS residing in the U.S. with the status of a legal dependent. In addition to gender, her research also addressed how “the socio-economic background” and the “values” of the participants (p. 66) contributed to their views and opinions regarding their sojourn. Specifically, this research is critical in underlining the social and institutional factors that affect the daily experiences of WoIS. For instance, on the topic of the political implication of the financial hardships of WoIS, Teshome (2010) noted that as a result of institutional barriers (i.e. “nearly impossible for such spouses to enter into other job sectors without the appropriate permits”), WoIS “are likely to seek work that is undocumented” and that “the cleaning and housekeeping job sector also routinely absorbs the job seeker with no difficulty” (p. 138).

Aiming to tie together the issues of social mobility, social class, and education, Neupane’s (2011) study examined South Asian WoIS’s identities during their sojourn. The result finds five interconnected themes: academic qualifications and occupational mobility, class-based habitus and the feeling of declassing, negotiation of multiple identities, employment rights and restrictions tethered to their American visas, and the symbolic meaning of the U.S. Based on qualitative data gathered from interviews with South Asian WoIS, Neupane argued that because the participants’ prior “academic credentials were devalued in the US, they were unable to find work at their level of qualifications and experience, and such devaluation resulted in them
experiencing significant downward social class and occupational mobility” (Neupane, 2011, p. 83). In turn, “The downward mobility created by working in a supposedly low level job in the US created a feeling of status loss because these women’s prevailing attitudes toward these occupations were highly influenced by their habitus acquired in their home countries. Since their habitus informed them that white-collar jobs were more prestigious, working in a blue-collar job gave them a feeling of denigration and declassing” (p. 84). As a result of the inability to obtain “the expected opportunities in the American labor market” (p. 84), the WoIS became aware of their “negotiation of multiple identities” (p. 85) while feeling that they were “sacrificing their career” (p. 85). Consequently, increasing concerns began to surface in regards to employment rights and restrictions tethered to their American visas and the symbolic meaning of the U.S.

The most recent discourse on gender and cultural construction aims to move beyond cultural shock and acculturation discourse, while maintaining an understanding of cultural transactions among WoIS. Broadened notions of cultural elements moved beyond fixed notions of nationality and race in referring to culture and began to include discussions on gender, class, and diversity within cultures. A common denominator of recent studies on WoIS is that they often position themselves within feminist and critical theory, and many of them incorporated a post-structural position to analyze structural oppression based on various categorizations and power-relations within and between various layers of structures.

By way of summary: Loose genealogical threads

Compared to their student-husbands, the literature on lives of wives of international students (WoIS) has been scarce. De Verthelyi (1995) observed that the wives are largely “invisible” because “they are not expected to fulfill any specific task nor to achieve any positive
goal during their sojourn” (p. 390), resulting in ostensible institutional and social disconnections. Similarly, two of the earlier articles (Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986) concerning spouses of both students and faculties underlined the social isolation and marginality of the international spouses on campus.

After the first study published in 1970 (Baldwin, 1970), it took nearly a decade for others to surface. In the last decade, however, increasing numbers of studies concerning international spouses on campus have addressed many aspects of their cultural-crossing experiences—from cultural shock (Bennett, 2002; Day, 2003), acculturative stress and adjustment (Lin, 2006; Lo, 1993; Myers-Walls et al., 2011; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001), developmental process of acculturation (Bennett, 2002), family and marital relationships (Chang, 2003; Fonseca, 1995; Sakamoto, 2006; Zhang et al., 2011), need assessments (Bigler, 2007; Martens & Grant, 2008; Ojo, 1998), untraditional mode of learning (Nugraha, 2004), effects of social networking (Rayman, 2006), and mental health concerns (Cho, Lee, & Jezewski, 2005), to how the contextual changes of social-cultural situations impact cultural and gendered identities of the sojourning spouse (Kim, 2006; Park, 2009; Teshome, 2010). Definitive reasons for an increased interest and inquiry on the topic of international wives is not clear – perhaps more and more women are coming as international sojourners, more sensitive maybe to the plights of WoIS, perhaps some international sojourners are themselves mothers and spouses, or perhaps as Pence (2004) suggests, an “ongoing globalization” (p. 106) cues sensitivity to a wider range of academic interests and concerns.

A closer look at the home disciplines of the authors, and the journals publishing their articles, reveal a widening circle of concern, from the discipline of educational studies, to psychology, sociology, public health, and interdisciplinary studies. Among them, the earliest
(Baldwin, 1970) and most of the recent literature on WoIS are still anchored primarily in the discipline of education, but with divergent foci, such as Counseling Psychology (e.g. Bigler, 2007), Educational Leadership and Educational Policy (e.g. Nugraha, 2004), International Education (e.g. Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2012), Home Economic Education (e.g. Liu, 1992; Myers-Walls et al., 2011), Counseling Education (e.g. Yellig, 2011), International and English Education (e.g. Kong, 2003; Park, 2009) and Educational Psychology (e.g. Greenberg, 1989). This is perhaps because concerns about WoIS is more directly related to practices and policies of higher education institutions, and often many of the WoIS are visible only to people within the educational system. However, as mentioned earlier, attempts to learn about the overall experiences of WoIS are often extended so as to provide better care and improve the academic performance of the international students— which is the main goal of the higher education system.

Within the discipline of psychology, interests in WoIS seem to locate around developmental psychology (Fonseca, 1995), family and child development (de Verthelyi, 1995), and applied psychology (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Although public health concerns and contextual factors within contemporary socio-cultural milieu have been alluded at in most of the cited literature, it is not until recently that lives of WoIS were understood as embedded and inseparable from the fabrics of social-cultural contexts, and acknowledged as such directly and explicitly (e.g. Mitrushi, 2009; Rayman, 2006). Similarly, whereas most earlier studies on international wives have considered gendered variations of cross-cultural adjustments (e.g. de Verthelyi, 1995), it is not until recently that feminist approaches to understanding WoIS were incorporated explicitly as an entry point of inquiry (Kim, 2006; Kong, 2003; Pence, 2004; Teshome, 2010).
The studies reported on come from a variety of sources: books, journal articles, Masters theses, and doctoral dissertations from various disciplines. As I have illustrated as well, these disciplinary and theoretical frames and points of departure impact both the ways in which the phenomenon is taken up methodologically, as well as how it is understood academically. Put another way, it impacts on how knowledge is inscribed, erased, and reproduced. But as we have seen, beyond the methods and theories of respective disciplines, specific eras and historical periods, normative social and cultural values and beliefs, also exert an influence on how the phenomenon is understood and articulated. To that end, the texts on WoIS are neither value-free nor value-neutral; rather, they are texts that both constitute and are constituted.

Baldwin’s (1970) first study concerning WoIS for example comes in the aftermath of a civil rights decade, tumultuous and hopeful at the same time, and the backdrop of the Vietnam War. It may not be entirely far fetched to relate the “first” of the study within the historical era that may have legitimized, or otherwise occasioned the study. Whereas the discourse of cultural shock had existed before, it was not applied to spouses of sojourning students, perhaps no least because – in fact – sojourning students were themselves almost exclusively male! As acculturation stress entered the literature to provide a more nuanced academic sense of cultural transition, the sense of disease and pathology inherent to culture shock, gives way to the stress of cultural transition. Hence, there is some room for the situation, such that the transition is stressful as opposed to there is something wrong with me. As it turns out, however, even this discourse of acculturative stress (Berry, 1997) cannot entirely relinquish the sense of intrapsychic dis-ease, articulating as it does a clear narrative of acculturative styles (such as assimilation and integration) more “healthy” than others, and the person who adopts those styles more psychologically robust and adjusted.
In parallel to the research mentioned above, a strong *atheoretical* trend in which different variables are statistically related to each other have also been noticed. For all its presumed “objectivity” and search for universal process, the consequence of this trend has not been to find a robust variable or set of variables with which to explain the experience of WoIS, or of acculturative stress and acculturation in general; instead what we end up with is a shopping list of variables supposedly impacting the acculturating process and we are no closer to a universal process, theory, “correct acculturation”, or a “universalized cultural subject” by the methods and procedures of the statistical.

The culture shock-, acculturation-, and atheoretical measurement literature all provided a variety of specialized lenses to frame the experiences of WoIS, and with those lenses, the literature was able to touch on important elements of the lives of WoIS. Simultaneously, they all fail to address the subjective experiences of WoIS in their own terms, as they seemed to emerge within the temporal context of their contemporary discourse. Additionally, questions regarding how these experiences may be interrelated to the sense of cultural and gender ascriptions of WoIS have not been discussed directly.

A core premise of this dissertation is that much can be learned and gleaned from an approach to acculturation or cultural shock, even if we were to use those exact same terms, *as they are lived*. In other words, rather than assuming a norm or a “correct” way of acculturation or a correct mechanistic in responding to psychological variables or social-cultural structure, the present study wants to offer descriptive accounts that help capture and make sense of the different experiences of WoIS’s lives during their sojourn in the U.S., thereby adding to the literature on cultural and gender constitution by expanding the horizon to and through the “other” side of local practices. The present study consequently proposes an approach that describes the
experiences of WoIS in constitutive terms. By making explicit the everyday experiences of
WoIS, this study at once underlines and alters the shape of the critical responses seen in previous
studies.
CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAME:
CULTURAL-CROSSING PSYCHOLOGIES

In the last chapter, I narrated an academic thread from the early culture shock literature, through acculturative discourses, and atheoretical studies, to feminist and post-structural discourses. What seems apparent is that WoIS have been studied from a variety of perspectives and angles, even as that study represents a very small body of work, completely in keeping with the generalized sense of this group of sojourners as “marginalized” and “invisible.” There are, however, other academic ways with which to study and approach WoIS, notably cultural psychology and indigenous psychology. It is true that, in a field characterized by paucity, studies which are framed within cultural- or indigenous psychology are even scarcer, a parallel of sorts to the fact that these ways of approaching psychology are themselves “marginal” and “outside the mainstream.”

In this chapter, I provide some of the lacunae and critiques of the theoretical and methodological ways with which WoIS have been studied as a way to situate alternatives, and to offer different ways of framing experiences of WoIS.

On Cross-cultural Psychology

Cross-cultural psychology is perhaps the first contemporary attempt to systematically and explicitly address cultural-related issues in psychological studies. In a review that traces the early establishment of the directory of cross-cultural psychology, Berry (2009) noted that “a
number of cross-cultural psychology books… began to appear” in the 1960s, and he identified several marks of cross-cultural psychology as a field of study in psychology. For example, the new International Journal of Psychology was launched in 1966, the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology (JCC) was founded in 1970 and the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) in 1972 (Berry, 2009). To date, the ICAAP has had thirteen International Congresses, servicing the association’s supposedly primary aim —“to facilitate communication among persons interested in a diverse range of issues involving the intersection of culture and psychology” (“about ICAAP,” n.d.). This “communication” and “intersection”, changes across time notwithstanding, seemed invariably directed at the goal of achieving a universal psychology.

Harry Triandis, one of the earliest presidents of IACCP and a pioneer in the field of CCP, in an effort to illustrate the contribution of cross-cultural psychology, noted that:

Cross-cultural studies increase the range of variables, help unconfound variables, and allow an assessment of the effects of context on behavior. Cross-cultural work can often identify a universal core of meaning of a theoretical construct, as well as variations of the meaning of the construct in different cultures. Culture has important influences on many fields including perception, cognition, motivation, interpersonal behavior, and group dynamics. For optimal treatment of these topics, it is helpful to indicate both the limits of certain generalizations and the culture-linked variations. (Triandis and Brislin, 1984, p. 1014, emphasis added).

The basic assumption of “universal core” and “variations” across cultures was explicit in this early attempt to delimit the field of CCP. Basically, CCP identifies “culture” as a variable that can be measured, examined, and hence corrected (or to “unconfound” in Triandis’ words)
through experimental method to verify its effects on human behavior. In a later address, comparing cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology, Triandis focuses on the unique methodology of CCP in its broader way of sampling “across culture” (Triandis, 2000, p. 185), such that its methodological rigor aligns more closely with experimental psychology. Triandis assumes that indigenous psychology, cultural psychology, and cross-cultural psychology are “sub-disciplines” or “approaches” of a broader academic approach that deals with culture and psychology (Triandis, 2000, p. 185). He also observes that “mainstream psychologists are more likely to pay attention to the findings of cross-cultural than of indigenous or cultural psychologists” (Triandis, 2000, p. 191), presumably because mainstream psychologists are interested in theories that assume a universal psychology with culture as a variable. Triandis’s note implied that mainstream psychology is drawn to cross-cultural psychology both because of its assumption of universality and of its experimental methodological cachet. This view of CCP was partially confirmed by one of Triandis’ successors at IACCP, John W. Berry, who is also a predominant figure in the development of CCP. Like Triandis, Berry characterized the goal of reaching universality as the first goal of cross-cultural psychology, that is, “to transport current hypotheses and conclusions about human behavior to other cultural contexts in order to test their validity” (Berry, 2000, p. 198, italics original).

Berry, however, holds a broader view on delimiting the field of CCP than Triandis, in that Berry argues that Triandis’ version of CCP is narrowly defined and can be referred as an “imposed etic methodological approach” (Berry, 2000, p. 198).

1 Note that Triandis (2000) later acknowledged Berry’s analysis on the “imposed etic” methodology and discussed it as a potential methodological problem for cross-cultural psychology. “A general issue is that we want to study both the etic and emic aspects of each element of subjective culture. It will simply not do to take a test, attitude scale, or personality inventory developed in one culture, translate it and use it in other cultures. When this is done one assumes that one has an etic concept, but there is no evidence that it is etic. In fact this has been called a ‘pseudoetic’ or an ‘imposed etic’” (Triandis, 2002, pp. 7-8).
The issue regarding the etic-emic divide is common in cross-cultural research. Briefly, “The emic view emphasizes that psychological processes take unique culture-specific forms; the etic view emphasizes that psychological processes are basically the same and have different manifestations” (Triandis, 2000, p. 186). Berry (2000) expanded Traindis’s dualist division by further dividing the etic approach into the imposed etic approach and the derived etic approach. Generally speaking, an imposed etic approach disregards local conditions, while a derived etic approach arrives at universal claims, based on adequate understanding of culture-specific psychology. Following this distinction, Berry delimited two additional goals of cross-cultural psychology. The second goal of cross-cultural psychology, according to Berry, is related to the emic approach, namely, “to explore new cultural systems to discover psychological phenomena not available in the first culture” (p. 198). The third goal of cross-cultural psychology is associated with the “derived etic methodological approach” which seeks to “integrate psychological knowledge gained from these first two activities, and to generate a more pan-human psychology that would be valid for all people” (p. 198, italics original). For Berry, the imposed etic approach is insufficient to create a universal psychology. A key divergence between Berry and Triandis is that Berry “does not prioritize the etic approach over the emic approach; on the contrary, he seems to have reversed the priority so that the emic approach becomes the foundation of the etic approach” as Peng (2012, p. 11) summarized. Nevertheless, as hinted in the beginning of this section, Berry continues to pursue a universal psychology (i.e. “pan-human psychology” [see Berry, 2000, p. 198]) as one of the essential goals of cross-cultural psychology.

In addition to his contributions around the procedural and assumptive goals of cross-cultural psychology, perhaps Berry’s most influential contribution to CCP is the famous (or, in
some quarters, infamous) acculturation theory. According to Berry (1997), “The central aim of the field of cross-cultural psychology has been to demonstrate the influence that cultural factors have on the development and display of individual human behavior” (p. 6). When a person attempts to live in a new cultural context—one that differs from the one in which he or she has developed—Berry asserted that that there is “some complex pattern of continuity and change in how people go about their lives in the new society” (p. 6), and cross-cultural psychology is to study how cultural changes influence individual behavior. On the foundation of this assertion, Berry revised a previous discourse of “culture shock” (Oberg, 1960) to the new discourse of “acculturative stress” and “acculturative strategies” in addressing individuals’ behavioral changes when encountering a new culture. It is within this frame of reference that many previous studies on Wives of International Students (WoIS) are conducted.

Following the experimental paradigm of comparison across culture, some studies on WoIS tried to understand cultural-crossing experiences of WoIS as a result of essential cultural difference between a non-Western and a Western culture (e.g. between Japanese and American cultures, see Vogel, 1986; between Chinese and American cultures, see Liu, 1992); some attempted to compare acculturative strategies among WoIS on the basis of different cultural origins in terms of regions or countries of origin (e.g. Nugraha, 2004); some inquired into the ameliorating effects of specific means (i.e. electronic communication, social engagement, ESL classes, etc.) on acculturative stress (e.g. Bennett, 2002) and some explored various factors that adds to acculturative stress (e.g. Bigler, 2007). Like most studies following the frame of cross-cultural psychology, these studies on WoIS made several assumptions about culture and about psychological studies concerning culture. For example, studies often began with the assumption of acculturative stress as a universal experience that can be ameliorated through the integration
strategy (see Chapter Two for more details). Also, in comparing the essential differences between a non-Western and the U.S. culture, culture is assumed to be a fixed entity that is internally coherent, such that comparison between and among different cultures is rendered possible. Embedded in this assumption is the implicit prescription that culture, like other psychological elements, can be measured and tested via experimental means, such that cross-cultural comparison is viable and valid. Similar assumptions were made explicit in Segall, Lonner and Berry’s (1998) definition of culture as “a set of independent or contextual variables affecting various aspects of individual behavior” (p. 1102). Segall, Lonner and Berry further made obvious the universal assumptions about culture by stating that there are basic characteristics common to all members of the species (i.e., constituting a set of psychological givens) and that culture influences the development and display of them (i.e., culture plays different variations on these underlying themes called ‘variform universals’). (Segall, Lonner and Berry, 1998, p. 1104).

To the extent that “culture” is a variable to be tested, its “deviation” or differences can be ameliorated and corrected with artificial means (or “intervention”), such that cultural influences can be minimized, the goal of cross-cultural psychology is living up to maximally verifying a universal human core. As a whole, based on theoretical and empirical research from the cross-cultural psychological perspective, culture is taken as a variable that modifies psychological representations while the core of human nature remains universal.

**Evaluating Cross-cultural Psychology**

Following the methodological tradition of CCP, studies on WoIS have often proceeded in a comparative manner, assuming a constant core across people, with culture (as variable)
modifying that core. Recent studies and theoretical positions, however, question the direction of this assumption, arguing for much more of an intertwining relationships among social structure, gendered construction, cultural practices and self (e.g. Kim, 2006). By this argument, a larger socio-cultural dynamic is at play and has a direct influence on the lives of WoIS—they are not simply a group of people having varying experiences as a result of a measurable variable (i.e. culture) or as a result of individual and intrapsychic acculturative stress. There are invisible dynamics among cultures and between the individual lives and the policy/politics in cultural-crossing contexts—and it is the mark of how these dynamics play out in the lives of WoIS that touches on how it is like to live as a WoIS.

Additionally, acculturative theory can be critiqued from both a historical-logical (Rudmin, 2003) and a humanistic perspective (e.g. Adler, 1975). From the perspective of humanistic psychology, Adler (1975) argued against the assumption of “cultural adjustment” or “cultural shock” by advocating for cultural encounter as a “a movement from a state of low self- and cultural awareness to a state of high self- and cultural awareness” (p. 15). As self- and cultural awareness increases, cross-cultural encounter may serve as “instrumental to personal growth” (p. 18), which Adler (1975) also spoke of in terms of “a depth experience” (p. 20) and “a journey into the self” (p. 22). Adler’s humanistic revision advocates for a “new understanding of change experiences” (i.e. cultural-crossing experiences) that “will hopefully broaden the challenges to ethnocentrism, chauvinism, and nationalism” (p. 22). Essential to his analysis on cross-cultural experiences is the intertwining relationship between culture and self. Similar views were later extended in post-colonial identity theories that advocates for thinking about cross-cultural experiences by considering “selfhood as firmly intertwined with socio-cultural factors such as colonialism, language, immigration and racially based laws” (Bhatia & Ram,
While converging on the notion of intertwining relationship between culture and self, an important divergence between humanistic and post-colonial theories lies in the fact that the notion of self is singular and individually coherent in the humanistic understanding, whereas self in the post-colonial sense is not the focal concern of inquiry.

Rudmin (2003), after an extensive literature review, makes a persuasive critical case, illustrating how the fourfold scales of acculturative strategies “are ipsative with one another and are thus unsuitable for factor analysis or other multivariate methods,” and that “no empirical evidence” supports integration (p. 8) as the best strategy for people in cross-cultural situations. This sentiment was reiterated by post-colonial theorists Bhatia & Ram (2009),

Although integration and bicultural competency may be worthy goals to achieve, … for most people living in contemporary diasporas, their negotiation with multiple cultural sites is fluid, dynamic, interminable and often unstable. Achieving integration may simply not be an option and/or may be achieved temporarily only to be lost at some point and so on. The acculturation journey is not a teleological trajectory that has a fixed-end point but instead has to be continuously negotiated. Thus, there are several conceptual problems with describing the integration strategy as the developmental end goal in the immigrant’s acculturation process. (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 148).

All said, while the discourse of acculturative stress and acculturative strategies permeates cross-cultural psychological approach, its validity and applicability to everyday cross-cultural experiences is debatable at best.

Epistemologically, as well, the universalized theory of cross-cultural psychology and the “variable” driven way of understanding cultural-crossing experiences run into serious critical
challenges, for example, and as Bhatia and Ram notes, whereas cross cultural psychologists consider

culture and history [as] variables that enable the ‘display’ of the pre-given properties of the acculturating self, but these very variables are not taken to be inextricably interwoven with the self. The historical, structural, and political aspects of immigration rarely enter the discussion, and when they do, they are classified as group variables. (2009, p. 147, emphasis added).

Echoing the previous point on the inextricable relationship between self and culture, Bhatia & Ram (2009) further explicate the inadequacy of using culture and other contextual aspects as experimental variables. In fact, using culture as a variable to examine and explain differences has a longer history in Psychology than the contemporary establishment of IACCP. In a careful analysis on the history of cross-cultural psychology, Cole (1996) traced the early cross-cultural studies on sensations, intelligence, and memory, all of which were vibrant areas of research in late 19th and/or early 20th century, to examine the cross-cultural differences via “scientific” and “comparative” approaches, using experimental design and statistical method in an attempt to separate culture from psychological factors. Based on his careful analysis of the history of cross-cultural studies on the “primitive” cognitive elements that are presumably universal and may represent behavioral variations across culture, Cole found that all evidence supporting this claim is dubious and he concluded that “culture is not really an independent variable, because it is not under experimental control and subjects are not assigned at random with respect to it haunts all such efforts” (Cole, 1996, p. 67). Simply put, Cole and other psychologists question the attainability and the reality of the presumed universal psychology proposed by cross-cultural psychology. Building on the epistemological (and ontological)
shortcoming of cross-cultural psychology, Cole proposed a more dynamic and fluid view on cultural-crossing psychology (which he called “a cultural-historical theory of mind,” p. 37) that takes close affinity to everyday activity in real life. It is from Cole’s version of “cultural psychology” to which I turn in the next section on culture and psychology.

**On Cultural Psychology**

In establishing his own version of cultural psychology, Cole (1996) provides a brief review on the historic origins of various versions of cultural psychology. He started with Wilhelm Wundt’s idea about *Völkerpsychologie* (i.e. a psychology of peoples, or national or cultural groups) that was largely ignored as attention was only given to Wundt’s establishment of experimental laboratories that later led to the rise of behaviorism, psychological testing and the hegemony of experimental science. Underlining this missing “second psychology”, which accorded “a central role to culture” (Cole, 1996, p. 101), Cole noted the rise of cultural psychology from the 1970’s onward (Cole, 1996, pp. 102-104), represented for example by important contributions from people like Stephen Toulmin (1980), Douglass Price-Williams (1980), the Saarbrücken group (Eckensberger, Krewer, & Kasper, 1984), Richard A. Shweder (1991), and Jerome Bruner (1990). Coming from the background of experimental psychology and having been influenced by the Russian cultural-historical psychology, Cole’s (1996) version of cultural psychology takes on a more positivistic philosophy—or in his own words, this way of doing psychology may be called “Romantic Science” (p. 343)—that fosters a kind of psychological science that not only concerns scientifically reductionist facts, but also accounts for everyday experiences.
Similar to Cole, Price-Williams (2002) took a scholarly turn from cross-cultural to cultural psychology in his career around 1980. As one of the early predecessors of cultural psychology, he argued “that the idea of a cross-cultural psychology logically necessitated the anterior idea of a cultural psychology” (p. 1), reinforcing again the idea that “psychology operates within a cultural medium” (p. 1). Price-Williams’ (1980) work set the stage for a cultural psychology with distinct epistemological and ontological assumptions from cross-cultural psychology.

Another influential figure in cultural psychology is Bruner (1990), who focused on the ideas of narrative inquiry in his notion of “Act of Meaning.” For Bruner, people use narratives to make sense of lives, and their sense-making process is inseparable from their cultural settings. He noted that the “central concern is not how narrative as a text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind on the construction of reality” (Bruner, 1991, p. 6). With a more interpretive underpinning, Bruner’s concern was on how people use ordinary and commonplace understanding to interpret and make their everyday lives meaningful, such that culture emerges via the meaning given and transmitted through that process of sense-making.

Similar to Bruner, Shweder placed a greater emphasis on interpretation, but arrived at it from the discipline of psychological anthropology. Shweder’s book, Thinking Through Culture (1991), was pivotal to the development of cultural psychology as it draws a sharp distinction between mainstream psychology and cultural psychology, as well as points out the differences among cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and classical psychological anthropology. What Shweder (1991) called “the great and unbearable divide between general and cultural psychology” (p. 83) is the contrasting views of mind—one considers the mind as an inherent central processing mechanism that needs to be understood in the void of “noises” while the other
argues that “the mind left to its own devices is mindless” (p. 83). As such, Shweder (1991) offers cultural psychology as “an alternative discipline of interpretations of the fundamentals of the mind” (p. 87).

The mind, according to cultural psychology, is content driven, domain specific, and constructively stimulus bound; and it cannot be extricated from the historically variable and cross-culturally diverse intentional worlds in which it plays a constituting part. Consequently, cultural psychology interprets statements about regularities observed in a lab or observed anywhere else,… not as propositions about inherent properties of a central processing mechanism for human psychological functioning but rather as descriptions of local response patterns contingent on context, resources, instructional sets, authority relations, framing devices, and modes of construal. (Shweder, 1991, p. 87).

In his vision of cultural psychology, Shweder offers an excellent attempt to escape from the Platonic dualism between culture and mind, and to promote a non-dualistic notion of culture and mind. Transformed from the incessant search for the universal in the field of cross-cultural psychology, Shweder (2000) put forth the idea of “universalism without the uniformity” (p. 210) in his understanding of cultural psychology, as an attempt to justify its generalizability. In his words, “Indeed cultural psychology presupposes many universals. However, the search for and the privileging of things that are uniform across all peoples and cultures is a project that goes under some other name” (Shweder, 2000, p. 210, emphasis added). While recognizing the potential universal applicability of cultural psychology, Shweder also made clear the differences (in the same name of “universal”) between cultural and cross-cultural psychology⁡.

⁡A similar idea was later established in discourses on indigenous psychology by the notion of “unity-in-diversity” (Li, 2012, p. 859). What seems intriguing is the common underlining desire for the sense of “unity” that comes once
Despite the implicit desire for a form of unity, Shweder’s eyes were certainly focused on differences in his understanding of cultural psychology. As opposed to cross-cultural psychology, Shweder noted that the focus of cultural psychology is not to look for a common psychic core through cultural variations, but “on differences in the way members of different communities perceive, categorize, feel, want, choose, evaluate and communicate that can be traced to differences in salient community-based ‘goals, values and pictures of the world’” (Shweder, 2000, p. 213, emphasis added). And by understanding the rationale of differences fully, Shweder is in support of cultural psychology acting as agent of social justice by participating in public debate so as to “avoid or at least overcome certain kinds of mistaken and sometimes harmful judgments about the beliefs and practices of ‘others,’ including the judgment that others are abusive, barbaric, mutilators of their children, or otherwise immoral, misguided, irrational, disgusting or bad” (2000, p. 217). As such, Shweder contended that “‘Thinking through others’ is a central aim of cultural psychology” (Shweder, 2000, p. 220), and he proposed to do so in at least four senses: “(1) thinking by means of the other; (2) getting the other straight; (3) deconstructing and going beyond the other; and (4) witnessing in the context of engagement with the other” (Shweder, 1991, p. 108). It is arguable that by adopting the notion of “thinking through others,” Shweder’s version of cultural psychology has completely transformed into a new way of thinking about culture and psychology that is ontologically and epistemologically different from the comparative and reductionist approach upheld by cross-cultural psychology\(^3\). Indeed, Shweder himself noted that “cultural psychology has the feel of a ‘postmodern’ discipline” (Shweder, 1991, p. 220).

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and again in different guises across various branches of cultural-related psychology.

\(^3\) Such can be understood as a new “event” in Foucaultian (Foucault, 2001/1982) sense.
After briefly reviewing some major players in the early evolution and establishment of cultural psychology, it has become clear that the question regarding the place of culture in psychological science is at the center of the decade-long debate. Cole, Bruner, Price-Williams, and Shweder all had their own emerging definitions about culture, and all of them acknowledged the difficulties to “fix” culture into a determined relation to psychology. Perhaps it is the elusive and fluid quality of culture that has troubled psychological science for decades, to the extent that it was placed in a peripheral role by the standard of mainstream psychology, which has long sought to achieve the scientific goal of “objectivity, experimentation, and universality” (Misra & Gergen, 1993, p. 227). To put it differently, culture has been treated as a source of error in the eyes of mainstream psychology, as an obstacle toward ultimate universality. From the mainstream/Cross-cultural psychology side, Triandis (1993) defended the goal of universalism in favor of generalization by admitting that both psychology and science are Western “constructions,” such that goals of prediction and control are scientific proper. On the foundation of Western scientific ontology, Triandis was right about what counts as scientific proper, such that the epistemological foundation of cultural psychological views on the relation between culture and psychology makes little sense. However, the mismatch between the understanding of culture from the Western Scientific (i.e. mainstream, cross-cultural) and from the cultural psychology views is perhaps an ontological but not an epistemological one. The argument of Misra & Gergen (1993) (and cultural psychologists) goes beyond epistemological concern by advocating for an ontological revision on the relationship between psychology and culture. This ontology concerns not the law of effects (which treats human like objects), but

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4 “The glory of science is generalization” (Triandis, 1993, p. 250).
5 Obviously, if the argument starts with the ontology of natural science (that the laws of effects is universal), then Triandis’ argument for psychology as a science make sense (i.e. the ontology of science asks for an epistemological goal of generalizability, prediction and control).
takes into account uniquely human processes and experiences like psyche, soul, culture, etc.

Indeed, the application of Western science “is fraught with the risk of imposing an alien ontology and an alien epistemology” (Misra & Gergen, 1993, p. 235) onto people’s everyday lives. On the ground of this new ontology, the way that Misra & Gergen (1993) and cultural psychologists attempt to think about culture and psychology makes more than perfect sense, and the cross-cultural view becomes not only limited, but actually fraudulent. Indeed, cultural psychology employs an other way to think about culture and psychology that perhaps is the only way to connect with the lives lived in the practices of common people.

While underscoring the divergence among various scientists ascribing to cultural psychology (inclusive of historical roots and emphasis on the centrality of interpretation version action theory), Cole (1996) summarizes the main characteristics of cultural psychology as follows:

It stresses mediated action in a context.

It insists on the importance of the ‘genetic method’ understood broadly to include historical, ontogenetic, and microgenetic levels of analysis.

It seeks to ground its analysis in everyday life events.

It assumes that mind emerges in the joint mediated activity of people. Mind, then, is in an important sense, ‘co-constructed’ and distributed.

It assumes that individuals are active agents in their own development but do not act in settings entirely of their own choosing.

It rejects cause-effect, stimulus-response, explanatory science in favor of a science that emphasizes the emergent nature of mind in activity and that acknowledges a central role for interpretation in its explanatory framework.
It draws upon methodologies from the humanities as well as from the social and biological science. (Cole, 1996, p. 104)

It is from this shared foundation and with the appreciation of its diversity within the cultural psychological discourse that the present project turns to the inquiry regarding wives of international students (WoIS). As one proceeds, several questions are important to bear in mind:

How is cultural psychology critically relevant to the present project on wives of international students (WoIS)? Why is it critical, or not, to employ a cultural psychological point of view in an attempt to understand lives of WoIS?

The relevance of cultural psychology on studying lives of WoIS

To discuss the relevance of cultural psychology on the present study concerning the lives of WoIS, let us review some of the common ground in the mainstream acculturation research: many presented migrant experiences “in terms of a series of phases that must culminate with a successful incorporation into the host culture” (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 140). An example of such “successful incorporation” has been present since the first research on WoIS—remember the story of the “model wife” (Baldwin, 1970)? While these stories may be “factual” to the extent that some WoIS did “make it” according to the rules and assumptions of the mainstream/Western viewpoint, many later studies on WoIS underlined the fact that perhaps none of the WoIS really “made it” in the sense that their struggles with power-relation, structural oppression, gender division of labor, and conflicting experiences of differences were truly resolved in the unfortunate form of disappearance (e.g. M. Kim, 2006; Pence, 2004; Sakamoto, 2006; Urias, 2005). While they may be “invisible” under erasure, traces of struggle were found in the community and through the other people who interact with WoIS on a more than minimal
basis (e.g. de Verthelyi, 1995; Kong, 2003). In fact, the experiences of being marginalized were never “ameliorated” by the strategy of “integration.” Instead, it appears that it is via a constant “negotiation” (e.g. Neupane, 2011; Pence, 2004; Sakamoto, 2006) that some forms of meaning and understanding of being/becoming a WoIS, be it marginalizing or empowering, can start to be grappled with.

Diverging from mainstream psychological approaches, a critical approach to cultural psychology offers an understanding of WoIS in that it cultivates “a shift from conceptualizing acculturation and immigrant identity as an individual process to a more broad, contextual, and political phenomenon” (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 141) such that the notion of “acculturation” can be reconsidered in relation to diasporic conditions and postcolonial identities—in this sense aligning with Shweder’s note on how cultural psychology ascribes to “the feel of a ‘postmodern’ discipline” (Shweder, 1991, p. 220).

A critical approach to cultural psychology offers a different way of reading texts and narratives as “acts of meaning” in the way that Bruner framed it, such that culture, self, and others are made intelligible in the everyday understanding of practices (like the romantic science Cole was inspired by—an integration of practice and science) despite the fluid and diverse cultural settings in which a WoIS finds herself (that is, a context that can hardly be “predicted” or “controlled” in the strictly “scientific” sense). It may be an understanding of narrative inquiry as cultural psychology, that is, “to move away from privileging the self as the site of narrative production of identities and instead compels us to shift our focus to narratives that are produced out of colliding cultural practices” (Bhatia, 2011, p. 351, emphasis added). To put it differently, conflicts and tensions are emphasized in a narrative inquiry that is “fundamentally a cultural act and also rooted in a cultural psychology that must aim to understand the constitution of self-other
relationships” (Bhatia, 2011, p. 348), fostering and welcoming a way of “constructing views of self through others” (Bhatia, 2011, p. 348).

To echo Price-Williams’ note on the anterior position of cultural to cross-cultural psychology, it is perhaps a step forward to underscore the ontologically disparate positions of the two—that an ontology of human-science is called-forth in cultural psychology, as opposed to the ontology of natural science (as adopted by cross-cultural psychology) that views human as objects. If lives of WoIS are to be understood within an inter-cultural medium that is fluid and forever transforming, a cultural psychology (perhaps a polymorphous one) that takes narrative inquiry, textual interpretation, contextual factors, and conflicting social powers seriously into consideration has a lot to offer, because it does not start with the separation of mind from culture, but it takes the centrality of culture as a way of understanding and making sense of lives of WoIS.

To summarize, the present project ascribes to styles of cultural psychology in many senses—in the sense that the present projects takes on a disparate ontological feel from cross-cultural psychology, as Price-Williams alerted us to; in the sense that narratives of WoIS are taken as meaningful carriers and incubators of culture as Bruner proposed to us; in the sense that cultural-historical psychology of WoIS is integrated with concerns regarding everyday practices in context, as a tool with which Cole equipped us; and in the sense that political and practical implications may be made directly applicable to the everyday experiences of WoIS as advocated by Schweder.

Perhaps what is left is, indeed, “the daunting task of uncovering how narratives acquire their meanings within the context of asymmetrical cultural practices” (Bhatia, 2011, p. 351, emphasis added). The asymmetrical cultural practice is relevant to the present project as it is precisely the cultural-crossing condition in which WoIS finds themselves. The question is very

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6 Again, echoing Shweder’s notion of “thinking through others.”
much how is it that the “asymmetrical cultural practices” of WoIS come to be meaningful and intelligible in psychological research? Apart from the rise of modernization theory that was endorsed by cross-cultural psychological research, Hwang (2005) observed two other academic movements attempting to incorporate non-Western cultural factors into psychological research, including “research on individualism/collectivism, and the indigenization movement” (p. 80). Nevertheless, Hwang (2003b) critiqued that the invention of new categories to capture different essences of cultures (for example, individualism versus collectivism, or individual traditionality versus individual modernity) fall short in accounting for the asymmetry of cultural practices inherent in various cultural-crossing experiences (such as that of WoIS). The same critique can be applied to early research within the indigenization movement as many followed the categorization approach to establish new cultural norms in an attempt to construct a central cultural ideology pertaining to indigenous culture. Consequently, Hwang (2003) called for a “new research paradigm for cultural psychology” (p. 290)\(^7\) vis-à-vis indigenous psychological movement, specifically urging for ontological, epistemological, and methodological revisions in indigenous psychological research and practices (Hwang, 2005b). Does the study of WoIS concern indigenous psychology? If so, how does indigenous psychology offer an additional frame of reference relevant to the present project on WoIS? Let us turn to the evolution of indigenous psychology in the next section.

**On Indigenous Psychology**

Different researchers in the field of Indigenous Psychology (IP) have different ideas about the insurgence of IP. For example, Kuo-Shu Yang, the father of Taiwanese IP, considered that IP began with Wilhelm Wundt’s work on *Völkerpsychologie* (the same origin with some

\(^7\) Specifically, Hwang (2003) called this new approach “a symbolic approach to cultural psychology” (p. 290).
versions of cultural psychology), and that the “recent wave began as local academic movements, mainly in India, the Philippines, Mexico, and Taiwan in the early 1970s” (Allwood & Berry, 2006, p. 250). Yang mentioned that the IP movement advocated for their own versions of psychology, for example in India (Nandy, 1974), Mexico (Díaz-Guerrero, 1977), the Philippines (Enriquez, 1977), Japan (Azuma, 1984), Taiwan (K.-S. Yang, 1982) and Korea (U. Kim, 1990).

Indigenous Psychology movements became recognized as a global event “in the early 1980s through the pioneering and influential writings of Durganand Sinha, Virgilio Enriquez, and Rogelio Diaz-Guerrero” (Allwood & Berry, 2006, p. 250). Significantly, as well, is the year 1993 when the first anthology of indigenous psychologies, entitled Indigenous psychologies: Research and experience in cultural context, was published under the editorship of Uichol Kim and John W. Berry. Thereafter, heated academic debates about IP becomes more visible in various peer-reviewed journals (e.g. Asian Journal of Social Psychology, Applied Psychology: An International Review, and the International Journal of Psychology), leading to the second publication of an anthology of indigenous psychologies, entitled Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context, edited by Uichol Kim, Kuo-Shu Yang, and Kwang-Kuo Hwang in 2006.

Depending on the researcher, a variety of ideas regarding what, how, and why of IP have instigated stimulating conversations within and outside the IP community. For example, Indian psychologist Durganand Sinha noted that indigenous psychology “has developed as a reaction to or rejection of dominance of Western psychology... and has assumed almost the shape of a ‘movement’ in many erstwhile colonial and developing countries” (Sinha, 1997, p. 135). Much in line with Sinha’s sentiment about IP as a “reaction” to, and “rejection” of Western Psychology, Yang gave a fourfold outline for the purpose of IP:
(1) to point out that Western dominance is unhealthy, not only to the development of meaningful and useful psychologies in non-Western cultures, but also to the construction of a comprehensive, balanced global psychology; (2) to arouse non-Western psychologists’ need to develop their own indigenous psychology for their own people; (3) to share each other’s experiences in doing indigenous psychological research and in promoting their own indigenous psychologies; and (4) to exchange ideas on how to integrate different indigenous psychologies, Western and non-Western, into a cross-culturally indigenous global psychology.

(Allwood and Berry, 2006, p. 250)

As a former student of Yang, Hwang acknowledged the sense of reaction and rejection of the domineering Western Psychology in the early development of IP, framing the indigenization movement as one of the post War academic movements that attempts to “incorporate non-Western cultural factors into psychological research” (Hwang, 2005c, p. 80). By delimiting some of the early academic works on indigenous psychology, Hwang once called IP the “third wave” of cultural psychology, and noted its carrying the “spirit of nationalism and academic anticolonialism” (p. 83). Specific links were made between the emergence of IP and the “modernization of non-Western intellects” (p. 83). By making explicit the effects of modernization and underlining the culture of the postwar era, Hwang (2005a) urged IP researchers to move from the anticolonial to post-colonial sentiments (Hwang, 2005a).

Coming from a rather different position, Allwood pointed out different ways in which IP is practiced in research, and advocated for the idea that by the broadest definition of IP, Western psychology may be considered a form of IP. In his words,
Different aspects of Western psychology have been indigenized. These include researching phenomena and populations from one’s own country or culture, but still using problems and methods from Western psychology. A more ambitious form is to focus on problems that come out of the needs of the country’s own culture and society. Another approach is to indigenize the research methodology in order to make it more appropriate to one’s own research context. One can also attempt to use or develop concepts and theories that are more representative of one’s own cultural tradition. Finally, specific ontological postulates may be introduced. (Allwood and Berry, 2006, p. 259)

Allwood’s view on the “various forms” of indigenized Western psychology clearly touches on the question regarding what and why of ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods endorsed by IP researchers. As many researchers in the IP movement simply engaged in a “regional psychological inquiry” by studying people of a particular geographical region, using Western methodology without question, fundamental philosophical reflection on the appropriateness of such an approach has been called into question (e.g. Hwang, 2005b; Yee, 1997). Furthermore, Hwang (2005b) proposed “an epistemological strategy for [IP’s] future development from the perspective of post-positivism… with critical rationality or creative imagination, and then using these theories to explain the mentality of people in a given cultural tradition” (p. 14). Hwang’s position is that of “a system view of culture” and it aims to “adopt a contextually grounded view for studying cultural impact on psychological functioning” (p. 14). In this sense, Hwang’s position is philosophically akin to cultural psychology. From a different perspective, Yee (1997) used the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to suggest that culture already exists in the presence of human existence, as a way to frame the condition of IP. It
seems clear that the internal diversion regarding philosophical position continues to keep alive the various conversations within the IP community. In general, however, the insurgence of indigenous psychology (IP) is said to have two common denominators despite the wide variety of theoretical, methodological, and regional forces—that it is a reaction to mainstream psychology, and that it operates with the belief that Western psychology was not an efficient aid to solving local social problems (Allwood & Berry, 2006).

**Indigenous Psychology: a post-colonial discipline?**

Indeed, given the hegemony of Western Psychology and the post-colonial condition of non-Western worlds, it makes seeming sense to place IP with post-colonial discourse. However, just what counts as post-colonial? Is Hwang (2005a) right in differentiating the anti-colonial sentiment from the post-colonial transformation in the developmental trajectory of IP?

As alluded to in the earlier discussion on cross-cultural and cultural psychology (see pp. 36-53 in Chapter three), the desire to achieve a universal psychology appears to be omnipresent, implicitly or explicitly. Adopting a comparative approach (Triandis, 2000), cross-cultural psychology endorses a universal core to human nature that only varies in representations across culture. In contrast, cultural psychology is more cautious in adopting a universalist view, while still finding different ways to claim the collective whole within the discipline, such as “universalism without the uniformity” (Shweder, 2000, p. 210). As to the development of indigenous psychology, although early IP researchers have focused on developing “local” ways of understanding indigenous cultural practices in the service of “local” people so as to solve “local” problems, many critiqued the inevitable ineffectiveness of potentially constructing “too many” IPs and its lack of scientific relevance and contribution. For instance, questions regarding
the size and what counts as a cultural unit remain unclear (e.g. Allwood, 2011). As the goal of constructing numerous indigenous psychologies no longer seems practical and convincing, many indigenous psychologists have argued that their final goal is to develop an Asian psychology (Ho, 1988), a global psychology (Enriquez, 1989; K. S. Yang, 1993), or a universal psychology (Berry & Kim, 1993; Sinha, 1997). Unknowingly, IP movements seemed to step onto the same territory of aiming to arrive at a “wholistic” psychology, along with cross-cultural and cultural psychology.

This trend toward “unification” as a result of globalization is confirmed by a survey on the origin and development of IP, indicating that “somewhat more than half of the contributors discussed the possibilities of developing a more universal psychology via a comparative integration of the different IPs” (Allwood & Berry, 2006, p. 265). What seems particularly surprising is that in Hwang’s (2005a) attempt to reconsider critically the ontological and epistemological foundations of IP, he concluded by urging Taiwanese IP to “switch their philosophical assumption from relativism to universalism” (p. 228). Regardless of the extent of conscious awareness of the desire for unity in all disciplines concerning psychology and culture, the desire to be able to “wholify” psychological discourse and its relation to culture is certainly present across the allegedly different discourses. The play between the same and difference in the variety of discourses concerning culture and psychology is echoed in Derrida’s (1985) notion of differance. In Derrida’s words,

Philosophy lives in and on differance, thereby blinding itself to the same, which is not the identical. The same, precisely, is differance (with an a) as the displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other.

(Derrida, 1985, p. 17, italics original)
Perhaps one way to think about the desire for cultural psychological unity, unification, and universality, across cross-cultural, cultural, and indigenous psychology is through *differance*, by wrestling with the idea of “the other different and deferred in the economy of the same” (Derrida, 1985, p. 17).

Now, a return to the post-colonial position is possible in the discourse of IP via *differance*. To be sure, IP as a post-colonial movement claims to be different from the hegemony of the same (i.e. the overpowering Western psychology). In the process of becoming or constructing something else, something new and different, IP finds an uncanny reflection of self that indicates the same in the name of unity or unification, yet this *same* is not to be confused with “the identical” as Derrida (1985) alerted us. It is, rather, “as the displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other” (p. 17). In precisely this chain of oppositions, from one to another, marks are inscribed in the work of IP, such that it is post-colonial in the sense that it is a “reaction” or “rejection” (Sinha, 1997) against the dominance of Western psychology. In this sense, the trajectory from anticolonial to post-colonial development of IP is but a crystallization of the traces of *differance*, and what makes IP possible as a postcolonial research. Sure enough, the merit of recent insurgences of IP movements lie in its providing “some legitimacy for the view that people should be understood in terms of their own cultures, rather than always in terms of some foreign culture” (Allwood & Berry, 2006, p. 265). Instead of sticking to the status quo based on mainstream Western psychology, IP does engage in a post-colonial project by promoting an understanding of people in terms of their own cultures, using at once the same and different discourses, differed and deferred.
Indigenous Psychology, power, and misrecognition

“What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions” (Foucault, 2001/1982, p. 340)

Another way to interpret the desire for unification from various cultural-crossing psychologies is by dismantling the power-relation between IP and Western Psychology (WP). It has generally been established that Western Psychology is more “powerful” in terms of dominance in mainstream psychology. The specificity of “the” powerful WP, however, is mostly invisible. To be more concrete, the powerful WP is a psychological discourse that endorses a positivistic philosophy within the experimental tradition. Other Western Psychologies (WPs), such as the psychoanalysis, Gestalt Psychology, critical psychology, etc. are often left unnoticed in the margin as they are not of “the” powerful WP centre. Foucault’s notion of “power relation” (Foucault, 1978) is consequently helpful in understanding the emergence of power among various discourses on this phenomenon, such that the divide between WP and IP may be relevant only to the extent that it serves as one illustration of power-relation among a number.

To analyze power relations, Foucault established five points of guidance, which are useful to think about the IP-WP relations and among various discourses concerning culture and psychology. First, there is a “system of differentiation that permits one to act upon the actions of others” (Foucault, 2001, p. 344, italics original). The system of differentiation is illustrated by the establishment of IP as opposition against WP, and the emerging divergence among cross-cultural, cultural and indigenous psychologies, as demonstrated earlier in the chapter. The second point concerns “the types of objectives pursued by those who act upon the actions of others” (p. 344). The explicit objectives of cross-cultural psychology seems clear in its hope to
understand variations of other “cultures” so as to establish a universal psychology applicable to all people. However, the implicit objectives of cross-cultural psychology are more difficult to untangle. A close analysis from a psychoanalytic perspective may reveal a colonial unconscious underlining the universal goal, that is, an implicit objective to idealize WP in the form of cross-cultural psychology, so as to perpetuate its dominating role. As such, the objective of cultural psychology is to become a post-colonial discipline, and the objective of IP is a “reaction” against WP so as to establish a psychology sensitive and applicable to local culture—the development of these objectives are, indeed, actions “act[ed] upon the actions of others” (Foucault, 2001, p. 344).

Foucault’s third point considers the “Instrumental modes” (p. 344), pointing to the question: by whom is power exercised? As “Power is exercised only over free subjects” (p. 342), the hegemony of cross-cultural psychology as the domineering discourse reflects the power-relation at work, specifically when the cultural-political climate supports a pursuit of knowledge only among Western psychologists (as “free subjects”) during the industrial revolution. As socio-political conditions changed with the “modernization of non-Western intellects” (Hwang, 2005c, p. 83), the exercisers and exercisees of power-relations were broadened to include both Western and non-Western intellects/psychologies, giving rise to cultural psychology, psychological anthropology, and indigenous psychology—the disciplines and intellects both function as free subjects in the production of discourses and are embedded in an exercise of power.

The fourth point of power relations is “forms of institutionalization” (Foucault, 2001, p. 344). As Foucault (1978) says, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95), indicating resistance to be an interior form of power. This point is easily illustrated by the fact that IP occurs as resistance to WP, and that cultural psychology emerged as a resistance to modernized,
fixed, unambiguous positive psychology. Finally, the last point concerns “the degree of rationalization” (2001, p. 344), referring to the how of power relations—how power is put into action in the field of possibilities. Foucault notes that the exercise of power “is something that is elaborated, transformed, organized; it endows itself with processes that are more or less adjusted to the situation” (2001, p. 345). An example of this can be seen in a phenomenon occurring alongside the recent development of IP that is reflective of the elaboration, transformation, and organization ensued by the exercise of power relations. As previously noted, some initial supporters of cross-cultural psychology started to advocate for a discourse that Western psychology is “indigenous” in nature, and that “indigenous psychologies (IPs) can be seen as an important addition to Western psychology (WP)” (Allwood and Berry, 2006, p. 262, italics mine). At first glance, this new emerging attempt to cultivate IP into WP by acknowledging the “indigenous” nature of WP appears amicable. However, a closer look at the notion of IP as an important “addition” to WP in fact materializes the underlying power-relation between IP and WP. In other words, IP as an “addition” to WP (rather as than a “diversion”) continues to have no right of its own, and the effects and power-relation held by the tension between IP and WP remains invisible and under erasure. By all means, power-relations between IP and WP did “more or less adjust to the situation” as the relationship between culture and the objectives of “scientific” research was made clear to remain consistent with epistemology of cultural and indigenous psychology. In Allwood and Berry’s (2006) words,

later developments in the study of science (for example in the area of science studies) have demonstrated the dependence between science as it is practised and the society in which it is produced… The problems researched, the methods by which they are studied, and the type of arguments counted as relevant, valid, and
legitimate to support the researchers’ conclusions are all seen as dependent on culturally dependent pre-understanding. (p. 245)

The above acknowledgement is a significant transformation and adaptation from a science of cross-cultural psychology that is “neutral” and independent of culture, to a science of cross-cultural psychology that is “dependent on culturally dependent pre-understanding” (Allwood & Berry, 2006, p. 245).

Above all, analyzing the power relations among various discourses on culture and psychology is most relevant as it sheds a new light on the evolution and adaptation of multiple trends of mutations, despite the shared desire of unity, on the topic of discussion. The seeming opposition between Western Psychology and Indigenous Psychology shares unanimity in the local political climate. For instance, the survey conducted by Allwood & Berry (2006) found that “in at least one contribution (concerning Iran) some forms of IPs were politically supported, whereas other forms were politically disapproved!” (Allwood & Berry, 2006, p. 265). This finding reveals the intimate relationship between academic discourse and local political culture, especially regarding the interpretation of specific discourse (i.e. the discourse of IP), which often indicates ruptures between local and global cultures. In other words, power-relation is embedded and intimately connected with political climate (local and global), which led to a different way of thinking about culture. That is, the boundary of culture does not stop at the pre-decided categories of nationality, race, ethnicity, etc. Instead, the boundary of culture is fluid, and likely to permeate through the local and global political climate concerning different kinds of identities (i.e. race, ethnicities, gender, sexuality, spiritual affliction, etc.).

At this point, a return to examine the question of “what culture is” seems crucial. Different brands of discussion on culture and psychology engage in different approaches to delimit culture.
For cross-cultural psychology, culture is a variable and is often treated as a source of error to be “controlled” (Misra & Gergen, 1993). For cultural psychology, culture and psychology are inseparable. And for indigenous psychology, culture offers a post-colonial rootedness (i.e. a return) to understanding meaning and practices of the local people, and is the foundation of indigenous psychology. Allwood (2011) critiqued that “a too limited concept of culture is used” (p. 4) in English-writing researchers in indigenous psychology because the fundamental premise of IP is “that they are to be anchored in what is identified as the local culture” (p. 11), which led to a clear dilemma of IP,

The indigenous psychologies appear to exist in a zone of tension between a desire to be conventional sciences and the fact that they are parties on a political arena, at least when it comes to the question of what contents of understanding is to be identified as belonging to ‘the culture’ of their own society. (Allwood, 2011, p. 11)

Briefly, Allwood questions the impossibility of defining what “unit of culture” is worth researching for IP, and he warned against the tendency of “reification of culture” in IP research. As a response to Allwood’s critique, Hwang (2011) posed the question, “why is the reification of the western culture of individualism a merit for the progress of psychology, and why the reification of non-western cultures by indigenous psychologists a mistake?” (Hwang, 2011, p. 125, italics original).

In the illustration of this brief exchange to delimit culture, a power-relation is clearly at work. For Foucault, the question is never about “what” culture is, but about “whose” culture, “why” culture, “how” culture, and what “effects” of culture. To be sure, if there was such thing as “culture” per se, the process of negotiating the whose, why, how, and effects of culture has to
be embedded in the “culture” of academic and political climate. In other words, a better way to tackle this dilemma is to reflect on the question of “how cultures culture?” Take Hwang’s response to Allwood’s critique for example: in addition to advocating for IP in its own right, Hwang (2005a) has long recognized the dilemma that IP faces, and recommended “three levels of breakthrough” required for the progress of IP, namely “philosophical reflection, theoretical construction, and empirical investigation” (p. 236). He further recommended that

Indigenous psychologists … should assimilate the accumulated achievement of Western civilization with an open mind. By doing so, they may understand that if the philosophy of science switches from positivism to postpositivism, their chief mission is neither to develop an indigenous psychology of relativism, nor to establish a global psychology or human psychology of universalism, but to construct formal theories that are supposed to be applicable to various cultures on the one hand, and can be used to explain the specific features of indigenous culture on the other, then to take these theories as a frame of reference for conducting empirical research in a given society. (p. 236)

At its core, Hwang’s position is that of a “constructive realism” (2005, p. 237), which proposes that a theoretical reconstruction of IP may be considered, in order to reach beyond universalist and relativist divides and to maintain a “unified” philosophical ground for IP. While Hwang’s questions about the adequacy of reification of specific culture (Hwang, 2011) and his arguments for theoretical reconstruction of IP (Hwang, 2005b) are sensible given the premises and the evolution of IP, it is also obvious that Hwang (and his argument) is embedded in a culture transitioning from a modern to post-modern global climate, such that the effects of culture is that of the ways in which Hwang understood the particular academic debate on the
issue regarding IP versus WP—a constructivist realist one. Inevitably, Hwang participated in the search for “recognition” from WP in his theoretical reconsideration of IP, manifesting through his advocating for IP to “assimilate the accumulated achievement of Western civilization with an open mind” (p. 236).

To a certain extent, indigenous psychologists’ desire for “recognition” has achieved some success as IPs are finally recognized as something worthy of attention among psychological discourses concerning culture after three decades. In a convincing argument, however, Peng (2012) noted that “this recent recognition—a seemingly victorious moment for the indigenous psychology movement—is at the same time misrecognition” (pp. 3-4). By tracing the history of the indigenous psychology movement in Taiwan, Peng unpacked “how this recognition/misrecognition works on the subjectivity of the indigenous psychologists” (p. 19) and warned against IP’s trapping in the “pathological search for recognition” (p. 19). Peng’s genealogical explication inherited the Foucaultian analysis that aims to demonstrate the power-relations at work. It is arguable that the desire for unification from various trends of cultural-crossing psychology and IP’s search for recognition (which is inevitably a “misrecognition” as Peng proposed) are both symptomatic of a post-colonial condition, which calls for a new “driving force of decolonization” (p. 19). And to some degree, IP aspires to be that driving force, as least at the beginning establishment of IP.

As a whole, the present study on wives of international students (WoIS) is quite relevant to postcolonial and IP research. The present project shares the assertion of Bhatia & Ram (2001), We believe that postcolonial research, with its emphasis on understanding the construction of self and identity in terms of colonial histories and present day transnational migration, has tremendous relevance for understanding issues related
to acculturation and immigrant identities in the field of human development. (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 2)

That is to say, to understand experiences of WoIS, an understanding of their particular brand of indigenous psychology in relation to a particular colonial history and individualized experience of migration carries significant weight in understanding experiences and new identities of WoIS in the new culture. Hence, the present study on WoIS is indigenous to the extent that it concerns indigenous psychology manifesting via a diasporic condition, or in other words, that indigenous psychology reveals itself in the rupture that occurs through a cultural-crossing situation of that of WoIS. The present study does not aim to solidify any “pure” form of a particular kind of indigenous culture, but intend to illustrate how variations of culture emerge from an everyday cultural-crossing context, in the actual lived solutions and sense-making of that process. To allow for variations of culture to emerge without unmanageable digression, and to keep consistent with premises of IP, the present study will attempt to learn only about Taiwanese WoIS, as an illustrative example of the larger group of WoIS coming from different cultural situations. Given this focus on Taiwanese WoIS, a brief review of IP in Taiwan may be warranted.

Indigenous psychology in Taiwan

The history of Taiwanese indigenous psychology (IP) is closely related to the political climate in Taiwan. In Peng’s (2012) careful account on the history of psychology in Taiwan, he identified the change in political climate and the corresponding movement of psychology in modern Taiwan. At the beginning, as a result of the Chinese Civil War between the Kuomintang (KMT; also referred to as the Chinese Nationalist Party) and the Communist Party of China
(CPC), the KMT was defeated by CPC, retreated to Taiwan with more than a million Chinese people, and reestablished the government of the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan in 1949. In the meantime, the CPC formed a new government after they took control of the Mainland China, declaring the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Within this political context, it was “in a geopolitically anti-communist and pro-American” (Peng, 2012, p. 78) climate that psychology as a discipline was established in the postwar Taiwan. This political condition fueled the new generation of Taiwanese psychologists to become immersed in the tradition of American psychology. As a result, “With the extensive use of American textbooks, the historical narrative constructed by mainstream American psychologists became the first historical perspective of the students of psychology in Taiwan” (Peng, 2012, p. 79). As time goes on without critical reflection, the later generations of psychologists in Taiwan “became deeply convinced that mainstream American psychology represented the present and future of psychology, and that therefore it was the psychology on which Taiwanese psychology should be modeled” (Peng, 2012, p. 81). In a sense, Taiwanese psychology has long been “colonized” by American psychology.

As one of the people who retreated with the KMT to Taiwan, and having lived through the postwar Taiwan, professor Kuo-Shu Yang\(^8\) began to have difficulty reconciling the knowledge he learned from the Chinese-Speaking (American) psychology textbooks and the everyday experiences of Taiwanese people in the 1970’s, which propelled him to initiate the movement for the indigenization of psychology in Taiwan. In 1993, the first Laboratory of Research for Indigenous Psychology was established in the National Taiwan University, and a journal entitled *Indigenous Psychological Research in Chinese Societies* was inaugurated; both were a part of Yang’s promotion of Taiwanese indigenous psychology. Yang had the idea of “indigenous

\(^8\) For more details regarding Yang’s personal history, see Peng (2012, p. 99-105) and Yang (2012).
compatibility” at the beginning of the indigenization movement, and he continued to emphasize this notion to this day as the guiding principle of indigenous psychological research (Yang, 2012). In his reflection on the current condition of indigenous psychology, Yang noted, “Overall, indigenous Chinese psychology is now well received in Taiwan by colleagues who have not adopted such an approach. Indigenous psychologists there have been enjoying equal opportunity in job promotions and research grants” (Allwood and Berry, 2006, p. 252). Similar comments indicate that since the 1990s, indigenous psychological research has become “the most important trend” within social psychological research in Taiwan (Chiu, 2004, p. 210).

It is true that the connection between Taiwanese indigenous psychology movement and the political climate in Taiwan necessitates a more in-depth understanding of power-relations in the Taiwanese IP movement, and underlines the potential difficulty in utilizing the discourse of Taiwanese IP to move forward. As Peng (2012) explicated, the inherent pro-American and anti-Communist attitude during the postwar climate in Taiwan had led to an erasure of a Taiwanese history of psychology in its own terms, while a Chinese-Speaking American psychology was dressed up and presented as the “natural” visage of Taiwanese psychology. The IP movement in Taiwan may be understood in Foucault’s term as a “resistance” against this pretense, which at its inception involves an “anti-colonial” agenda (Hwang, 2005a; Peng, 2012). While resistance underlines power-relation, it is not enough, in itself, to rid itself of an oppressive relationship.

In the context of Taiwanese IP, the “anticolonial discourse gradually became less inspiring and started to show its conceptual limitation in effectively problematizing the colonial situation of psychology in Taiwan” (Peng, 2012, p. 121). Furthermore, as a result of a “paradoxical desire—a desire to be rid of the influence of the West but at the same time to be recognized by it—in the works of indigenous psychologists” (Peng, 2012, p. 19), the anti-colonial sentiment
only led to the potential entrapment of Taiwanese IP movement in a pathological searching for recognition, hence entangled in a “problematic imaginary relation with mainstream American psychology” (Peng, 2012, p. 122). Peng (2012) called this “a problematic colonial subject whose desire is determined by the inverse idea/ideal of the West” (p. 123), an inversion considered a problematic “colonial trauma” in the Taiwanese IP movement. Although not in the exact same words, the problematic of a Taiwanese IP movement has been formulated as a “modernization approach” that required “a paradigm shift from modernization research to the indigenous approach” by employing new and emerging ontology, epistemology, and methodology “within the Taiwanese camp of indigenous psychology” (Hwang, 2003a, p. 259).

In effect, Taiwanese IP, like other IP movements around the world, may find that instead of merely carrying and constructing a response around an anti-colonial sentiment, a wrestling with the post-colonial may be more useful as an effective de-colonizing force. Rather than engaging in a complete inversion of power-relations, an analysis of power through a genealogical tracing of historical struggles of Taiwanese IP, and a reflective practice that turns a critical gaze on the evolution of Taiwanese IP movements are all useful tools toward a post-colonial critique and a vibrant future for Taiwanese IP. One way of doing so is by writing critical and reflexive histories and by the courage of “putting the unspeakable into words”, as Peng (2012) has done beautifully. Another way of doing so is by deconstructing the theoretical traces deployed without reflection, as Hwang (2005b, 2010) has attempted to do. Yet another way to critically reflect on the process of colonization in the service of decolonization is by conducting field research to make visible the materialized effects of colonial conditions on the everyday life of colonized subjects, which is what the present study aspires to do. The present study aims to illuminate the experiences of Taiwanese WoIS in the U.S. By understanding the suture and
chasm in the everyday practices of the WoIS sojourning between Taiwanese and American cultural context, the present study provides a hint into the process and effects of colonization, as well as the struggle against the rupture experienced via the inconsistency between the imaginary colonizer/colonized and the lived colonizer/colonized. It is in between the imaginary and the real (i.e. the lived) that the Taiwanese IP is made possible and intelligible.

To retrace—About the Proposed Study

There is, of course, and as has been stated already, the deliberate and pronounced goal of the study to investigate the experiences of WoIS, and particularly Taiwanese WoIS. However, this explicit goal is also subtended by the desire to advance indigenous psychology in Taiwan by substantiating what Hwang (2005a, p. 236) has called “three levels of breakthrough”—philosophical reflection, theoretical construction, and empirical investigation—with rigorous theories, methods, and ample cultural reflections. By offering descriptions that reflect cultural intersections between Taiwanese experiences and the American context, by the empirical investigation of Taiwanese wives living in North America as an example to illustrate the manifested practices of cultural and gender constitution, this study may provide a way to understand and think culture and gender differently, at the borderline of cultures, in so doing working towards the goals of philosophical reflection and theoretical construction for the evolution of indigenous psychology in Taiwan.

Taken from the indigenous psychological perspective, the intersection of cultural encounters offers an opportunity to examine specific cultural convergent and divergent experiences of local ways of living in the everyday experiences of Taiwanese WoIS in America, adding to a deeper understanding of Taiwanese versus American culture and corresponding
identities that emerge in the context of cultural transition. To the extent that the study stays local
(i.e. local to the American context), it is indigenous in nature (i.e. indigenous to the Taiwanese
people). Meanwhile, it utilizes methods of cultural and interpretive psychology to address
cultural-crossing issues with diasporic women in a transnational and sojourning context. It is by
getting to the nuts and bolts of the empirical, everyday experiences of WoIS that the study
attempts to reformulate a discourse on culture in psychological research that concerns “how”
culture cultures rather than attempting to define a particular, be it American or Taiwanese, at the
service of categorization, reduction and simplification.
CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGICAL FRAME:
BETWEEN HERMENEUTICS AND DECONSTRUCTION

As is evident from the literature review in Chapter Two, the bulk of academic studies on wives of international students (WoIS) are firmly rooted within the discourses of acculturative stress and the acculturation process, on the one hand, or an atheoretical approach aiming to understand the interrelations of variables concerning experiences of WoIS, on the other. While these studies offer an abundance of valuable knowledge about ways in which WoIS are conceptualized and understood, consensus on the subjectivity of WoIS, and the experience beyond the rule and aggregate remain limited. Granted, such an oversight may not be due to a methodological choice alone, but perhaps also because of the great variety of experiences of WoIS, as is expected given the multiple divergent factors involved—from individual-personal, familial, to socio-cultural influences on the sojourning experiences of WoIS.

As a researcher, or even just someone genuinely interested in the cultural-crossing experiences of WoIS, the question of how culture and cultural-crossing experiences may be understood and interpreted, is of paramount importance. In light of this question, Chapter Three attempted to address a variety of theories concerning culture at large, and proposed the almost all too obvious argument that one’s theoretical positioning vis-à-vis culture serve as orienting frame for understanding, and for the manner of one’s research. As such, the present study positions itself more in line with the approaches of cultural and indigenous psychologies than that of cross-cultural psychology.
The validity and applicability of cross-cultural psychology to our everyday experiences of culture is debatable at best, based as it is on multiple recent revisions and denunciations of acculturative stress and acculturation theories. Secondly, cross-cultural psychology has a way of engaging in variable-driven research as the dominant form of inquiry, which inevitably assumes the separation of self and culture (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). As opposed to this assumption, the present study wants to understand the relationship between self and culture operating under the premise that such insight comes from understanding the “in-between,” that is, the subject-within-cultural-context. This departure assumption promises not only a richer understanding of the experiences of WoIS in a cultural-crossing context, but also struggles seriously with how culture is to be taken up in psychological research. Additionally, the present research does not hope to arrive at a universal truth regarding WoIS, as many cross-cultural researches seem to aspire to. Rather, the present study wants to understand and interrogate the narratives of WoIS, and to juxtapose those narratives as texts alongside other texts (e.g. literature, popular media, interdisciplinary theories, etc.), such that the ways in which these narratives have come to mean in a certain way may become clearer. By extension, the hope is that such a reading will afford an understanding of how WoIS come to be, or—put another way—how WoIS are constituted by culture and cultural forces.

As I have indicated before, a few previous studies have examined WoIS from a phenomenological perspective, and whereas there is some overlap with this study’s similar emphasis on the lived phenomenological experience, it differs in the present study’s sensitivity – in addition – to the ways in which that experience is constituted by culture and the societal surround. In doing so, this study also hopes to offer a new discourse on culture in psychological research that concerns not “what” culture is, as is frequently debated with seemingly Sisyphean
futility, but rather, “how” culture cultures. The present study inquires into the constitution of WoIS, in so doing expecting to illuminate the process of culturing culture, especially because WoIS occupy a curious place of suspension—sojourners between cultures, often marginalized and invisible.

Given the above-mentioned sets of objectives for the present study, a valuable methodological question regarding how to achieve these sets of objectives is warranted. The present chapter provides methodological frames through which the present research addresses the constitution of WoIS, and with that, how culture cultures in the example of WoIS. To do so, the present chapter is organized around four main topics with which to frame the methodology of the present research, namely, the differences between human science and natural science, the converging traps between qualitative and quantitative research, the method of hermeneutics, and the trace of textuality.

**Why Human Science Psychology?**

Psychology as a field today has attempted to position itself alongside the natural sciences, such as physics, mathematics, chemistry, etc. Indeed, the American Psychological Association (APA), the largest and most powerful of psychological groups, has recently listed psychology a STEM science, unequivocally grouping psychology alongside Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (American Psychological Association, 2010). The assumption has been that if psychological research can come up with robust psychological principles that are applicable to humans universally, then psychologists will be able to predict and control human behaviors as in the relationship of chemists to chemicals, mathematicians to numbers, and physicists to matter. However, since Wilhelm Wundt’s first establishment of a psychological
laboratory during the mid 1800’s, often marked as the beginning of psychology as a separate discipline, there have been few psychological principles that are truly universal. Even with the early studies on psychophysics that claimed to have found universal principles of human perceptions, the allegedly universal “difference threshold” (Wundt, 1907) of sound, vision and sensation not only varies between subjects but also depending on contexts. Factors such as the observer's motivations and expectations, and whether the person is adapted to the stimulus all play a part in varying degrees of difference threshold. That is to say, the universal principle of human perception is not so universal when contextual and historical factors are taken into account. And because these factors vary greatly among people in real life conditions, despite having produced lots of knowledge about human perceptions based on findings in controlled laboratory settings, psychology as a natural science has had considerable limits in its application to people’s everyday life.

Concerning methodology, it is perhaps important to take a minute to think about the different objects of research, which for Gadamer is precisely what distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences. He noted, “Whereas the object of the natural sciences can be described idealiter as what would be known in the perfect knowledge of nature, it is senseless to speak of a perfect knowledge of history, and for this reason it is not possible to speak of an ‘object in itself’ toward which its research is directed” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 285). Gadamer points to the essential dilemma in psychology that attempts to study humans as ideal objects. The problem is, humans do not exist in ideal terms. Humans, instead, are embedded in the world, influenced by cultural trends, and carry historical marks, such that research questions about humans are similarly embedded in multiple contextual factors.
To apply to the present research, thinking that a psychological study will arrive at “an object in itself” may lead to a research question that sets out to get at the question of “what is.” For example, what is a WoIS? In their attempt to answer the “what is” question, many previous studies respond by finding a group of women who experience a language barrier, who are underemployed, gender-oppressed, “invisible”, and suffering from acculturative stress (e.g. Bigler, 2007; Day, 2003). As illustrated in Chapter Two, while these are areas of concerns for some (or even many), those findings are not who they “are”, or the measure of their “isness”, their being, let alone that the within-group variability of WoIS is so large that a “prototype” experience or concern for WoIS (i.e. “ideal objects” in Gadamer’s term) has never been found or agreed upon. WoIS share singularly unique stories, and no theory or finding has been able to offer universal rules or laws for the experiences of WoIS, let alone universal programs or protocols for intervention, prediction or control.

A human science approach to the subject shies away from the “what is” question because the human science approach respects and appreciates the fluidity and multiplicity of human psychology and its inevitable relation to socio-cultural context. The human science approach does not aspire to only ask about the content of what something is, but wants to also get at the process of how something becomes. In psychology then, instead of asking what a thing is, or what its contents are, a different question may be how it is, or how it becomes. Packer illustrates this question with a particular reference, asking “How is mind possible: How is it that we become people who can represent that world in an inner space?” (Packer, 2011, p. 168).

Applying the human science approach to the present study, we have now come to arrive at a question that aims to understand more fully the experiences of WoIS not only as they are
represented (i.e., the question of “what is”), but also as lived, and comes to be lived (i.e., how WoIS are constituted).

The human science approach to psychological research serves as a philosophical foundation for the methodology of the present research. Clearly, the present study does not think of research about human beings in a controlled laboratory setting. The purpose of research is not just about measurement, prediction, or control, but also to think of “human science itself as a program of research with theoretical, practical, and ethical dimensions” (Packer, 2011, p. 13). The theoretical dimensions of the present research have been laid out in Chapters two and three, and the hope is that the critical appraisal of existing theories, and the introduction of new ways of looking at WoIS, will produce a richer understanding of the phenomenon across all theoretical positions, including acculturation theory, cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology.

Bearing the practical and ethical dimensions of the human science approach in mind, the present study maintains that it is best to stay close to the immediate experiences of WoIS through their descriptions of everyday experiences. This not only to glean an individual sense of how that life is actually lived, in the everyday, and in the service of the relationship between the cultural everyday and the relation to oneself, but also in the sense thereof as a fundamentally ethical research practice that respectfully, and seriously meets people where they are. Additional elaboration on the practical and ethical dimensions of the human science approach to the present research will be addressed throughout this chapter.

Why/What Kind of Qualitative Research?

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9 For Packer (2011), the transformation of self (and the culture and the community) closely corresponds to the ethical dimension of human science approach.
Having proposed a human science approach as the philosophical foundation for the methodological frame of the current research, an epistemological concern regarding modes of inquiry (at its most basic level, for example, involving qualitative versus quantitative methods) is worth reiterating. The literature review has highlighted some problems with the mostly quantitative, and positivist rationalist epistemologies, no least of which is the objectifying treatment of these wives as objects of study. Instead of understanding the comprehensive experiences of how lives are lived by WoIS, many quantitative studies categorized their experiences into quantifiable variables such as degree of cultural shock (e.g. Day, 2003), stages of acculturation and identity adjustment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001), and the prescribed needs of international wives (Martens & Grant, 2008). Quantitative studies may also take a “curative” perspective that focuses on examining the variables that allegedly “improve” lives of WoIS or “assuage” their difficulties with cultural experiences by inquiring into ways to ameliorate the cultural shock (e.g. Bigler, 2007), such as learning (e.g. Nugraha, 2004), social networking (e.g. Rayman, 2006) or electronic communication (e.g. Bennett, 2002). As much as these studies are insightful in identifying and underscoring their topics of inquiry in relation to WoIS, none of the studies provide a comprehensive account of what (and how) it is like to live as a whole person—let alone adequately address how their cultural and gender ascriptions play out in their narratives and their effects.

Given the scarcity of the literature on the topic and the limited ways of inquiry into this topic, a qualitative methodology that promises a more nuanced, richer, and fuller account(ing), is warranted in order for the experiences of WoIS to be heard, to be understood, to be felt, and to be affected. A qualitative inquiry that makes explicit the lives lived, promises both understanding and explanation (Packer, 2011). Fischer (2005) suggested that “qualitative research asks what
something is in terms of how it is lived” (p. xvii). Therefore, rather than a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach with the philosophical foundation of human science serves as an adequate methodological frame for a detailed understanding of the lived world of WoIS. A qualitative approach will also provide a space to wrestle with the processes and dynamics by which the world of WoIS is structured and made to mean.

Employing a qualitative approach within the human science tradition calls forth the question of specificity, namely, what kind of qualitative approach? Why, and how? As a common practice, most qualitative methods attempt to work with qualitative data, hoping to arrive at a certain scientific truth or knowledge with the goal of studying the subjective experiences of objectivity. While qualitative data provides richer texts on the subject of interest, the implicit assumption of the traditional qualitative methods continues to be one that hopes to employ inductive or deductive logic to arrive at a universal objectivity with qualitative data (i.e. the subjective experiences). Examples of this kind of qualitative methods include various systems of coding used by grounded theory (e.g. Glaser, 1992), some iterations of discourse analysis (e.g. Johnstone, 2007), and some phenomenological methods (e.g. Smith & Osborne, 1999). Among the research on WoIS, for instance, Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu (2011) used phenomenological methods to analyze interview data of spouses of international students, concluding that unique stressors to non student spouses include loss of roles and status, power imbalance in the couple’s relationships, and feelings of inadequacy. While these identified stressors highlighted areas of difficulties for the spouses, the lives of WoIS are more complicated than the contributing stressors per se. The assumptions of studies employing traditional qualitative methods are that valid scientific knowledge can only be achieved through a logical understanding of a set of meaningful data gathered, and that the focus of qualitative methods is
on the form of data—qualitative rather than quantitative. This assumption remains that of logical positivism, one that has been critiqued already\textsuperscript{10}.

The present research wants to incorporate a methodological approach alternative to a positivist rationalist epistemology, such that the study addresses not only WoIS as “representations” based on their subjective narratives and/or on pre-existing written texts, but also how WoIS has come to be and may become in the future. To differ from research paradigms that use either qualitative or quantitative data to represent the subject of study, the present study also wants to understand “the conditions for the capacity to form subjective representations” (Packer, 2011, p. 167), that is, to address the question of “constitution.” Addressing constitution takes the research methodology away from rational positivist epistemology as the question of constitution necessarily takes an ontological turn. Rather than asking what something is, the present research endorses the ontological claims that “social practices constitute real objects and subjects” (Packer, 2011, p. 11, italics original) on the foundation of what Packer calls “a nondualist ontology” (Packer, 2011, p. 167). In brief, the present research embarks on an ontological revision of methodology to show “how we can see reason and thinking as cultural and historical, as grounded in practical know-how, and how we can see research as thinking that doesn’t take itself for granted” (Packer, 2011, p. 11). Following this ontological revision of methodology, rather than thinking about science as a purely logical process, the present research adopts the stance that thinks of science as “a social practice in which some aspect of the world is explored systematically” (Packer, 2011, p. 8). The shift of understanding science from a focus on representation of truth to a focus on systematic exploration of social practices expands the horizon of scientific research to offering new ways to

\textsuperscript{10} See Chapter Two and Three in Packer (2011) for a closer critique on the logical positivistic assumptions among the traditional qualitative methods.
think about social practices that are fluid and impossible to fix/objectify, such as the question regarding culture vis-à-vis cultural-crossing psychology. In the meantime, scientific research as social practices remains empirical in the sense that it stays very close to people’s everyday experiences. That is to say, the ontological revision of a qualitative methodology offers a research program that is reliable, generalizable, and valid by asking the question of how social practices constitute both subject and object. It is reliable because the question of constitution is able to follow social practices closely despite its fluidity. It is generalizable because the day-to-day experience is the foundation of the research inquiry. It is valid because the methodology directly supports its intended claim—rather than getting at the “what” question, it intends to highlight the process of becoming.

The methodology that concerns ontology and constitution provides the foundation of the research method employed by the present study on WoIS so as to respond to the gaps in the existing literature on WoIS at large and on cultural-crossing psychologies. First, the question of constitution makes WoIS’ everyday experiences explicit without having to foreclose the internal or external variability that comes with this unique cultural-crossing experience. In this way, unlike previous studies on WoIS, this study is able to approach subjective experiences of WoIS without objectifying them. Second, by staying close to everyday practices, the research is able to address culture locally within the larger social context, such that the delimitation of culture in psychological studies does not stop at the level of an “experimental variable” but can be expanded to an interpretive frame in the sense that culture both “subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, 2001/1982, p. 331). Studying WoIS is then a study of an indigenous culture in a cultural-crossing context. Culture in psychological research ought not to be understood only as a
variable, but also as a form of power that inscribes itself and subjects within it, similar to the function of Foucault’s (1982) notion of power.

The philosophical underpinning of the methodological frame of the present study is comparable to Packer’s (2011) method that emphasizes constitution on the basis of a non-dualist ontology. Packer (2011) followed thinkers like Hegel, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty noting that,

theoretical knowledge is made possible by a more fundamental relationship between humans and our world… [and] what is more fundamental is the practical involvement—historical, embodied, and social—that is prior to the subject-object distinction but remains invisible to the traditional human sciences. (Packer, 2011, p. 201)

To that end, Packer’s methods wants to provide a way “to see people and objects as inextricably one with their forms of life, and to see reason and thinking as cultural, historical, and grounded in practical know-how” (Packer, 2011, p. 167). The methodology of the present research follows the general principle of these philosophical threads, aiming at a research study that makes room for consciousness as a relationship between a subject and an object (Hegel, 1807), for the emerging “thickness of flesh” between the seer and the thing” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 178), and for one’s being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927). To integrate

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11 Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh is central to a new ontology that he tried to establish. Basically, rather than the primacy of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty’s ontology places body as the primacy site of knowing the world. And the notion of “flesh” signifies a non-dualistic world where object and subject are united dialectically as determinations within a more primordial reality. David Abram (1996), for example, considers the “flesh” as a means of establishing the ontological continuity between humans and other beings. In his words, “The Flesh is the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity. It is the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible and of the sensible in the sentient, a mystery of which we have always, at least tacitly, been aware since we have never been able to affirm one of the phenomena, the perceivable world or the perceiving self, without implicitly affirming the existence of the other” (p. 66).

12 Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world is again an attempt to reach a non-dualistic ontology to overcome the
qualitative data and differing from “traditional” qualitative methods, the present study frames qualitative research as “the study of intersubjective phenomena, such as language, culture, and society” (Packer, 2011, p. 9, italics original). With that, important tasks for qualitative research are not limited to arriving at certain scientific knowledge or universal objectivity of subjective experiences, rather, it is “to offer knowledge, provide critiques, and foster transformation” (Packer, 2011, p. 6). Consequently, research concerning WoIS is not only about offering knowledge regarding WoIS, but also about providing critiques of the knowledge offered such that transformation of the knowledge and the experiences of WoIS may be possible. It is within this thread of methodological philosophy that the present research proceeds to incorporate qualitative data. More specifically, hermeneutics and textuality (Silverman, 1994) are two brands of methodology that are incorporated in the present research to achieve the goals stated above.

**Hermeneutics**

“When understanding is entirely mediated by the whole explanatory procedures which precede it and accompany it. The counterpart of this personal appropriation is not something which can be felt, it is the dynamic meaning released by the explanation which we identified earlier with the reference of the text, i.e., its power of disclosing a world” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 116).

Hermeneutics is employed in the present research to understand experiences of WoIS in the social context. Hermeneutics allows for an understanding of WoIS’s subjective narratives while preserving an appreciation of the complexities of their lived lives. Packer (1985) notes that hermeneutics “provides a way of understanding and studying human action that is grounded
in considering such action as having a semantic rather than logical or causal organization” (p. 1081). In this way, hermeneutics makes room for lives of WoIS both in its explicit content and in its implicit meaning-making process. The lives of WoIS are understood in a meaningful socio-cultural context that shifts with time as hermeneutics involves an attempt to describe and understand meaningful human phenomena in a careful and detailed manner based on practical understanding (p.1081-2). However, lest one proceeds to assume that there is one “hermeneutics”, it makes good sense to provide some background as to different strands or emphases within hermeneutics as considered by Packer (2011), Gadamer (1975/1989) and Ricoeur (1973), as compared to romantic hermeneutics (i.e. Dilthey, 1900).

**Brief note on modes of hermeneutics**

At its face value, and quite simply, hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation. The ways in which interpretation is employed, however, differ between romantic hermeneutics considered by Dilthey (1900) and a reconstruction of hermeneutics as considered by Ricoeur and Gadamer. Dilthey’s hermeneutics speaks to the “theory of how life discloses and expresses itself in cultural works” (Packer, 2011, p. 91) and interpretation aims to go beyond subjectivity to life itself, one that corresponds with the notion of “the objective study of subjectivity.” The shortcomings that come with the goal of arriving at a transcendental and universal thing in-itself has been sufficiently introduced in the current and last two chapters; suffice it to say that as appealing as Dilthey’s theory is, it falls prey to the irony that a theory with such strong emphasis on cultural context would aim to arrive at interpretations transcendent of culture. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that romantic hermeneutics maintains its value in providing phenomenological description, as it concerns the content of experience that are often rich and informative.
Interpretive hermeneutics, on the other hand, aim to move beyond the content of experiences by stressing the act of mediation between an interpreter and the interpreted. This approach brings forth a new set of questions because the act of mediation is often not as simply defined as the explicit content as in phenomenological description. The hermeneutic circle becomes a useful way of thinking about this act of mediation, such that the goal of hermeneutics is no longer just about landing at a transcendental interpretation. Rather, hermeneutics can be considered as a constant movement between new-projections and fore-projections. For example, Gadamer said,

every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projections can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation. (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 269).

In other words, the initial understanding and interpretation as fore-projection instigates a chain of new-projections, which in turn reshapes the understanding and interpretation. The chain of movement between understanding and interpretation is the hermeneutic circle that continues to refine and readjust itself to a certain meaning moment by moment, as emerging fore-projections. Similar thoughts on the hermeneutic circle can be seen in Ricoeur’s note that “Ultimately, the correlation between explanation and understanding, between understanding and explanation, is the ‘hermeneutic circle’” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 117). The relationship of mutual formation between understanding and interpretation in Gadamarian terms, or between understanding and explanation in Ricoeurian terms, offers the basis for thinking about constitution. To think about how WoIS is constituted is not to think about what WoIS is, but to
think about the “relationship of mutual formation” (Packer, 2011, p. 10) between the wives and their form of life, which illustrate a specific meaning making process with multiple possibilities. Gadamer (1975/1989) noted,

The fact is that meanings represent a fluid multiplicity of possibilities (in comparison to the agreement presented by a language and a vocabulary), but within this multiplicity of what can be thought. (p. 271)

In this way, the present research does not wish to arrive at a singular meaning regarding WoIS, but at a fluid multiplicity of possibilities. To take a step further, the present research aims to approach what can be thought within the multiplicity, in this way addressing the question of constitution.

In considering the constant movement between fore-projection and new-projection, as well as a mutual formation between understanding and explanation, interpretive hermeneutics as characterized by Ricoeur and Gadamer also offer orientating details with which to think about emerging culture within historical context, another supporting reason for involving hermeneutics in the present study. In Gadamerian hermeneutics, “historically effected consciousness” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 301) is the foundation of the hermeneutic process. Essentially, historically effected consciousness is the fore-projections/fore-conceptions of things that are malleable to revision (i.e. new-projection) throughout the hermeneutic process. This malleability speaks to important characteristics of hermeneutic method, including an ability to open up a space for “questioning of things” and a fundamental respect for the “alterity” of the text (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 271). In Gadamer’s words, “Historically effected consciousness is an element in the act of [hermeneutic] understanding itself and… is already effectual in finding the right questions to ask” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 301). Gadamer underscores the suspicion of
prejudice\textsuperscript{13} in romantic hermeneutics, but argues for prejudice as an integral condition of hermeneutic understanding. Basically, prejudice ought not to be discarded as irrelevant, because it is akin to historically effected consciousness that carries traces of history (i.e. cultural sedimentation), and is the initial instigator of hermeneutic processes. Ricoeur, similarly, talks about history as the “sum of marks” that is detached from an original author or agent. In his words, “History itself as the sum of ‘marks,’ the fate of which escapes the control of individual actors. Henceforth history may appear as an autonomous entity, as a play with players who do not know the plot” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 102). Understanding history and historically effected consciousness, highlighting sedimentations of culture, questioning of things, and having a sensitivity to alterity of the text are all features of a hermeneutic orientation useful in addressing constitution. The question of constitution is neither about asking what the players are (i.e. the question of “what WoIS is”) nor about delineating the plots (i.e. a plot that designates social-cultural situation as oppressive for WoIS), but about the play that attends to the players, the plots, and the interactions between the players and the plot. In other words, constitution is about the containing structure that holds the tension between the players and the plot, which at the same time, makes the players and the plots possible. In sum, “The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 295, italics original).

**Applying Hermeneutics to Research Interviews: From Description to Interpretation**

In the present research, subjective narratives of WoIS are obtained through research interviews, and like most qualitative methods (e.g. Interpretive phenomenological methods, Smith & Osborne, 1999), the general meaning of the interview contents provides the first-line

\textsuperscript{13} Prejudice is simply pre-judgment, in this usage, as opposed to the overdetermined negative use in the cultural everyday.
approximation to the phenomenology of the lived experiences of lives of WoIS in descriptive forms. In addition to understanding the general meaning of the phenomenon, an inquiry into how the narratives of WoIS are made to mean what they mean is also warranted through interpretation and analysis. As a result, hermeneutics is employed in the present research as a theory of text interpretation.

Packer’s (2011) qualitative methodology is an example of how to apply hermeneutic principles to understanding interview transcripts. He incorporates theories of text interpretation from Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Merleau-Ponty to offer different ways of understanding interviews that reaches beyond the content of the narratives. He proposes,

When we interview a person we don’t simply test our theories about them or find answers to our questions but encounter them and are challenged by them… When we analyze interview transcripts, we should articulate our understanding of it as an invitation to see a different form of life. (Packer, 2011, p. 379)

Additionally, consider Gadamer’s proposal that to reach an understanding in a dialogue entails a transformation for both subject and object.

To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.

(Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 371)

This salient point from both these comments is that an interview is not just about testing a theory with interviewee’s answers, but about an encounter that challenges the interviewer’s assumptions, thereby transforming both the interviewer and the interviewee. To this end, the goal of the research interview is neither about affirming or disputing a particular hypothesis as
articulated in prior studies, but to *encounter* each life of WoIS and to illustrate how such encounter discloses a form of life and its transformation as a result of the interview process.

Fostering a transformation for both object and subject as a result of the qualitative interview brings us to Packer’s next point—analyzing the interview transcript is about articulating our understanding to it and serves as an invitation to see a different world. This point echoes Ricoeur’s notion that understanding an interview transcript is akin to gaining access to “a mode of being in the world that the text opens up in front of itself by means of its non-ostensive reference” (Ricoeur, 1971/1979, p. 94). For Ricoeur, the non-ostensive reference is not what the author intended to say, but the “world opened up by the depth-semantics of the text” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 113). To put it simply, hermeneutic interpretation of the interview transcript aims to get at “the depth-semantics of the text,” thereby opening up a horizon with a world of possibilities that were embedded and transmitted through spoken words coded as text. Staying close to the spoken words (i.e. interview transcripts) carries with it an immediacy that “guide[s] us in the construction of such world” (Packer, 2011, p. 119). In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, “The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 184). The world emerges through the meaning of the spoken word, and that meaning is what Ricoeur called the “depth-semantics of the text” that is disclosed in front of the text and that “points toward a possible world.” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 113).

To summarize briefly, hermeneutic interpretation of the interview is to offer a new way of seeing things rather than representing or reconstructing the subjective experiences of the interviewees. Packer noted that the process of interpretation begins with the *tacit* understanding a researcher has reading the text of the interview transcript…. The effect on the researcher, the meaning *for them*, is
explicated, along with how that effect came about. In short, ‘Here is my reading of the text. And here’s what this reading is responding to’. (Packer, 2011, p. 119, italics original)

Packer’s note above indicates three main components of the process of interpretation: the tacit understanding of a researcher, the effect on, and the meaning for, the researcher, and the researcher’s reading of how the effect came about. So far, two of the components were explicated throughout this chapter: The tacit understanding of a researcher is comparable to Gadamer’s fore-projection/fore-understanding, and the question regarding how the effect came about can be likened to Ricoeur’s hermeneutic circle concerning the mutual formation and co-construction “between understanding and explanation” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 117). The issues regarding the effect on the researchers and the meaning for them warrant further exploration, and well through an examination of how the research “applies to the self”, and the issue of “reflexivity.”

Application to self

For Gadamer, the hermeneutic problem of application is of central importance. Application, and particularly for an interpreter to apply his or her understanding of the text to him or herself, is what makes interpretation possible. Gadamer said,

The interpreter dealing with a traditionary text tries to apply it to himself… the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text… In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate to the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all. (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 321)
Understanding is to take into account one’s current situation as one engages in the process of interpretation. The incorporation of one’s current situation signifies the concepts of fore-projections and the primacy of prejudice as previously discussed. In addition, application to self as the foundation of interpretation has a temporal dimension that focuses on the present moment—an interpretation is an application to self in the present moment within the horizon of the present situation. To apply one’s understanding of the text to the present moment (i.e. to interpret) is, for Gadamerrian hermeneutics, also a process of posing a question to the interpreter. Briefly,

The hermeneutics phenomenon too implies the primacy of dialogue and the structure of question and answer. That a historical text is made the object of interpretation means that it puts a question to the interpreter. Thus interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question. But this takes place, as we showed, by our attaining the hermeneutical horizon. We now recognize this as the *horizon of the question* within which the sense of the text is determined.

(Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 363, italics original)

In stressing the application to self as a part of hermeneutics process, Gadamerian hermeneutics underscores the horizon within which an interpreter is situated, and the horizon of the questions that open up possibilities for how texts are made to mean what they mean. Reflection on the interpreter’s situation is essential to hermeneutic interpretation and is addressed more elaborately in the following discussion on reflexivity. The horizon of the questions that open up possibilities for the meaning-making of the text is a monumental step that Gadamer took, distinct from romantic hermeneutic, in that it does not attempt to arrive at a universal
understanding, but to gain access to multiplicity of differences a text signifies, contingent on the 
interpreter’s fore-projection, the question being posed, and the interpreting situations. In other 
words, the multiplicity of differential meanings is possible because texts have effects on, and 
reveal specific meanings, for the reader/researcher/interpreter. Gadamer’s focus on the text 
beyond its content is well-characterized by Silverman’s appropriation of Gadamerrian 
hermeneutics:

    language constitutes a horizon of meaning in which the being of language speaks
    and renders the sense that is presented. The interpretation of language and
    horizon in each case, and in conjunction with its horizon produces understanding
    (Silverman, 1994, p. 26).

    Silverman’s appropriation of Gadamerian hermeneutics puts it on the trajectory to
    hermeneutic semiology, that is, “a reading of a text in terms of its meaning structures as they
    relate to elements in the world and as they refer back not to a centered self but to the interpretive
    activity itself” (Silverman, 1994, p. 26). Explicating Gadamerrian hermeneutics in the present
    research is relevant not only because it provides a new way to think about interpretation and
    opens up possibilities, but also because it leads the way to textualities, elaborated on in the
    ensuing sections of this chapter.

**Reflexivity**

Before going into textuality, let us mark the location of reflexivity in the present study in 
relation to its popular use in qualitative methods. Reflexivity is a commonly employed method 
in the analysis of qualitative data where researchers engage in explicit analyses of their own roles 
and their situations that contribute to particular understanding of qualitative data (Finlay, 2002).
Conventionally, interviewing guidelines often assume a neutral position of the researcher/interviewer with him/her not getting involved with the participants and by only asking questions with the goal of arriving at an affirmation or disputation of hypotheses or research questions. These guidelines buy into the assumption of epistemological dualism—that the goal of qualitative method is to gain access to the objectivity of subjective experiences. Employment of reflexivity into qualitative analysis takes an active stance against this conventional interviewing guideline and begins to engage in a non-dualistic ontological inquiry that aims to approach how subjects and objects are mutually formed in the process of interview. Like Gadamer’s concept of fore-projection, it is faulty to assume that a researcher can be completely neutral because a researcher always already has a stance (i.e. by being a researcher) and is always already situated within historical conditions (i.e. by one’s personal and cultural history). To actively think about a researcher/interviewer’s involvement with the data and the process through which data emerged is to recognize the importance of how personal involvement shapes and is shaped by the process of interviewing and interview analysis, akin to the transformation of both subject and object aforementioned.

In a certain sense, conceptual support for engaging reflexivity as a lens through which to view interview analysis has already been provided in the application to self as a tool to approach an understanding of the text, as discussed in the last section. Additionally, Ricoeur discusses the notion of “personal commitment” as gatekeeper for the hermeneutic circle. He notes,

The qualification of the notion of personal commitment does not eliminate the ‘hermeneutic circle.’ This circle remains an insuperable structure of knowledge when it is applied to human things, but this qualification prevents it from becoming a vicious circle. (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 117)
Moreover, analysis of an interview is undeniably intersubjective because language serves as “the medium of the hermeneutical experience” (Silverman, 1994, p. 25). In Packer’s words,

Our understanding of what someone tells us in an interview draws unavoidably from factors that are not personal or individual but *intersubjective*. Language itself is an intersubjective phenomenon, and the researcher’s knowledge of language plays a crucial role in the conduct and analysis of an interview…

Communicative and intersubjective relations should be treated as the bases on which subjects, and subjectivities, are formed. (Packer, 2011, p. 120)

When Packer speaks about “researcher’s knowledge of language,” he is really pointing to the expansion of the world and culture that language carries. That is, “a seemingly straightforward personal and individual source of data has turned out to involve shared public conventions, practices, and ways of knowing” (Packer, 2011, p. 120). And it is through the researcher’s understanding of language in relation to the interviewee’s use of language that an understanding of the horizons of possibilities becomes comprehensible and imaginable, thereby allowing a study of “the *constitution* of both the subjects and their subjectivity” (Packer, 2011, p. 120). The interview of the present research is designed with all the abovementioned theoretical foundations in mind, including Gadamer’s emphasis on application to self, Ricoeur on personal commitment, and Packer on the intersubjective nature of language and communication.

Specifically, the design includes the choice of using shared language in the research interview, of engaging more personally rather than allegedly neutral, and of reflecting on how the shared communication opens up a horizon of transformation for both the researcher and the participants.

On the practical front, engaging reflexivity into qualitative analysis is of particular importance when understanding female narratives and is often incorporated into feminist
qualitative methodology. For example, Oakley (1981) noted that personal involvement “is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives” (p. 58). As the present research aims to understand narratives of WoIS, sensitivity to gendered texts and sub-texts is called for. In sum, for practical, theoretical and ethical reasons, reflexivity as a mode of interpretive analysis provides room to illustrate the effect on and the meaning for the researcher in reading the transcript, which is one of the important elements of interpretation as noted by Packer. Reflexivity as an interpretive move also fits well with the participating population, the goals of the present research, and methodological trajectory.

**Textualities**

*Adding to hermeneutics*

In the discussion on hermeneutics, above, mention was made of Gadamer’s engagement of language as an opening to multiplicity of possibilities and as a way of addressing the horizon of questions. This approach of reading a text (understanding an language) is an interpretive move that consists of questioning as an essential part of the hermeneutic. In the relation between questioning (as a way of opening to multiple possibilities) and the notion of interrogation (as a way of engaging with a text), this interpretive reading of a text puts itself on the trajectory to hermeneutic semiology, adding a deconstructive movement to hermeneutic.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutic, with its locus of interest on the in-between and sensitivity to alterity, also has a place on the trajectory toward deconstruction. In particular, Ricoeur tried to show the extent to which one may “consider the notion of text as a good paradigm for the so-called object of the social sciences” (1973, p. 91) and the extent to which the methodology of text-interpretation may be used “as a paradigm for interpretation in general in the field of the
social sciences” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 91). The “methodology of text-interpretation” suggests Ricoeur’s interest in the multiple meanings of text and multiple ways of interpreting speech acts. When discussing hermeneutics in social science, Ricoeur indicated that “we proceed from naive interpretation to critical interpretations, from surface-interpretations to depth-interpretations through structural analysis… But it is depth-interpretation which gives meaning to the whole process” (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 116). In some ways, the movement from surface-interpretations to depth-interpretations may be characterized as a movement from descriptive interpretation to textual interpretation. The notions of “structural analysis” and “textual interpretation” brings Silverman’s notion of “hermeneutic semiology” into play. He said,

Interpretive activity involves a dialectic of distanciation and appropriation. Distanciation concerns the way in which a text is addressed to someone… Appropriation involves a playful transposition of the text, in which the reader—who unlike the author is not cut off from the text—enters into the text and makes it his or her own… The fact that Ricoeur allows for the cooperation of interpretation and explanation of texts indicates the proximity of his position to that of a hermeneutic semiology. (Silverman, 1994, p. 28)

Silverman introduced the notion of “hermeneutic semiology” to illustrate a new understanding of hermeneutics’ engagement with text and textual quality (i.e. “textuality”, Silverman, 1994). To the extent that hermeneutic semiology is likened to a deconstructive move, a departure of sorts from hermeneutics per se must take place.

As a matter of fact, what has been discussed so far with theoretical and conceptual helps from Ricoeur, Gadamaer, Foucault, and early Merleau-Ponty is a methodology that follows

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14 Ricoeur spoke elaborately on the differences among the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary in his article “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text” (Ricoeur, 1973).
Packer’s notion of ontological constitution/radical realism, such that a hermeneutics is employed to offer a fresh way to see the world by way of reconstruction. To take a step further, the next conceptual frame that serves the methodological foundation of the present study is a deconstructive force, in the name of textualities, or what Silverman (1994) would call “hermeneutic semiology” or “inter-textualities.”

In this section, the methodology of the present research takes a step by adding an analysis of the “structuring of the structure of the text” to hermeneutics, gesturing toward textualities. Analysis of textuality is considered another interpretive engagement with the qualitative data gathered from narratives of WoIS, following descriptive and hermeneutic understanding.

Hermeneutic semiology

In Silverman’s analysis of textualities, he evoked various frameworks to gesture to both what textualities is and what it is not, but most importantly in this approach, what textualities could also transform into. In other words, textualities as a philosophy or methodology lies in the line between hermeneutics and deconstruction, serving as a hinge that blurs the line not by erasing the line but by expanding the space in-between, by enlarging or stretching the line(s). It is precisely for this reason when a research study, such as the present one, tries to include textualities as an interpretive move in terms of methodology, the task is difficult to put down in writing, as text. Writing with/about hermeneutic semiology is like writing without an origin. The present work has started with hermeneutic, but hermeneutics started before itself, before Gadamer, before Ricoeur, even before Dilthey. So does semiology. Texts had started before it became a text, with the meaning of the words, sentence structure, and the whole world of culture that supports the composition of a text in a certain way, all of which carried historical marks

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15 Packer made note of the productive function of language, “the recognition that meaning is not simply something ‘expressed’ or ‘reflected’ in language: it is actually produced by it” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 60; see Packer, 2011, p. 83).
before them. To attend to the impossible task of writing about hermeneutic semiology, about what it means and how it works, the order of which the following sections (and hence, this entire dissertation project) adhere to does not have significance in its sequence, but have significance as components of multi-directional interactions, within which each element plays a part in the whole and hence changes the whole by adding different anchors and different ways of relating to one another. Let us wrestle with the question of how hermeneutic semiology, the notion of difference as operative in hermeneutics and semiology, the forces of deconstruction and of interrogation, the current task of writing, and the idea of textualities.

One cannot speak of hermeneutic semiology without speaking of the various functions and meanings of the text. Silverman made it clear, “The text is located and operates at the intersection of semiotics and hermeneutics” (Silverman, 1994, p. 28), and that the text “is not that which is interpreted but rather the domain in which the interpretation occurs” (Silverman, 1994, p. 20). In the earlier discussion on hermeneutics as a research methodology, hermeneutics was first noted as a theory of interpretation, and particularly as a commitment toward the production of understanding via interpretation. Such understanding is bi-directional in that the hermeneutic circle is co-constituted with both fore-projection and new-projection in Gadamerrian terms, and with surface-interpretations and depth-interpretations in Ricoeurrian terms. In this way, hermeneutics carries a feel of subjective orientation, and the text for hermeneutics is “that which offers its meaning through the event of the text as it is interpreted in relation to the world and as a reflection back upon the interpreting self” (Silverman, 1994, p. 30, italics original).

Text, for semiotics, serves a different function and has a different meaning from text for hermeneutics. Semiotic concerns itself more with understanding the structure of the text (i.e. the
“significability” of the text, Silverman, 1994, p.22). The structure of the text is what makes meanings, fore- and new-projections possible in the first place. Hence, semiotic concerns are less about the contents of projections or meanings per se. The text for semiotics, then, refers to the world “iconically, indexically and symbolically” (Silverman, 1994, p. 30), and by so doing makes it possible for “its own multiple readings in its atopic plurisignificational dimensions” (p. 30). Simply put, in terms of semiology, the text is an open system of signs with plural meanings.

The main difference between text for hermeneutics and for semiotics is that the reflection upon the self is left in suspension in semiotics, whereas the reflection upon the self is participatory for the hermeneutic circle. So, to both reflect back to the self and leave it in suspension, poses a seeming methodological paradox and impossibility – how is one to do hermeneutic semiology?

Silverman summarizes,

A hermeneutic semiology would seek to offer a reading of the text in terms of its meaning structures as they relate to elements in the world and as they refer back not to a centered self but to the interpretive activity itself. Such a reading of meaning structures in their plurisignificational character occurs in a cultural/natural, social/individual, etc. milieu as a reading of the textuality (or textualities) of the text. (Silverman, 1994, p. 30, italics original)

For the present research, a reading of textualities as the proper milieu that makes possible the reading of meaning structures in their plurisignificational character is the next interpretive move toward textual analysis.

Difference as operative in hermeneutics and semiology
In addition to the differences between hermeneutics and semiotics regarding the location and movement of the reflection upon the self, the difference of differences is operative in hermeneutics and semiotics. In semiotics, Silverman says,

Difference is deferral, a sliding off or passing on to a contiguous, subsequent, or prior sign. Difference is what gives any particular sign’s signification its identity. Difference is not restricted to any particular temporal sequence. Difference links the various elements (both syntagmatic and paradigmatic) in the whole sign system. Difference is also that which distinguishes and identifies any particular element in the system. Difference is not simply the intervals between each unit (signifier plus signified) as if each sign were an atomic unit. (Silverman, 1994, p. 17)

An example of difference in semiology is the use of rhetorical tropes that has the potential to “produce an imbalanced and off-center signifier-signified relation,” which is reflective of “the fluidity and flexibility occur in the place of difference” (Silverman, 1994, p. 17). In other words, difference as operative in semiology is plural, that is, differences. Alternatively, in hermeneutics, difference is what makes interpretation possible as it locates at the “in-between,” such that it is “theoretically spatial and vertical” (Silverman, 1994, p. 17) as opposed to deferral or indecidables. Given that the difference of differences is operative in hermeneutics and semiology, hermeneutic semiology discloses a hybrid of “a differential notion” (Silverman, 1994, p. 2) instead of an identity. To add a deferred answer to the question of how hermeneutic semiology, perhaps one consideration may sound like this: “A hermeneutic semiology would operate at the intersection of the vertical interpretive, constitutive, meaning-forming experience and the horizontal dispersive, differential system-articulating signifying chain” (Silverman, 1994, p. 2)

16 “The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 295, italics original).
And it is from this deferred answer that we move to the deconstructive and interrogative forces for hermeneutic semiology.

The forces of deconstruction and of interrogation

As a hybrid differential notion or as a “juxtapositional deconstruction” (Silverman, 1994, p. 3), hermeneutic semiology is not, however, deconstruction per se. Rather, essential features of hermeneutic semiology reveal its adaptability to the forces of deconstruction and interrogation. If the task of hermeneutics is interpretation, and of semiology, analysis, then “the task of deconstruction is to offer a theoretical practice of reading texts” (Silverman, 1994, p. 20) such that the “zero degree and points of departure for a hermeneutic semiology can itself be decentered and disseminated in a field of writing, difference, and indecids” (p. 20). As such, deconstruction “requires the elucidation and elaboration of indecids” (Silverman, 1994, p. 3), underlining the “indecidability” of a text, which is an essential element of the textuality of a text. Semiology is shaped by deconstructive forces because it concerns the structural analysis of the text that discloses the indecids of the text.

Meanwhile, the force of interrogation brings forth the task of raising questions rather than answering them, so as to “make a place where positions can occur rather than speak from positions” (Silverman, 1994, p. 31). As previously alluded to, Gadamer’s inclusion of questioning into hermeneutics had within it the trace of interrogation. That is, hermeneutic interpretation is adaptive to the force of interrogation as interrogation is “the questioning that makes interpretation possible” (Silverman, 1994, p. 35).
Silverman (1994) specifically discussed forces of interrogation and deconstruction to juxtapose later Merleau-Ponty’s notion of visibility (1964) and Derrida’s notion of supplementarity\(^{17}\) (1967). He noted,

> At issue in interrogation is the logic of visibility; at issue in deconstruction is the logic of supplementarity. In juxtaposing the two, one finds that visibility is a sort of phenomenological supplementarity and supplementarity is a sort of textual visibility. (Silverman, 1994, p. 41)

Juxtaposing interrogation and deconstruction as forces of hermeneutic semiology brings forth the texture of these different forces and how they furnish and supply for hermeneutic semiology. In terms of a methodological foundation for hermeneutic semiology, as the present research attempts to incorporate, writing to interrogate and to deconstruct invites and opens up a method(s) of analysis.

**The present task of writing**

So what is the present task of writing in relation to a research methodology? Or in other words, how to write from a method characterized as a hermeneutic semiology? Writing by way of interrogation and deconstructing is, in a way, itself a method of analysis, but what are the tasks of deconstruction and of interrogation? For Silverman, “The task of interrogation is to become the experience of the things which it interrogates… Interrogation is concerned with visible things and their significations… Interrogation explores the visible as intertwined with the invisible… For Merleau-Ponty, what is not there is the seeing itself” (Silverman, 1994, p. 44). Following these guidelines, a research analysis may interrogate lives of WoIS by getting at an

\(^{17}\) The “supplement” in Derrida’s notion of “supplementarily” must be thought of as having two mutually exclusive meanings—that it is a *replacement* and that it is an *in addition*. Read more in Derrida’s in *Of Grammatology* (1997/1967).
experiential sense of living as WoIS. To concern with the visible things and their significations
is to concern with how experiences of WoIS appear, are “presenced”, or how the experiences
make sense to the WoIS. Simultaneously, by interrogating the lived experiences of WoIS,
another layer of analysis may bring to the forefront the invisible socio-cultural ascriptions of how
the lives of WoIS ought to be, both in terms of what is revealed (i.e. visible) and concealed (i.e.
invisible) in the construction of discourses on WoIS, and that, is a way of getting at the “seeing
in itself” by way of interrogation.

In terms of deconstruction, the task is
to become writing, namely another text, a critical text which supplements and
incorporates the one or ones in question… Deconstruction is concerned with texts
and their inscribed interrelations… Deconstruction requires that the text be
examined for its differences (from other texts) and its deferrals (into other
texts)… Deconstruction examines textual traces, marks, traits, signatures, and
differences as they occur in writing… For Derrida, what is not there is either at
the borderlines of a particular text (at the hinge of this text and another text) or
within the frame of (an)other text(s). (Silverman, 1994, p. 44)

To this end, the present work of writing is in itself a deconstructive move. The writing
expresses my reading of the literature on WoIS, my reading of the narratives (in texts) of the
participating WoIS, my reading of the interrelations between literature and narratives, their
differences and deferrals, and my attempt to supplement and incorporate different traces and
marks into the current writing by illustrating how one text anchors back and/or makes reference
to (an)other text(s). By marking the borderlines and frames of literature and narratives of WoIS,
the present writing as a reading of those texts becomes itself a new text with borderlines and
frames, and what has to be left out is the readers’ reading of the current text, and how such reading makes manifest the borderline and frames of this writing.

**Practicing Textualities**

Simply put, writing with hermeneutic semiology is likened to writing about “the various frameworks in which textualities occur—as occasioned by a reading of a number of binary oppositions including: visible/invisible, inside/outside, presence/absence, text/context, and unity/multiplicity” (Silverman, 1994, p. 3). In terms of the notion of binaries, what is relevant for hermeneutsics and/or for semiology alone is the system of differences that gives signification to each particular sign such that the horizon of meanings is constituted. However, for hermeneutic semiology à la textualities, what is relevant is the *differentiation* between each form of the binaries (i.e. between visible and invisible, between inside and outside, between presence and absence, etc.), in which meaning is found and produced. Even a cursory recognition of the lives of WoIS bring various binary forms to mind, prescribed as they are by cultural frames: east and west, where this population of interest is concerned particularly, but also more generally between a host and a guest, between dwelling and visiting, between oppressing and the oppressed, between genders, etc. In this way, a hermeneutic semiotic writing about WoIS as differentiation lends marks to “a difference in which meaning is found and produced” (Silverman, 1994, p. 17), and conceivably by so doing resisting particular sign or signification. In Silverman’s words, “A hermeneutic semiology can be formulated as the understanding of a set of signs ordered into a coherent textual complex. Such an understanding will disclose the aspects of a particular text or textualization but always in relation to (or in the context of) alternative texts and textualizations” (Silverman, 1994, p. 2). What transpires to a hermeneutic semiotic
writing on WoIS is a disclosing of various aspects of a text, be it an individual narrative or a body of literatures, how such text(s) relate(s) to, make(s) reference to, or supplement for alternative texts and textualizations, including the present piece of writing.

The text, in a real sense, is “exorbitant” (Silverman, 1994, p. 82), that is, the text spills over, goes beyond itself, and “there is always a remainder according to which the text affirms an identity for itself” (Silverman, 1994, p. 82). To that end, the practice of textuality is the practice of reaching beyond the limits of meaning to the side of the exorbitant, of striving to that shore where things are spilled over, and on, and to make visible what there is to be seen to the same extent that one does the act of seeing—all of this in an excessive and exorbitant manner attuned not only to the explicit and literal said of the text, but also and especially to the traces, marks, and sediments of the text (i.e. the textualities of the text). In short, “The textuality of the text is both a condition of the text and the practice of the text” (Silverman, 1994, p. 86). In this regard, textualities as a method for the present research wants to underscore both the condition of the texts within the present writing and the practice of the text as the present writing. Textualities are plural, yet the textuality of the (present and this particular) text is singular. Textualities as a method is not about following a set of steps to reach a scientifically objective truth about the textuality, but a practice of writing a text. The writing of a text extends an invitation to the readers, both to read with the implicit textualities of the text, and to read the multiple readings of the text (i.e. this dissertation) written in relation to other texts (such as the literature, the multiple cultural-crossing theories, and the texts of participants’ report in another language). In the double reading of writing as both a text (singular) with specific implicit textuality and many texts (plural) with textualities, what manifests is the possibilities of inter-textualities of multiple texts and multiple readings.
An instance of the inter-textualities may be illustrated in the movements from human science, to qualitative method, to hermeneutic, and to textualities. These movements offer various frames as scaffolds; simultaneously, they push above and beyond the limit and borderline of the structures of the narratives (i.e. how the narrative of WoIS organizes the structure of their experience). In this way, it may not be a surprise to see the approximation of how “life comes to imitate art” (Bruner, 1991, p. 21; Foucault, 1978). By making visible these movements, by supplementing what has been invisible and left out of the movement, one may find that “the result will not be freedom from metaphysics but a better metaphysics, one that is more adequate to the complexities of human life and human being” (Packer, 2011, p.41). As a consequence (and from the get-go), the present research is attending to the complexities of living as WoIS.

Summarizing Remark on Methodological Frames

This chapter introduced differences between human science and natural science, as well as the converging traps between qualitative and quantitative research, and an elucidation of hermeneutics and textualities as methodological frames for the present research. Briefly, the present research attempts to understand the lives of WoIS, and to do so with particular reference to how “culture cultures”, that is, how WoIS are constituted within discourse, and at the same time how discourse is made meaningful in their lives. In doing so, this study wishes to move beyond the limits and lacunae of much current research on WoIS, as highlighted in earlier chapters. One such attempt is in the choice of a methodological frame that privileges a human science perspective, and a textual hermeneutic semiology.

As is hopefully clear by now, the present study does not endeavor to provide definitive answers to some hypothesized and variable defined research phenomenon, but wishes to wrestle
with the discursive experientiality and phenomenality of WoIS as they live their lives, such that the academic field is opened up, rather than foreclosed. Moreover, the aim is not only about reconstructing the subjectivity of the author(s) of the texts (i.e. traditional qualitative methods), or about specific modes of interpretation and the structure that gives rise to such interpretation (i.e. critical hermeneutics), but also about a reading of multiple texts as they relate to one another (in terms of the textualities of the texts) and a writing of a text (with its specific textuality), knitting together a web of inter-textualities that involve both reading and writing of multiple texts, within and beyond this text.

In addition to providing a descriptive account and hermeneutics interpretation, this study also attempts to situate meaning and add dialogue to the existing literature by posing questions to the texts through interrogating the texts. This process is guided by Silverman’s (1994) notion of textuality and hermeneutic semiology, addressing the question specifically of how is it that the text makes sense in relation to other texts. In the case of the present research, question addressed is regarding how the texts (both narratives and literature) of WoIS makes sense in relation to literature on culture and gender studies, and vice versa. Responding to this question does not mean that one has to stay within the presence of the text and what is there, but allows the researcher to also bring her reading and positionality to the text, to note both what the text omits as that it admits, and to bring it into intertextual relation to other texts. In other words, reflexivity as a mode of analysis enters into the text, becomes a part of the text, and at once transforms the subject writing and objects written in the texts. An instance of the researcher’s insertion into the circle of interpretation is, for example, to be seen in my familiarity with the cultural dialogue, adding an interpretative layer in unspoken references to nostalgic meanings of
home or culturally specific codes or references, in so doing approximate the question regarding how culture cultures.

Furthermore, an analysis of textualities aims to read both what the text represents and that belies the contents of such representation, thus at once the text is being read and reading itself, offering an inter-textualities of the narratives that brings the meanings of culture and gender beyond the content of the narrative itself. The assumption is that through interrogating and deconstructing the inter-textualities of the text that the rigorous processes of local (i.e. immediate, here-and-now) practices, power relations, division of gender, and a fluid notion of culture illustrating through lives of WoIS will become more visible as multiple layers of textualities.

Given the above-mentioned methodological frames, the following section will address briefly the practical and concrete translation into procedures and method.

**Method and Procedure**

**Recruitment**

An initial attempt was made to recruit participants through a popular public discussion board\(^\text{18}\) for Taiwanese students studying abroad, but proved to be unsuccessful as no qualified participants could be identified through this venue. Consequently, recruitment procedures were adapted to a word of mouth process, by way of my sending out a recruitment e-mail to my Taiwanese circle of friends residing in the U.S. and asking them to spread the words to their own social circles (see Appendix A for a sample recruitment e-mail). The criteria for inclusion in the

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\(^{18}\) The electronic discussion board is arguably the most popular medium in Taiwan for support, information exchange, and discussion on various topics for Taiwanese students who are preparing or currently studying abroad. Users may register for free to participate in all of the discussions or browse the discussions without becoming a registered member. At various times, heated discussions on experiences of bringing partners with students studying abroad have been logged.
study were that participants: (a) should be current wives of Taiwanese international students, and (b) should have been living in the U.S. for at least six months, and no more than five years in length. Wives who fit both criteria were eligible for inclusion in this study. Criterion (b) was set to recruit a more homogenized group of participants with a relatively consistent amount of sojourning experiences. Although the present study does not subscribe fully to the assumptions of acculturation theories, it is in the context of the developmental model of acculturation that assumes an acculturation process with rapid transformations between six months and two years after arriving at the host country. Therefore, the present study assumes that wives who have lived in the U.S. between six months and five years will most likely be able to provide personal narratives that capture their sojourning experiences closely enough for the purposes of this study.

Four current wives of Taiwanese international students in the United States were identified and included in the present study. Participant A was the first to contact me after receiving my e-mail—she is a friend of mine in the local social circle. Participant A also helped me recruit additional participants by forwarding my recruiting e-mail to other potentially qualified Taiwanese WoIS. Participant B is a friend of participant A, and was the next to respond to my recruitment e-mail. Participant C is also acquainted with participant A, and she noted that she had received more than one of my recruiting e-mails from her social circle. Participant D is a friend of Participant C, and participant D contacted me with participant C’s encouragement.

All participants received my recruitment e-mail either from me directly, or from an acquaintance of theirs who forwarded my recruitment e-mail to them. And all of them responded via e-mail to my recruitment e-mail. After receiving a response of interest with an e-mail from each participant, at least one phone conversation with each participant occurred prior to the interview to discuss the details about their participation in the study, to answer any question that
participants had about the study, and to coordinate the date and place of the interview if the participant agreed to be interviewed. Three of the interviews took place at the participant’s home as it was the most convenient to them. The interview with participant D took place in a coffee shop per participant D’s preference. Interviews with participants A and B both took place while their children were nearby (i.e. taking a nap, having snacks, playing with toys). One-on-one interviews with participants C and D were conducted with no one else present. Participant rights, including that of confidentiality and informed consent, were explained prior to the interview; all participants signed their consent form prior to the start of the interview.

In addition to the four included participants, a couple of participants were introduced to me by participant A, but they did not fit the selection criteria to the present study (e.g. have exceeded the maximum length of stay in the U.S. to be included in the current study), hence they were not interviewed. Another person made contact after getting a recruitment e-mail, but she was only available for an interview for thirty minutes at a specifically designated time. I met with this person for thirty minutes, and she noted that she would not be available for another extended conversation in the next two to three months due to personal reasons. Due to the insufficient information obtained in the 30-minute conversation, this data is not included in the present study.

**Procedure**

Before going into the details of the interview, some context of how the interview took place is explicated briefly. The interviews were considered a “joint production” (Packer, 2011, p. 56), and the goal of interview places greater importance on both the content of the interviewee’s narrative, and the process emerged in the interview that indicates “how a person has been constituted in a particular form of life” (Packer, 2011, p. 7). Of note to the procedure of
interview is that certain data-gathering formats all too often are not theorized or are not thought for the manner in which they are impacted by cultural script or norms. For example, in some cultures, heterosexual interview formats may not be appropriate. For the present study, there were no indications of any such cultural constrains or limitations to the interview format, both by virtue of the researcher’s familiarity with the broader Taiwanese cultural norm and by virtue of the lack of evidence in the literature to such an end. However, it remains important to be mindful of the ways in which both the format (e.g. solicitation, the structure interview, etc.) and the data are gathered through means that cannot be assumed to be neutral. In this case, one is called to be sensitive to the possibility that the very form of the interview is not outside of culture and value. As such, acknowledging and paying attention to both the form and the content of interview processes provides a frame from which this research proceeded.

One extensive and lengthy individual interview with each participant was conducted by the author in the participants’ first language (each interview lasted between 90-150 minutes). The interviews were conducted with open-ended questions, beginning with “Tell me about your life as a wife of an international student.” Through empathic reflection, the interview allowed the narratives of each participant to unfold their stories at their own pace and in a spontaneous direction. If, at the end of the interview, the notions of culture and gender ascriptions and their impacts on the sojourning experiences of the wives were not addressed directly, direct exploration of those issues were posed as questions such as: “Describe a belief about yourself that has changed and a belief about yourself that has not changed before and after your journey to the U.S.” or “How is it that your sense of being a woman in the U.S. differs from in Taiwan?” (Please see Appendix B for a list of possible questions that I could have, and have, asked during the interviews.)
All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated for analysis. Names and identifiable information were altered to protect the privacy of the participants.

**Method of Analysis**

After conducting the interviews, interview data was transcribed into Mandarin-Chinese (the language used in the interview) by the author. Descriptive analysis begins with reading through all interview transcripts a few times to get a general sense of the content. As the first goal of the present study is to understand narratives of WoIS in their own terms, the first layer of analysis focuses on descriptive understanding via a retelling of their stories. After transcribing the interviews into Mandarin-Chinese, and after several readings of the transcripts, the narratives of each participant are roughly aggregated into broad categories, such as “journey into the U.S.”, “Reflections on being/becoming a F2”, etc. All of the original narratives are translated from Mandarin-Chinese into English to fall under the broad categories, as seen in Appendix C.

While the narratives in the appendix consist of a large amount of the “raw data”, within-person categorization and thematization (even analysis!) has already taken place by the very act of translation. As readers may have noticed, the processes of transcription, translation, and thematization of the raw interview data lay an additional layer of textuality onto participants’ narratives. The emerging textuality of this first level of analysis (by way of translation and thematization) at once reveals the challenge and the complexity of conducting research in the participants’ native language (i.e. Mandarin-Chinese) while “representing” it in an English language form. Perhaps the most significant challenge encountered at this stage of analysis, is the “non-translatability” of the language-form between two fundamentally different language systems. On many occasions, a participant may speak without a subject or an object, making a
seemingly incomplete sentence potentially open to varying interpretations of meaning. Although the meaning of such incidents was clear to the interlocutor in the context of a face-to-face conversation (in Mandarin), it could become less clear or non-sensible upon re-presentation in written (phonetic) form (i.e. in transcription) and/or in a different language (i.e. having been translated into English). As a brief case in point, consider the following narration of participant B:

what I mean is that because I spend most of my time on such, and that I do not feel that, interpersonally, similar to others, I sometimes feel a little bit like an outsider, and sometimes a bit lost, but not most of the times… It also seems usually I do not actively seek out. (participant B)

At first glance, this raw and direct translation above seems simultaneously nonsensical; as a direct translation from spoken Mandarin, the translation begs for the English supplement of phrase, subject, concord, agreement, and the grammatical like. It is, however, not without meaning or nonsensical in Mandarin, where the gaps, so to speak, are filled in and assumed within the language system as such. The researcher-translator, consequently, has already engaged in some basic level of interpretive analysis in the presentation of the example illustrated above as:

Participant B reflected on the feeling of being an outsider and the sense of loss when she spoke about her spending more time reading and doing things that are less “social.” In her words, “what I mean is that because I spend most of my time on [reading and looking for information that I am interested in], and that I do not feel that, interpersonally, [I am] similar to other [WoIS], I sometimes feel a little bit like an outsider, and sometimes a bit lost, but not most of the times… it also seems like I do not usually actively seek out [interactions with others.]”

In this representation, a narrative cohesion is achieved, but it is not exactly the words of the participant. To be sure, the highlights of each participant’s narratives relevant to being a WoIS
are presented primarily in the exact quote she used during the interview. Although some incomplete sentences and phrases are included in individual narratives, some pauses and nonsensical phrases are edited out. This is done so as to preserve the original narrative and to eliminate unnecessary confusion in the represented stories told by the participants. To be mindful of foreclosed multiple meanings, discussions in Chapter Six will address further nuances of textualities related to the re-presentation of the translated story told by the participants—both regarding a transcribed and translated document, and regarding the particular story-form that is deployed to the present presentation.

The next step of analysis is guided partially by the methodological and procedural directions for hermeneutics and narrative analysis as articulated by Packer (2011). On a basic level, an analysis addresses both similarities and differences among four participants’ plots through a hermeneutic interpretation, in the service of identifying some common experiences of lives of WoJS. In terms of similarities, when more than three of the four participants’ narratives contain a good amount of explicitly stated content in the recounting of her life as WoJS, a converging theme is identified as one focal force of the complex experiences of WoJS. Much of the process of pulling together the many converging themes is likely to be influenced by the “fore-projection” as a result of my having read previous literature and studies on WoJS. Nevertheless, the validity of this analysis lies in the fact that each theme intended was in fact captured in the explicit contents of the narratives. In other words, the themes derived are valid as a denominator of common experiences among WoJS on the face value for the identifiable convergence among the four participants’ recounting of their sojourning lives. In addition, this process is completed with the assistance of the dissertation director who offered his reading of the themes vis-à-vis supporting contents. The final identified themes are refined after a few
back-and-forth readings between the director and me. The converging themes illustrated are samples of significant phenomenological common ground, but not exhaustive of points of possible convergence.

In addition to the explicitly converging contents, an analysis that looks for divergence of the content and convergence of the process was conducted in the multiple readings and re-readings of the narratives of the participating WoIS. The implicit and the contextual frames of the narratives are the orienting foundation of understanding each of the narrated text. The frames are thematized, as well, to delineate constitutive elements that help make sense of the narratives of participants. In other words, the implicit and contextual themes give insight into how the narratives of WoIS are made to mean what they mean. On this level, a “new-projection” of sort reveals itself as an interpretation, arriving at a hermeneutic circle between fore- and new-projection in the reading of the texts of experiences of WoIS.

A further layer of analysis occurs by way of juxtaposing the emerging themes (from the hermeneutic analysis) with the different tenets of theories among the literature on WoIS (i.e. cultural shock literature, acculturation literature, and theoretical literature) to highlight inconsistencies, ruptures, and newfound interactions between the themes derived from the narratives of WoIS and the discourses that gave prescription of what WoIS are. This serve as the an added layer of hermeneutic analytic by supplementing another kind of “new-projection.” Simultaneously, this added analysis gives shape to the movement from hermeneutic to textuality.

Protection of the Participants

Approval for this study was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Duquesne University (Approved Protocol # 12-125). Adherence to ethical guidelines for research, which
include confidentiality, voluntary participation, full disclosure, and secure treatment and storage of data remained a most important value during the research process. Potential candidates for the study were contacted via phone and email. When a candidate agreed to participate, written consent was obtained prior to the interview. The participants were informed that their identities would be kept confidential and that their real names would not be used. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time.

Demographic and background of the participants

In the following, a brief description of each of the participating WoIS is provided to give basic demographic and relevant biographical background of the participants.

Participant A was a 34-year-old Taiwanese Christian female at the time of the interview. She had a one-year-old daughter when I interviewed with her. She holds a Masters degree in Sociology from a Taiwanese university, and worked as a journalist for three years and a freelance writer for a year in Taiwan before she followed her husband to the U.S. after he was admitted to a PhD Program. At the time of the interview, A has been living in the U.S. for almost three years. Participant A noted that she speaks Mandarin-Chinese at home with her husband and her daughter.

Participant B self-identified as a Christian-Protestant. She holds a Masters of Divinity in Theology from a Taiwanese university and worked as a full-time pastor at a church in Taiwan before she came to the U.S. Prior to that, she had worked as a social worker. She was 32 years old at the time of the interview, and she had been in the U.S. for two and a half years. B and her husband lived in a seminary in a small town close to a larger metropolis in the Northeast during
their first two years in the U.S., and they moved to a mid-size city when the interview took place. This transition is related to B’s husband’s completion of his Masters’ degree and beginning to pursue a PhD degree in a different city. Participant B noted that she speaks Mandarin-Chinese at home with her husband and her daughter, but she also speaks both Taiwanese and Hakkai, local dialects in Taiwan—she uses them only when she calls her families in Taiwan.

Participant C holds a Bachelor’s degree in public administration from a Taiwanese university. When in Taiwan, she worked as an administrative assistant at a graduate school and a director of residents at a university. She also enjoyed dancing and music while living in Taiwan. At the time of the interview, C was 34 years old, had been living in the U.S. for 2.5 years, and had been working at a restaurant “under the table” for two years. She and her husband lived in a one-bedroom apartment with a cat, and they communicate mostly in Mandarin-Chinese, though C also speaks Hakkai with her family. In terms of spiritual practices, participant B ascribed to traditional folk belief, largely influenced by Buddhist spiritual tradition.

Participant D holds a Masters degree in Chinese literature and education from a Taiwanese university. She worked as an elementary school Chinese teacher prior to getting married and joining her husband to the U.S. She dated her husband for almost twelve years before they got married, and one reason for the timing of the marriage was such that D could join her husband to America because he received a job offer. After sojourning in the U.S. for five months with her husband, D went back to Taiwan for the Chinese New Year, and subsequently got a job offer to teach at a middle school. She then stayed in Taiwan for a year and a half. During this time, D’s husband decided to enroll in a Masters’ program at the university that he worked at, and he also planned to pursue doctoral education in the U.S. D came to visit her husband during the winter and summer breaks. At the time of the present interview, D was 30
years old and has joined her husband for the second time for another six months. She also has begun working as a waitress “under the table.” D and her husband communicate in English at home at the husband’s insistence for D to improve her English. Regarding spiritual belief, D reported that she participated in a weekly Christian small group as a “social event” and that she does not ascribe to Christianity at the time of the interview.
CHAPTER FIVE
RESULTS: HERMENEUTICS

Given this study’s methodology, reporting “results” is not possible in the “traditional” sense that separates reporting of results from analysis. As already indicated, the very organization of the stories by the researcher implies a certain meaning making and organizational interpretation. Hence, whereas this chapter provides a certain descriptive “result”, it also provides a hermeneutic in the organization of the stories into themes derived from the narratives of the four participants. A result, in this sense, starts with “getting the other straight” in the retelling of the participants’ stories from my reading of the interview transcripts. Additionally, a result of hermeneutic analysis is presented to delineate the common threads manifested in the participants’ narratives, answering the question of how it is like to live as a WoIS, and of the meaning of the phenomenon of living as a WoIS.

Participants’ Narratives

Each participant told a unique story of her sojourn, the narration of which can be found in Appendix C. In this section, I provide a summative retelling of the stories as narrated to me. In the retelling of the story, the goal is to “get the other straight” by relating their responses accurately and descriptively, even as it is a synoptic retelling.

Participant A

Participant A had been dating her husband for seven and a half years, and decided to get married as a direct result of his being accepted to a Ph.D. program, and preparing to study abroad. After they got married in the summer of 2009, Participant A’s husband left Taiwan for
America while she stayed in Taiwan to finalize some of her projects as a freelance writer. Participant A was appreciative of the short period of time to herself before she started her sojourn, noting that it was the last time she had as “a single woman.” Prior to her sojourn, A had a strong feeling that there would be “no next step for my career” and she felt that the flight she took from Taiwan to the U.S. was the start of “a journey of a process of losing my single life.”

When participant A first arrived in America, she tried to find “stability” by having a “goal”, which was to “better my English.” She had an attitude that was similar to that of a “traveler” or a “visitor” in the beginning. She related a clear “sense of uncertainty” and that she “fought more” with her husband around the question of why he chose to come to America. For her, starting the sojourn made the conflicts [between her and her husband] more visible.” Her overall experience when she first arrived can be summarized as followed: “I did not yet know my role, so my identification was that my husband wants me here, a descriptive one, but that my goal was to better my English, and that I did not know what my next step will be, but I was clear about wanting to improve my English.” In this context, participant A joined an English conversation group, and found herself being “very aware of my being a foreigner” among other participants, many of whom were native English speakers. Participant A was also biking and walking a lot during the first year of her sojourn because she and her husband had not bought a car. A noted that she misses her “family and friends the most”, and to “let go” of her family and friends is an area of “regret” she has as a result of sojourning as a WoIS.

Toward the end of her first year in America, participant A applied for admission to graduate programs and she sat in on classes at local universities. After about a year and a half, she started to have a sense of “stability” with several components in her life. First, she began to volunteer at a local library teaching Mandarin Chinese. Second, she became more involved with
activities at a local Mandarin-speaking church, and she and her husband started to hold small bible study groups for Chinese international students in their home. While participant A continued to focus on learning English, she became pregnant with her first daughter at this time.

The process of becoming a mother gradually took up the majority of participant A’s time. She experienced a transformation of herself during her sojourn as a WoIS (“I have changed in this process”), such that in the end she “fully accepted myself as a woman.” From A’s perspective, “Whether or not a woman gets married does not have strong influence on her life, but whether or not a woman becomes a mother will change her life forever.” Participant A was initially unprepared for what it meant to become a mother when she was first pregnant, and she was spending most of her mental energy on improving her English. Two to four months after A’s daughter was born, she realized that she has entered into the “mother role” and was able to enjoy this role. She saw herself playing the role of the “educator” for her daughter by virtue of spending the majority of her time caring for the daughter. During her sojourn, participant A’s “emotional need for being a mother relies mostly on the women [she] met in the English classes, all of them have children and they do not belong to a church.” A change of her day structure corresponded with child-care routine, namely, “mothers with children do not usually go out and have a meal together, we usually plan on hanging out during a time that our children are awake. Only women with no children will plan on hanging out around dinner time.”

Participant A also experienced a change of her view on being a woman who carries a dependent F2 Visa. She remembered a sociology class that she took when she was in college, where the role of F2 was criticized in that it “represents an oppressive role, and that it means women were not treated equally.” Upon her initial arrival as a WoIS, she had “internalized the feeling that, if a woman becomes an F2, that means that you do not have a life of your own.”
Nevertheless, as her journey went on, A found herself performing activities considered chores for a housewife, but in engaging in these activities, she “realize[d] that a housewife is like a laborer” and that becoming a laborer allowed her to feel reconnected, as opposed to having a sense of “disconnection” when she read the theories in her sociology text books. As such, her body and soul “become united again.” A found herself learning about “the beauty of cooking,” noting a natural willingness to take up the challenge of how to keep a tidy household in the particular context of sojourning as a WoIS. In her words, “this temporal and geographical context gives me a chance to take my time learning something that I have always wanted to achieve, without pressure, without a time frame. That is, I can take an entire year to learn this thing [cleaning the house] slowly, and step-by-step making sure that I do what I do in the best way I can.”

Participant A also made note of cultural differences on the expectation of a married woman. She said that it was easy for her to assume a life that focuses on work when she was in Taiwan, as opposed to a tangible shift to focusing on family in America. She pointed out that Taiwanese married women who do not work are facing an “increased stigmatization” due to heavy financial demands on the family under the particular societal structure. She spoke about the even heavier pressure (as compared to Taiwan) for women from Mainland China to work because “the division of gender was broken” after the Chinese Cultural Revolution such that all women are expected to work in China. She referred to a friend who is a WoIS from China, and noted that this friend “thinks about the fact that she will no longer be able to take care of her child the way she does” in America after she returns to China, which results in her feeling that she “could not take that kind of pressure.” Nonetheless, it was hard for participant A to comment on the expectations for women to work in the U.S. She observed that there is a high
percentage of working women in the U.S., but Americans may be more likely to see this topic as a “personal choice”, which gives room to a lessened degree of pressure for married women to work (i.e. the Americans “would be more able to leave you to your own decision”). This note is consistent with her experience as a WoIS because she feels comfortable being a housewife in America. She added that if she was pressed by people who she does not “want to talk in-depth with”, she may simply respond with the fact that she cannot “work legally because of [her] VISA.”

Regarding cross-cultural differences, participant A considered the U.S. a “foreign land” that values “self-creation,” “new learning” and “social skills,” and she talked about her sojourn here as a means to equip her with those qualities. In contrast, Taiwan was associated with “traditional value” and that the opinions of the elderly carry more weight than youngsters’ desire for independence and privacy.

Socially, participant A found it easier to situate her social interactions with others by taking up the role of a mother. She gave examples of attending different conferences with her husband. When she had a child with a “concrete and clear” role of a wife and/or a mother, it was less “awkward.” Prior to the birth of her daughter, participant A felt that her “role was a bit ambiguous” for she was “there for a trip without any contribution”, which gave rise to feelings of being “out of place and uncomfortable.” Participant A generally got along with other WoIS and with the students she worked with at the small bible study group. However, she found it difficult to participate in social events held by her husband’s department—“Basically it is hard to have a conversation with anyone because I don’t know how to chat in the U.S. because I’m not integrated in the culture, and my English is not good enough. I’m okay with the basic stuff, but like if they talk about jokes, it is very hard for me to understand.”
Participant B

Participant B is the only participant in the current study who did not get married as a direct result of her husband starting his sojourn in the US. She gave birth to her daughter two months prior to her family’s move to the U.S. for her husband to start a Masters program.

Participant B had an overall “positive” experience in the first two years of living as a WoIS, because she was living in a seminary where her husband was studying, a community that she describes as “friendly and helpful.” She met many people who knew that she and her family were students at the seminary and offered material help (i.e. free scarf for the winter). She felt that she was able to have a “better quality of family life” by virtue of her husband’s more structured schedule as a student (“he could come home for lunch and dinner”). Additionally, she found her life as a WoIS a “simpler” life as “compared to the time when we were working [in Taiwan].” She referred to her life in Taiwan, where both she and her husband were working as a pastor: In that context, due to participant B’s dual-role of being both a pastor and the wife of a pastor (of which the particular gender role was prescribed for her), there were a lot of “interpersonal matters” that she had to attend to. Looking back, she learned that some of her “physical conditions”, such as “difficulty sleeping” and getting ill frequently were indications of the amount of “pressure” that she was under in that particular work environment in Taiwan, which contributed to her feeling “relaxed and happy” as a WoIS living in the U.S.

Participant B’s typical day was filled with “unlimited housework” (including cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping) and activities related to caring and educating her daughter. In her free time, she would read and learn about things that interest her on the internet (i.e. “what’s the view of Chinese medicine on diarrhea? And how is that different from Western medicine?”).
Participant B considered herself playing the role of an “educator” for her daughter. In contrast to the common belief that being a mother is something that “everyone” can do, participant B found her role to be meaningful because she could see “fruits in the future” that her time spent with her daughter will show up in her daughter’s “personality” and “her character” with “lasting effects.”

Socially, participant B generally got along with everyone, but she did not feel like she belonged to any of the social groups. There were the groups of Korean and Chinese WoIS at the seminary during her first year of sojourn, but participant B did not fit in with either group due to cultural and historical difference (“I feel like this might be related to their history of family church… basically people who go to family church go to family church, and that could slowly develop into a personality style, such that they are less likely to welcome others”). In addition, participant B observed that other WoIS “seem to depend immensely on one another” and that they tend to engage in “gossiping” as a result of their life circumstances (“not because they just wanted to gossip, but it is just their life circles, like this is the entirety of their lives”). Participant B did not intend to live “symbiotically” with other WoIS and she did not ascribe to the practice of gossiping like many other WoIS, though she at times wondered “if I’m an alien” as compared to other WoIS.

Participant B was aware of her ambivalence about being a WoIS. She noted that in the past, she would be “unhappy” for feeling like she was “forced” into a role that may seem like a “useless” position with no “virtue or talent”, and having more “dislike” toward herself as a mother. Her concerns were about not “making a difference.” At the time of interview, however, she noted that her “faith” helped her feel less influenced by others’ opinions of her (that “this is the life that God gives me now”), and that different cultural contexts also allowed her to have different perspectives on her role as a mother. In particular, she noted that in Taiwan, mothers
are supposed to get help with child-care, mothers often feel “managed” and bothered by bystanders who consider themselves “experts” on proper ways of raising and treating a child, and that bringing children to public spaces is often considered an additional burden to others because children are noisy. In contrast, participant B noted that mothers in the U.S. often care for children on their own; most people focus on minding their own business rather than telling a mother how to care for her children, and that the role of the mother is respected and help is offered when the condition calls for it. Participant B felt more comfortable raising a child/being a mother in America, because “the Western culture is more respectful of individual choices” and that she enjoys not “being managed by others.”

Culturally, participant B experienced covert and overt incidents of varying treatment based on racial differences. She noted superficial and courteous interaction with her Taiwanese acquaintances, and that she was able to gauge the actual degree of friendship with them. In contrast, although participant B’s Caucasian acquaintances were acting “super friendly” towards her, she had experiences of being “shocked” by her own misunderstanding of the depth of their relationship (“I have always felt that I get along pretty well with my white friends, but one day I suddenly realized that we are not friends”). Significantly, participant B described in detail two occasions of being racially discriminated at—once at a coffee shop and once at a super market. She noted that she felt angry and asserted herself by confronting the particular employees with their actions.

Participant B’s plan for the future was “considered alongside [her] husband’s plan for his life.” If she returned to Taiwan with her family, her husband may teach in a seminary and “spend time in the church,” but she does not “want to go back to a church anymore” because she knows that “as long as my husband is a pastor, I will have to be the wife of a pastor.” For this
reason, she hoped to pursue a doctoral degree studying church history when she is “freer” and as her daughter gets older, though she is unsure how long this will take and how that will correspond with the plan of her family.

Participant C

Participant C is the only participant in the current study who has been working throughout most of the duration of her sojourn in the U.S. She started working as a waitress three months after she arrived in the U.S. and continued working for another two and a half years until the time of the interview. A main theme of participant C’s narrative is oriented around her experiences of working full-time during her sojourn as a WoIS.

Participant C’s initial decision of getting married is motivated by her own desire to be in America (“I also want to be here”) and by her getting tired of the long distance relationship with her husband (then boyfriend) and tired of her job in Taiwan (“One day I felt especially tired or something like that, and our relationship had been a long distance one, so one day I thought, I do not want to work anymore, I want to just go over and visit [my husband]”). For her, getting married was a means to expedite the process of going to the U.S. and living with her husband. Participant C had limited time to wrap up many aspects of her life in Taiwan (i.e. “like wedding receptions, wedding dresses, packing, moving, and wrapping up and passing down my job responsibility”) and to start a new life in the U.S., and she did not have a chance to stop and reflect on the decision of becoming a WoIS before her sojourn (“It was all in a rush, but if you gave me additional two weeks to a month to think about it, I might not even get married”).

When participant C first arrived in the U.S., she experienced many adjustments, including getting used to a married life, getting used to living with another person, and getting used to a
different climate (“it is too dry, because Taiwan is quite humid. It is really really dry, to the extent that my face feels like the sand paper, it was red and itchy, and none of the cleanser was suitable, really terrible”). In particular, she faced many points of conflicts with her husband, such as on the topic of family finances in relation to the quality of food they would purchase for the family. Although she was prepared for some practical details of living together and have been able to reach an agreement on some aspects of her life with her newly married husband (i.e. moving into a one-bedroom rather than a studio apartment, and having cable TV to serve as a English learning resources), some other aspects were not anticipated (i.e. whether or not to have a bank account of her own, and the extent to which each person contributes financially to the family).

Participant C described more social activities when she first arrived. She attended English learning resources that were available to the general public, such as English “conversation group.” In that process, she met other women who were also wives of international students/scholars from different countries. She noted that befriending other women early on was positive or else she “may not have any friend.” Participant C would also engage in activities like “making noodles” at home or “learning new things” during her first few months of sojourn and noted that she was not “just sitting at home bored.”

Although participant C considers herself to be a person who is “less afraid” of change and more able to “walk straight through everything, like just try things out”, she was surprised by her intense feelings of missing home at her initial arrival. In addition to being surprised by her missing home, she was also under the unexpected pressure of her husband’s urging her to start working soon after she landed in the U.S. Her husband asked her “three times” regarding when she was going to start working, and she “felt like crying” because she thought that they “have
prepared for the worst, which is that [she] may not find a job…. And that [they] will have to survive with [the husband’s] stipend, and to live a basic life.” In the end, with referrals from a friend, Participant C found a waitressing job at a local Asian-fusion restaurant three months after she arrived in the U.S. and has been working there since.

After she started working, the structure of participant C’s routine was oriented by her work schedule. On a workday, she would go to work, come home, tidy the house up, “communicate with my family back home via the Internet, and then go to sleep.” On her day off, she would do laundry and other house chores, and go grocery shopping. She could only go grocery shopping on an off day because she relied on public transportation to get around.

On the one hand, having a job brought a sense of financial security to participant C. On the other hand, participant C found her life to be unique because most WoIS do not work during their sojourn. She noted that while some WoIS “have children as a way of keeping themselves busy”, others (the “better ones”) would be travelling extensively around the U.S. during their sojourn with their husbands. Participant C did travel, but only with the money that she earned from her job, and her fixed work schedule also limited the amount of travelling she could afford. Participant C considered working during her sojourn as “a choice of no choice” because taking a break did not present as an option to her (“I cannot say that if I was really tired and that I want to take a break. I cannot”).

Spending most of her days working, participant C’s exposure to cultural-crossing experiences was closely associated to her experiences at work. She experienced American culture as one that emphasizes the “positive”, as opposed to Asian culture that focuses on “repression and criticism.” She enjoyed the “freedom” in America in terms of its respect for personal choices in all aspects of an individual’s life (i.e. choice of job, education, and marital
status). She found it difficult to imagine returning to Taiwan without feeling the influences of “interpersonal expectations” to conform to cultural standards. On the intersection between gendered and cultural experiences, participant C noted that “American guys are generally more thoughtful than Taiwanese guys” and that American women are generally more independent while Taiwanese women tend to ask men for help for certain gender-specific tasks (e.g., changing the light bulb) despite women’s complete capacity to do so on their own.

During her sojourn, participant C realized an increased tendency to explicitly identify herself as a Taiwanese. She noted the common difficulty to differentiate Taiwan, Thailand, and China in the general American public when she introduced herself as a Taiwanese. She spoke specifically about the differences between Taiwan and China and her passionate self-identification when encountering people who thought otherwise (“if the Chinese students asked, I would insist that I am Taiwanese not Chinese”). She mentioned that her identity as a Taiwanese was present but assumed when she was in Taiwan, but in America, “you have to tell others more firmly, regarding the differences between Taiwan and China.”

Participant C hoped to go back to school. She indicated the barriers as a working WoIS to achieve this goal: due to her busy work schedule, she could hardly find time to study for the tests required for her to apply for school. Meanwhile, she did not feel that she would be able to sustain herself financially without work. Participant C wanted to go back to school so as to improve her access to various career opportunities in the U.S.

Participant D

Participant D described her life as a WoIS in three ways—a strong sense of grievance, a retired life comparable to living like a pet, and being “both poor and bored.” In regards to the
sense of grievance, participant D experienced an overall sense of downward movement of the quality of her life because she used to have a good quality of life as a school teacher in Taiwan (i.e. it was well-paying, the commute was short, she was well-respected by her students and the students’ families, and the job gave her a sense of fulfillment and of making a contribution to the society). In contrast, being a WoIS and being unable to have a fulfilling job made participant D very “unhappy”—she had to give up on her “dream” of becoming the Minister of Education of Taiwan, which is how she wanted to contribute and change the Taiwanese society. Along with the loss of fulfilling occupational goals, participant D noted the feeling of “worthlessness,” “lack of contribution,” and the sense of “don’t know what you’re doing in your life” as a WoIS.

Participant D described living a “retired” life as a WoIS because many WoIS from “different countries often get together… and everyone feels like, our life is pretty funny, it’s like a group of retired old ladies getting together, doing some flower potting, reading, and the like, and everyone has pretty much the same problem, which is to sacrifice ourselves in order to fulfill others.” Participant D’s life is different from her husband’s in terms of their access to various social circles and their preparedness for everyday English. Participant D found that she met other WoIS “over and over again” while her husband got to meet other scholars, teachers, and students at school due to his institutional involvement. Also, participant D found herself (and other WoIS) to be less prepared for everyday use of English because they did not take an English language test prior to their sojourn as their student counterparts did19. Living a retired-like life, for participant D, also contains a narrowed vision due to restricted variety of activities in life, leading to a life comparable to that of a pet—that “we only have our partners in our eyes.” Participant D noted that especially during the first six months of her sojourn in the U.S., because

19 International students in the U.S. are required to pass an English language test as proof of their ability to succeed in an English-learning environment, but their wives are not required to do so.
she had not made any friends, she was “paying a lot of attention” to her husband and only him, which is quite atypical of her. She associated this to gendered experiences, noting that “females are more emotional,” leading to a “negative” feeling as a result of the change of position from a “self-sufficient” person to one that needs a companion to all occasions (i.e. going out for lunch, going to the movies, running errands). She noted a change of personality both subjectively (“I feel that my personality has changed”) and objectively (“my husband would also feel like you are different from who you were”). Participant D realized the importance of the supportive role a husband plays for WoIS. Although she described her husband as supportive and encouraging, she continues to struggle with having to rely on him for many basic daily activities. Meanwhile, she made references to a husband of another WoIS who was not as supportive, and how a WoIS “would be miserable” in that situation.

Living as a WoIS also feels like a life that is “both poor and bored” for participant D. As a direct result of loss of employment and income, she was very aware of the change of her spending habits. For instance, instead of buying whatever she wants when grocery shopping, she would make a list and compare the prices of groceries from different stores; and instead of eating out at a restaurant, she and her husband would prepared everything on their own and “pretending with ourselves” that they were eating at a restaurant. For her, it is true that “regardless of whether or not you have money it is a good idea to save up and not to squander, but it still feels so toilsome.” In addition to having limited financial resources, participant D also had more free time on her hands than her husband, which made her feel “bored” frequently. As a result of being both “poor and bored,” she would be out and about at the stores without the intention to spend any money, and she was made aware of the differential treatment she got from store clerks (“because you don’t have much money, …you would feel clearly that they do not want to greet
me”). In this way, she noted “a faint feeling of having become a fourth-grade citizen after coming to America.”

Participant D also had a strong ongoing desire to go back to Taiwan during her sojourn in the U.S. She asked herself many questions about being a WoIS: “what could attract me [in the U.S.]?”, “for me, what? [what’s there that is fulfilling for me to be a WoIS?]”, and how “to find ways to have a better life here for myself?” With all of these questions in mind, participant D’s journey as a WoIS included many back-and-forth trips between Taiwan and America. Her first extended stay as a WoIS in the U.S. lasted for six months, and she went back to Taiwan to visit but ended up staying to teach and work for almost two years before she went to America to stay longer term again. She had minimum difficulty with a long-distance relationship with the help of technology (“Because of technology, long distance is really not a big problem”) and she visited during winter and summer breaks at school. She made a “comparison table” comparing her life between Taiwan and America, and concluded, “of course staying in Taiwan wins!” Despite all these, participant D noted that a long distance relationship “is not a good long-term plan.” She reported that her most recent decision on returning and staying in America was made “with an empty mind.” In her elaboration on this decision, she noted that her other considerations (i.e. her quality of life, her having a sense of fulfillment, food, family, etc.) do not carry the same “weight” as being with her husband. In her words, “how good is it to stay in my own hometown, though it would no be longer meaningful?”

It was her second sojourn as a WoIS at the time of the interview, at which point Participant D’s “typical week” consisted of a part-time job she took on “completely for the purpose of passing time”, English classes twice-weekly, small-group gathering once weekly, typical daily errands like grocery shopping or doing laundry, and “going out and playing”
regularly on Saturdays. Overall, she spent a lot of time “sleeping and cooking” and there were a lot of “boring day[s]”, which felt like “living a life of doing nothing.” Socially, although participant D noted the limited opportunity of meeting other people as a WoIS, she described getting along with her husband’s colleagues and friends because she spent a lot of time around them at their research laboratory or for off-work social gatherings.

Exposure to cultural others was an integral part of participant D’s sojourn. She became “more open-minded” and found herself to be more tolerant of differences. For example, she noted a shift in attitude from being judgmental to appreciating the ways that people dress in public, and she became more able to understand why people may choose to get a divorce. Her “point of focus” regarding day-to-day concerns became different from that in Taiwan. Specifically, “in Taiwan everyone would compare and ask about the rate of your salary, what famous company one works at, and to compare around buying houses or cars.” But being in America allowed her to entertain the idea that “the important thing is to have value in your life.” Participant D’s view on culture was broadened, and she had an increased ability to engage in conversations about different perspectives concerning cultural differences. For instance, she found it interesting to learn about the history and food of different cultures from her husband’s lab-mates; and she had open discussions with her Chinese friends on the topics of differences between Taiwan and China.

Participant D also had extensive first-hand knowledge about cultural difference. She observed that Americans are generally more “honest”, “upright”, “confident” and positive, and that they care more about others. She gave examples to support these observations, such as getting help from random strangers on the street and being treated as an equal person by her husband’s boss.
While participant D noted a strong sense of identifying as a Taiwanese in America, she noted that a space to discuss the differences of perspectives with her friends from Mainland China was available to her. She noted that the general public perceives a large number of people as being of Chinese decent, which on the one hand calls for “respect, fear and dislike” from others (because “the Chinese power is very strong”); on the other, she experienced unanticipated consequences for being confused with people from mainland China, such as being treated as “fourth-grade citizens” with unfair treatment in day-to-day errands. Participant D made note of the differences of habits and attitude between Taiwanese and Chinese people in America, and she was very aware of the fact that many others do not know these differences and may see that “all the [ethnic] Chinese [people] are the same.” She concluded that the strong feelings regarding the differences between Taiwan and China “can only be felt after one has left Taiwan” because people who live in Taiwan often are quite involved in other day-to-day concerns, such as “a few pennies” of increase in the price of groceries or gas.

Converging Hermeneutic Themes

A perusal of the stories of four participants renders converging themes across the WoIS’s narratives. Points of convergence across at least three of the narratives are organized thematically below.

A. Changing an anchorage to the husband

For WoIS, starting a sojourn entails a fundamental change with every aspect of the life she had in Taiwan. In her new experience of living as a WoIS, this fundamental change involves a loss of anchorage in her own life and a change of that anchorage to her husband. The change of the anchorage to her husband manifests in a WoIS’s sense of who she is (i.e. self-identification),
her daily routine, her choice of focus during her sojourn, and her overall experiences. For instance, participant A noted that she “had an attitude like a ‘traveler’” or a “visitor” during the first six months of her sojourn, and that her “identification” was that “my husband wants me here”, signifying a self-identification that is directly associated with an anchorage on her husband during her sojourn.

In participant B’s description of her daily routine, a large portion of her life was oriented around her husband’s schedule—her day usually starts with her “husband helps me prepare breakfast”, and on the days that he did not ride a bike to school, participant B would drive her husband to school. In the evening, while participant B spends “family time” with her daughter, her husband would “stay in the study by himself studying.” This illustrates a WoIS’s daily routine that is fundamentally oriented around her husband’s daily routine, reflecting a change of anchorage to her husband during the sojourn of WoIS.

Participant C told a slightly different story from participant A and B, in that she started to work three months after the beginning of her sojourn. However, a close reading of her story shows that participant C started to work as a direct result of her husband’s instruction—that in the first two months of her sojourn, her husband “asked me three times, ‘when are you going to start working?’” Although participant C attempted to engage in various activities on her own (i.e. participating in social groups, making noodles, learning new things), she felt “pressured” to start working, underlining the strong influences of the husband as the pivot for the life experiences of a WoIS.

Participant D goes even further, likening her life to that of a “pet”:

That’s a strange feeling, it’s like after I came, we are like pets, because we only have our partner in our eyes, and we do not have anything else to distract us. So sometimes I feel
like the husband may also feel, you’re annoying, how could you watch me everyday, and you do not go out and play, or go find a job, or can you please give me some personal space, or something like that. But in our roles, we would feel that you and I are living together, or what else am I going to do? Because we were not like this when we were in Taiwan. We had our own life when we were in Taiwan. (participant D, excerpts from interview)

The metaphor of living like a “pet” underscores a life that only has one anchor—her husband—during her sojourn as a WoIS.

B. Loss and Longing

As a result of having to leave behind friends and families in their home country in order to start their sojourn, WoIS often experience a pervasive sense of loss in many aspects of their daily life, including loss of social relations, loss of connections with family (e.g. participant A: “a regret I have has to do with family, that it is something I have to let go. I miss my family and friends the most”), loss of financial freedom (e.g. participant B talked about making most of her meals at home as an attempt to stay economical, and participant C went through laborious detail about going to places via public transportation, as it is an integral part of her everyday life that is constricted as a result of financial constraints), and loss of a general sense of meaning and purpose in their new lives (e.g. participant D noted, “there’s nothing to do, so it feels like, worthless and lack of contribution”).

What comes with the sense of loss is a sense of longing—three out of four participants (i.e. participant A, C, and D) reported the feelings nostalgia, and that they missed their “home”, family, and friends at some point during the interviews. Although most WoIS did not yet know where their lives will lead as it will mostly be based on a decision that makes sense to her family
as a unit (but not to her as an individual), the strong sense of yearning continues to shine through their narratives. At times the sense of longing seems to manifest in WoIS’s attempts to reconstruct what they have lost in their current living situation under the realistic conditions of their sojourn. For instance, many WoIS described making new social connection within the confined social circle they have encountered (e.g. Participant A, C, and D reported making “friends” in English language classes). In terms of coping with the loss of financial freedom, participant D described that she and her husband “pretend” that they were eating at a restaurant by “getting the bread ourselves because if you had a steak at a restaurant, there should be bread, salad, soup and the steak.” Some of the longings, however, could not be so easily substituted because of practical and structural reasons. For instances, WoIS cannot recreate her original family despite their nostalgia of home. Also, WoIS were not really able to obtain a fulfilling job that they used to enjoy due to their VISA status—At best, participant D was able to get a waitressing job that feels “completely meaningless” and “solely for the purpose of passing time,” leaving her with the ongoing sense of longing that is not to be placated. Loss and longing is a dynamic theme omnipresent in the lives of WoIS.

C. Having Time/Losing Time

Another emerging hermeneutic theme from the narratives of the participants is the dual dynamic of having time/losing time, mapping a paradox of the lives of WoIS. To give a few examples, participant A reflected on how becoming a WoIS gives her a chance to take my time learning something that I have always wanted to achieve, without pressure, without a time frame. That is, I can take an entire year to learn this thing [cleaning the house] slowly, and step-by-step making sure that I do what I do in the best way I can.
This comment highlights the aspect of the life of a sojourning WoIS who has the privilege of time built into her daily routine. Simultaneously, this seemingly tremendous amount of time is not entirely boundless. In fact, participant A also commented on her not really having time to meet with friends as much as she would have liked to as a result of her schedule being structured by her childcare and household routine. In her words,

mothers with children do not usually go out and have a meal together, we usually plan on hanging out during a time that our children are awake. Only women with no children will plan on hanging out around dinner time.

This comment underlines the paradox of having time/losing time—it is not that participant A had more time to master her household skills, but that her day is structured in such way that time can be spent more generously on learning household skills, as opposed to spending time only sparingly on building interpersonal relations.

Similar to participant A, participant B also noted how she appreciates the amount of “family time” she gained as a WoIS (contrasting to her busy life when she was working full-time in Taiwan). Though the flip side of having ample family time for participant B is the “unlimited housework” that has taken up the majority of her time, “like I’m always washing dishes or doing laundry”, as she reported.

The tension between “doing nothing” all day and the complete lack of freedom manifests more explicitly for participant C as her life as a WoIS transitioned into a WoIS who works full-time. When describing the first few months of her sojourn, she noted that “I was not just doing nothing completely,” defending how she attempted to make use of the time she had as a WoIS who did not yet have a fully-scheduled day with clear structure. In contrast, after she started working, she found that it is difficult for her to achieve her dream of returning to school because
she had no time to study (e.g. “if you want to go back to school, you have to have time to study first”, said participant C), leaving her feeling stuck in a bind between having time/losing time.

For participant D, the sense of having excessive time at hand quickly is taken up as a feeling that her life as a WoIS is “very boring” because she spent most of her time “sleep and cook.” Even her part-time work at a restaurant became a measure of time because she was doing so “completely for the purpose of passing time.” Her narratives reflect not the time gained as a WoIS (as it is “boring” and “meaningless”), but more the time lost in her growth as a person, the potential of career advancement, increased mobility, and improved financial position.

Altogether, the theme of having time/losing time presents a clear dual-dynamic that reveals a paradoxical tension. On the one hand, an appreciation for the fact that WoIS had time to spend with children and family, to learn something about household chores that they would not otherwise have taken up, to reflect on their lives, and to be by themselves; and on the other that they are losing valuable time in terms of building stronger social relations, pursuing personal dreams and/or education, improving the conditions of her career, mobility, financial positions, and agency.

D. Role Negotiation

Role negotiation is a theme that emerges more through the processes than the contents of the narratives. While one participant seemed to have come to embrace her new role as WoIS fully (e.g. Participant A), others may hold on to the hope for the future despite the limited choices at present (e.g. Participant B and C), and yet another appeared to be struggling to find meaning in living a sojourning life as a WoIS (e.g. Participant D). For all four of the participants, nevertheless, what came to the surface is a constant role negotiation with themselves, with others, and the larger intersecting cultural assumptions. What is being negotiated is the frame
through which one orients oneself and makes meaning of one’s life. A process of negotiation holds the potential for transformation, albeit not in every case. Various sites of negotiation include spiritual beliefs, practical and everyday considerations, and the future (for both the WoIS and her family).

For participant A and B, this negotiation is partially facilitated through their spiritual belief, for example, A said, “The most valuable thing for us coming to the U.S. is my chance to be a servant of God in the U.S.” In this context, she also talked about her negotiation between experiential reality and learned “knowledge”, in her words,

I do not know why, but after I became a housewife, I found the answer to the uncomfortable feelings I had [when I was a journalist]. I can completely realize that a housewife is like a laborer, and being a laborer makes me understand that I was completely disconnected from all the theories from Marx onward. But becoming a mother and a housewife also makes me a laborer, and then I am reconnected from that sense of disconnection, so my body and my soul become united again… I found the feelings that I have been searching for from the role that I resisted the most when I was looking at it, and I feel very deeply about this. (Participant A)

Participant A is an exemplar case of someone who had experienced a complete transformation as a result of a negotiation process. A noticed an emergence of self that is different from her own sense of herself before becoming a WoIS. She spoke about her previous adamant disapproval of the position of a F2 dependent VISA holder, “If I showed what I do all day now to the me that was in Taiwan, I would probably have done everything I can to not marry this guy, to not go abroad, to not become an F2.” Nevertheless, participant A found that becoming an F2 “is a process, it didn’t just happen.” More significantly, she found that she has
“changed in this process”, such that she was quite able to “enjoy” her life as an F2 at the time of the interview. She went from someone who thinks of the role of WoIS as an example of gender oppression (based on a sociology class that she took earlier) to someone who embraces the role of WoIS fully and is grounded in her being, sexually, culturally and otherwise.

Participant B spoke about finding it very difficult initially when people learned that she was “just a housewife” and that she was “just cooking and caring for [her] children,” but her faith and her desire to learn kept her grounded and holding on to hope for the future. In her words,

I think that others might not see it, and they feel that I am just like any other housewife and any other mother, but me and my God and my family, we know the value of this, which is that we may actually see fruits in the future, like my child’s personality, character, and like we train her to be able to focus, we give her time to play on her own, and we teach her a lot of things, tell her many things, and discipline and educate her, things like this, I think will have lasting effects. (Participant B, excerpts from the interview)

Participant B worked hard to reconcile a life of WoIS as “just like any other housewife” with a life that actually can be meaningful and “will have lasting effects” in the process of negotiation that is aided by her spirituality. As she reported a generally “positive” experience as a WoIS, she emphasized how her “faith” has changed her from paying too much attention on how others may perceive her to trusting that there is inherent meaning in her life as a WoIS because “this is the life that God gives me now”, highlighting a move from questioning to surrendering to the experiences of WoIS. The negotiation of role reflects a shift from the role of “just a housewife” to the role of a WoIS that inhabits a life that is offered by “God.”
In the case of participant D, the contributing elements of her negotiation include her role as a daughter (due to her strong connection with her original family), her role as a teacher (i.e. manifests in her care about education for Taiwanese children), and her role as a career woman (who can make contribution to the society and has the potential to better future education system for Taiwan). These various elements were present and spread out throughout her narrative. To select a piece of text that speaks to her role as a teacher and a career woman in her words,

I feel that the biggest change I went through is that, I was planning on being the Minister of Education of Taiwan… I mean like climbing the ladder slowly, like you know from a school principal and climb layer by layer, with the final dream of the Minister of Education… … So this was originally my real dream, but it is gone after I came [to America]. This for me is not simply a kink, it’s actually quite miserable. And a friend of mine even told me that you gave up Taiwan for a man. Although I may never become the Minister of Education, but at least it is a dream that I had… so as it looks now it seems like I have given up, unless if I go back to start being a teacher again, or it’s going to be hard to continue on [with my dream.] Of course you can say that here, like my husband told me that you can advocate for Taiwan here, and that you can still do things that are meaningful. But I still feel so small and so weak, so I do not identify with him entirely, regarding the things I can do here. (Participant D)

In her narrative, participant D recognized a loss of the possibilities of many roles that she has (or could have) taken up prior to her sojourn as a WoIS, and noted a need to re-negotiate for new roles that would make sense to her new context of living as WoIS. However, this negotiation appears painfully ineffective such that she still feel so “small and weak.” To take a step further on her thoughts about future possibilities of living as a WoIS, D said,
I feel like the best thing that could happen is for us to also go back to school, even just for a Masters degree, like if we can also study, we can change and to be more like them [our husbands] with the same reason of coming to America. And that if we can actually study, then we can actually find a job, the life would be, of course family life is an important factor, but after all work can take eight hours, so I feel like whether or not we have a job is quite important for us foreign wife,… or else you would feel like you don’t know what you’re doing with your life. (Participant D)

Participant D was able to accept readily the role of a student or the role of a working person (“have a job”) as a sojourner, but the role of a WoIS seems to her like a person who does not “know what you’re doing with your life.” She found that her “personality has changed” as a result of her becoming a WoIS. She noted that she changed from “outgoing” and “independent” to someone who would ask her husband “everything” so that he could come along to help her with all errands and daily activities. In terms of her response to a snappy comment of her husband, participant D noticed a change from “whatever, I’ll go on my own” (in Taiwan) to feeling “powerless” and “a sense of grievance” (during her sojourn in the U.S.). Participant D exemplifies a case of ongoing negotiation with herself, others, and larger socio-cultural context, and this negotiation bears varying degrees of potential for change and transformation, and the extent of ensuing pleasure as a result of this change (for participant D) most depends on the aspect of change.

The role negotiation for WoIS reveals not only the many possibilities of differential roles that they could have taken up or got prescribed with, but also the many ways (i.e. attitude, reactions, etc.) relating to the role of WoIS and finding meanings in this negotiation process.
Along the same line, it seems that gender roles, as it pertained to mothering and spousal responsibilities were particularly impacted.

E. Individuality/Collectivity

One interesting theme that emerges from the narratives of the participants is a strange paradox between appreciating simultaneously the collectivity of Taiwanese family and community and the American value of individuality and agency, as it pertains to them, individually. What is embedded in this paradox is a process of WoIS internalization of the social—as contextual change occurred inevitably in their sojourn, each WoIS seems to internalize a set of contradictory social values relating to both individuality and collectivity.

For example, participant A reflected on her experience of different kinds of work-life balance between Taiwan and the U.S.: “When I work [in Taiwan], without thinking about it I tend to often focus only on work, which then may sacrifice my time with my family and loved ones.” She observed that people pay more attention to family values than to one’s dedication to work in America. As a consequence, participant A indicated that her sojourn becomes a means to equip her with the qualities of the new culture that she did not previously have—to become more family oriented. Participant A appreciates and hence internalizes the particular aspect of American family value, as it pertains to her individual sojourning experience as a WoIS. At the same time, the internalization of the social and the values of individuality and of collectivity may be self-contradictory at times. For participant A, while she noted that work was more valued when she lived in Taiwan and learned about the value of family after moving to the U.S., she was also quick to observe that Taiwanese value of family is illustrated in the cultural expectation to respect the elders, and that American value of work locates in terms of “self-creation” and
“new learning”, adding a layer of nuance to the paradoxical tension between individuality and collectivity.

With a different pragmatic example, when participant B discussed the differences of expectation on child-rearing practices between Taiwan and America, she noted that in Taiwan, “people can simply ask the grandparents to care for their children.” While this is a common practice under the collectivist societal structure, it is neither feasible nor sensible given the living condition of sojourning WoIS. As a result, B turned to American individualistic value for solace, in her words, “Look at the American mothers, with three children they hold one and push one [on a stroller] with each hand.” While participant B values the sense of agency that “American mothers” carry insofar as independent child-care goes, she was not impressed by the individualistic value that can come across as rude or selfish. In fact, she critiqued the American, specifically, Caucasian mothers’ double standard. She noted, “Their children can mess with others’ children, but if you mess with their children, they would sue you or get mad. I feel like they are easily offended, like getting mad easily, like ‘I’m offended,’ but I feel like they’re offending others all the time.”

For participant C, the American individualistic values that respect personal choices and individual differences serve the role of an antidote for the Asian culture that “emphasizes repression and criticism.” On the basis of her personal background, participant C especially appreciates the American non-discriminatory stance on people’s choice of job, personal educational path, and marital status. The process of an internalization of the social is crystalized in C’s finding a moment of insight about the experiential differences she felt between living in Taiwan and in America—“I was thinking about why I felt so miserable when I was living in Taiwan, and why I’m so happy after I came here? This is it! [It is because of the cultural
differences between an emphasis on criticism/repression and respect for individuality.]” The theme of internalization of the social is one illustration of the complex process that transpires through the strange paradox between individuality and collectivity as WoIS live in-between the two socio-cultural contexts with two different frames of reference. As an example, it is not only that a WoIS has internalized values pertaining to individuality or collectivity, but also that she finds herself being caught between the two. Accordingly, the internalization of the social reflects in her mental map that captures the paradox between individuality and collectivity. At times, a WoIS may be able to resort to the value system that offers the highest level of coherence in the service of balancing the internal and external inconsistencies (i.e. participant A’s understanding of her becoming more “family oriented”; or participant C’s feeling “happy” in America); and at other times, a WoIS may be getting in touch with a sense of friction when the two value systems are in conflict with each other in a particular condition (e.g. participant B’s finding the American mothers to be “easily offended.”). The paradox of individuality/collectivity, nonetheless, is an important theme that WoIS constantly wrestles with during her sojourn.

F. Embodied Consciousness

While often only in quick and passing comments, all participants mentioned bodily experiences that shaped their understanding of their decisions around joining their husband in the U.S. and their experiences around becoming a WoIS, marking embodied consciousness important themes in the lives of WoIS. For example, Participant A said,

my body started to have problems during my third year as a journalist for a newspaper. I would have period that does not stop bleeding with great amount… then I would have anemia… and it lasted for a year and a half… I have tried Chinese medicine to alleviate the symptoms briefly but it was never cured… and Western medicine would stop the bleeding
but that felt quite scary to me so I wouldn’t take the medication. And right before I took the GRE, [my husband] had prayed for me… and then it stopped slowly just like a regular period… And after that my menstruation became more regular. (Participant A)

With this recognition of bodily experience, participant A spoke more directly about how she came to embrace the role of being a mother and a housewife during her sojourn in the U.S., primarily because this bodily experience helped her become aware of the fact that being a mother cannot be taken for granted. This awareness may have in part allowed for a smoother transition into the full-time mothering role for participant A after she joined her husband to the U.S.

For Participant B, embodied consciousness occurred after the environment in which she worked changed. She noted that she only realized the stress that she was under after having left the work environment. In her words, “Now that I have left that environment and am living here [in the U.S.], I feel that without that [interpersonal pressure], I feel much lighter and happier” (Participant B). She spoke about the physical stress that was invisible while she was working in Taiwan. As a result of this embodied consciousness, participant B found that her life in the U.S. a “joyful” one because of the reduction of physical and interpersonal stress.

In contrast to participant B’s realization of embodied experience after leaving her work environment, Participant C noted that she was aware of her tiredness while she was working in Taiwan, which facilitated her decision to begin her sojourn by getting married and joining her husband in the U.S. She said, “One day I felt especially tired or something like that, and our relationship had been a long distance one, so one day I thought, I do not want to work anymore, I want to just go over and visit you” (Participant C). It is worth noting that participant C continued to talk about feeling tired physically after she began a sojourn in the U.S., because she also started to work soon after her initial arrival.
Without discounting the significance of embodied consciousness as constitutive of the lives of WoIS, it is worth noting that embodied consciousness shapes the experiences of WoIS’ sojourn more implicitly than explicitly, hence is more likely to be deemed unimportant or overlooked in understanding their lives. As embodied consciousness assumes neither the primacy of cognition nor the primacy of the body, it also does not consider mind and body as two disconnected field. Rather, embodied consciousness is a theme that highlights the non-duality of WoIS’s experience as fundamentally interconnected with their mind and body. Embodied consciousness presents as a hermeneutic theme that ceases to compartmentalize intellectual (i.e. cognitive) understanding and behavioral symptoms of lives lived, instead, it is a hermeneutic theme that plays a constituting part of the lives of WoIS by integrating mind-body experiences, evident in a close reading of the narratives of WoIS.

G. Marginalization

The theme of marginalization is an obvious and pervasive one for WoIS, as it relates to so many layers of their experiences, to the extent that one could almost miss recognizing it as an important element in the sojourn of WoIS. At the most basic level, marginalization occurs in WoIS’ adjustment to a new language. Within the WoIS’ family system, marginalization may take place in her adjustment to a married life away from home. WoIS’ loss of financial and material freedom as mentioned previously is another illustration of marginalization that arises in the sojourn. The lived cultural differences that transpires a felt-sense of “being othered”, combining with the WoIS’s coming in touch with a variety of “foreign” sense of herself are quintessential examples of the ramification of marginalization. To substantiate the theme of marginalization, in the following, illustrations and analyses of various topics are imparted,
including adjustment to a new language, adjustment to a married life, and being othered vis-à-vis lived cultural differences.

On the topic of adaptation to a new language, most previous research on WoIS found language barriers to be a common theme among the experiences of sojourning wives. In the present study, it appears that understanding the important experience of an “adaptation to new language” in the lives of WoIS is relevant because all participants talked about initial difficulty with using English in their daily life, and they also spoke about how they strived to better their English during their sojourn—an act that signifies a underlying process of marginalization. Participant D, for instance, spoke about some of the challenges that she faced when she attempted to practice English:

for example, if I speak a bit slower, they would say, ‘never mind’ and I would say that ‘I’m not finished yet, give me a chance to let me finish.’ Like the clerk in a store, like if I wanted to exchange something, they may ask me why I would like to return or exchange, and I wanted to explain to them, but they might think that I was slow or that they did not understand, and would say never mind never mind… and so it’s very upsetting, it’s like ‘give me a chance and won’t let me finish’. (Participant D)

In this example, participant D was marginalized as a result of her attempt to adapt to a new language, as indicated clearly in her plea of “give me a chance” and “let me finish.”

Similarly, participant B spoke about her experiences of being discriminated against as a result of speaking English at a slower pace with imprecise pronunciation, and she noted how she demanded justice in a language that was the source of such discrimination. In this example, marginalization is solidified in the practice of discrimination based on linguistic maladaptation, simultaneously, participant B’s making the demand for justice in her second language further
complicates the matter, creating a paradoxical scene that consolidates the process of marginalization.

For participant A, her initial goal of the sojourn was to “better my English” though she continued to feel uncomfortable in social situations —“I don’t know how to chat in the U.S. because I’m not integrated in the culture, and my English is not good enough”, and she noted that it is hard to understand jokes in English. In a sense, marginalization can be felt internally as a disconnection from external worlds, and it is inevitable for WoIS who are adapting to a new language and cannot follow presumed shared understanding (i.e. jokes) in interpersonal situation.

On the topic of Adjustment to a married life away from home, a common trend for WoIS is that many got married in order to start the journey together (i.e. participant A, C, and D). What’s more, one participant did not consider herself having a “family life” prior to arriving in the U.S., despite having been married (i.e. Participant B) prior to her sojourn as WoIS. Given this background, adjusting to a married/family life is a reoccurring experience for WoIS in their life away from home, especially, as well because it occurs without a ready extended support or easy availability of friends and family. Add to this, stressors such as restrictions in finance, social life, and availability of the husband, given his studies, and it perhaps comes as little surprise that conflicts and differences were exacerbated, especially at the front end of the sojourn, making many WoIS feel further marginalized.

Inasmuch as the sojourn pressured marriage as well, participants may not have been altogether “ready” –participant C, for example, noted that she “did not really want to get married” but it was “an easier way for [her] to come here to live with [her husband].” As a result, her life as a WoIS consisted of a set of conflicts by virtue of a marriage that was “rushed” and strained by family finances.
Similarly, participant A and D both spoke about the increased amount of conflicts between them and their husbands. Participant A noted that she “fought more” with her husband because “there was more of a sense of uncertainty in the first year.” In their verbal altercations, participant A noted more “emotional” contents and her expressing a desire to return to Taiwan as a “reprimand” of her husband. In some ways, “coming to the U.S. made the conflict [between participant A and her husband] more visible.” As well, participant D spoke about her adjustment to a married life in the following,

after I arrived, maybe because we were not living together in Taiwan after getting married, but here [in America], so sometimes I would, I was not very understanding initially, like I would blame him and said that it is your fault, like, you made me unhappy after getting married because we are here, and he asked me what was making me unhappy, we can try and figure things out, but there was nothing to figure out, because it is as a result of us living in America, so I said that I would be happy if you let me go home. (participant D, excerpts from the interview).

In this narrative, it is clear that participant D struggles with her life as a WoIS not because of any particular problem she had with her husband, but because of the fact that she was living in America where she feels “unhappy.” Although the evidence of the data collected in the present study are not sufficient to make claims in terms of how the adjustment to a married life of WoIS differs from a normal course of an adjustment to marriage in general, it does seem that the adjustment is influenced by a particular social-cultural context which includes financial stressors, and distance from familial and cultural support networks. In other words, a constellation of experiences of being marginalized in the context of being away from home without familiar and familial social support present specific challenges for WoIS on their adjustment to a married life.
There are a myriad of layers on the topic of *being othered* vis-à-vis cultural differences. Marginalization, in this case, highlights how WoIS are made to feel other or an interloper, in subtle ways. More specifically, the experiences of being a foreigner or an imposition contribute to the dynamics of *being othered* in WoIS’ narrative, while their reflection on becoming a target of racism being one of and perhaps an overriding process. For starters, participant B and D mentioned examples of overt racism on several occasions—both in public and in experiences of relating to their neighbors. Although participant A did not speak from her own experiences of being subjected to racism, she shared some stories about her friends who had been treated unfairly due to racial differences.

On a more subtle level, living as a WoIS is inductive of a foreign sense of self, both in terms of feeling foreign to others who are perceived as “common” and in terms of feeling foreign to the self that one previously conceived of herself. Participant B, for instance, did not feel that she was like other wives of pastors who seemingly followed traditional gender roles in Taiwan. She also found herself to be very different from Taiwanese mothers who would assume external help with childrearing. Moreover, she feels very different from other WoIS because she finds it difficult to relate to their experiences. In her words,

this may also be related to my personality, I feel like I am relatively more independent, and that even though I do not stay at home all day long, neither do I think that a life that is bounded at home is a boring life. Sometimes I would have conversations with other WoIS, and they would feel like living in a barring place like this one and having their husbands focusing only on studying is quite boring. I feel that my life is similar to theirs, though I do not feel as boring as they did. (Participant B)

Participant C also expressed a sense of feeling foreign to other WoIS. She said,
there is a strong portion that I also wanted to come [to the U.S.]. Because many F2 may not really want to, I mean that they may not even think about coming to the U.S. if not for their husband. But for me, I also wanted to be here, this is the part that’s different.

(Participant C)

Participant C gave additional thoughts on her own sense of feeling foreign to others WoIS. In her words,

Yeah, that’s why I said that I’m different from other people, I would like to know if you know of any F2 who has to work from sunrise to sunset, or that if there were anyone, or less, like almost no one would tell you that. My guess is that for the ones that are working, they do not have to work, but I have no choice but to go to work. (Participant C, excerpts from the interview)

For participant D, the sense of difference from other people of Taiwanese descent revolves around their different views on lives in America:

I feel especially afflicted because many of the people who I know are, like they have the impression that, you know you got married to go to the U.S., and the stereotype is that you’re living a good life. But I’m the kind of person, you know I’m from [a city in Southern Taiwan], and I love [my city] very much, (Participant D)

She went on to say,

As compared to other wives, my situation was a bit worse because I was too attached to my original family and [my hometown], because I see that many people were very happy when they came here, even though with mixed sweetness and bitterness, but it was not as serious… I collapsed when I first arrived, because I could not figure out what could attract me here [in the U.S.]. (Participant D, emphasis mine)
While most of her friends anticipated a “good life” that she is living, and that many people she knew “were very happy” living in America, participant D found herself in a different, and “a bit worse”, situation in that she “collapsed” and “could not figure out” why she should stay in the U.S., marking a clear sense of self that is foreign to others in similar situation. Both participant B and C’s narratives above also highlight the corresponding experiences of an emergence of a sense of self that is foreign to others in comparable context. The foreign sense of self underlines a process of *self-marginalization* that seems to occur naturally in the psychological meaning making of the sojourning experiences of WoIS.

**Beyond the Hermeneutic Analysis**

In this section, another layer in the middle space between pre- and fore-projections is brought into the analytic of the hermeneutic circle. The emerging themes above are an illustration of how the chain of new-projections emerges on the foundation of fore-projection. To bring further the chain that link together new and fore-projection, another layer of analysis goes beyond the hermeneutic by juxtaposing the emerging themes with the cultural-crossing psychological theories on WoIS. Readers may notice similarities or resonance of the results of the current study to some findings in earlier research as reported on in Chapter Two, and those connections may even be taken up as “validation” of sorts. The caution, of course, is that this dissertation does not aim to deliver a “book report”, or to replicate or falsify earlier “results”, but to illustrate a new way to approach the subject (subjugation) of WoIS—a way of recounting the lives of WoIS that engages in a fundamentally different way of characterization. As such, what may on the surface seem as similarity, is only so without context. The point of this study is to outline the invisible, the tension, the rupture, and the in-between of the narratives. That is, what
the meaning of an utterance attempts to reveal, and in that same utterance, what it conceals. Most earlier research characterizes WoIS by gathering “factual” knowledge “data” about the WoIS. On the basis of that knowledge, “normalizing” or “corrective” ways of living are often offered with the goal of smoothing over or integrating narratives of WoIS into the “common” or “mainstream” discourse. The present research, as seen in the next section of analysis and beyond, while also gathering and analyzing “data” through self-report and interviews, nonetheless aims to reverse the “traditional” foreground and background of knowledge formation, giving way to a new understanding of lives of WoIS.

As seen in the cultural shock literature?

The lexicon of cultural shock, which was allegedly a significant phenomenon of cross-cultural experience, is surprisingly nowhere to be found in the narratives of the participating WoIS of the present study. While all of the four participating wives reported some stressful experiences as a result of their cultural-crossing journey, none of them noted an “anxiety” state or “an unpleasant surprise” (Oberg, 1960) that occurred alongside a disjuncture between expectations and reality as described in the cultural shock literature. The traces of cultural shock, which might be better captured as a “stressful cultural-crossing experience,” however, does reveal themselves in the hermeneutic themes found in the present study. For example, participants in the present study told a story that resonated with the experience of initial shock as a result of a change of anchorage from self to their husbands, experiencing loss and longing, marginalization, etc., which may be brought forth by a loss of familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, providing some support for losses that were prescribed according to the cultural shock literature (e.g. Day, 2003; De Verthelyi, 1995). While the loss of familiar signs
and symbols may have contributed to WoIS’ anchorage on her husband or to the emergence of a foreign sense of self during a WoIS’s sojourn, the themes emerging in the current study do not correspond directly with the discourse of cultural shock per se. Moreover, the state of anxiety derived from a cross-cultural experience such that it signifies a disease of sort is neither present in the explicit narratives of the WoIS nor in the hermeneutic themes derived from the narrative. Perhaps it is worth keeping in mind that the notion of “cultural shock” is a Western concept established in an English-speaking world. While the translation of the “knowledge” of cultural shock as a well-known phenomenon is available in both English and Mandarin-speaking academic literature, it has little bearing in Taiwanese WoIS’s understanding of their lives and their day-to-day practices. In other words, while components of cultural shock discourse may be found in the experiences of WoIS (i.e. their experiences with their “Caucasian friends”), the discourse inevitably misses the point in adequately addressing the complexity and the meanings of the experiences of WoIS.

Acculturation (or not)?

Having mentioned that culture shock does not seem an adequate conceptual lens, given the data, it does seem – at first glance – as if acculturative stress may be more appropriate, and that there is, in fact, some evidence to support such a notion. It is evident that WoIS experience a change of anchorage, role negotiation, paradoxical tension between individuality and collectivity, and marginalization, and many of these experiences can be stressful. Nevertheless, alternative arguments regarding the origin of such stressful times could be made not as a direct result of cultural differences per se, but as a result of a change of context. In this way, perhaps the notion of acculturative stress may be made only if culture is defined more broadly. In a broader definition of culture, culture is not confined to a unified, coherent, and consistent whole,
such as the assumption of a unified “culture” in terms of country of origin (i.e. the “American culture” versus “Taiwanese culture”). A broader notion of culture would reveal that “acculturative stress” is not limited to the experiences of moving from one country to another. Rather, acculturative process may be expanded to cultural-crossing experiences of moving from one socio-cultural context to another, such as from a single to a married life, from a full-time job to a full-time homemaker, and from an involved member of a church to a distant member of a seminary, a process stressful by virtue of normal reactions to change. While stress is definitely present as a visible thread throughout all participants’ narratives, acculturative stress as defined in its narrower sense cannot be accounted for as one of the converging themes.

The discourse of acculturation suggests that the cross-cultural adjustment is stressful, and that such stress is both problematic and challenge-inducing. The variety of the sources of acculturative stress for WoIS has been noted in the literature to include factors like linguistic difficulty, means of transportation, change of needs, the level of learning needs, and process of assimilation (e.g. Bigler, 2007; Cho et al., 2005; Lo, 1995; Nugraha, 2004; Ojo, 1998; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993). Within the converging themes extrapolated from the narratives of participating WoIS in the present study, the corresponding experiences with the sources of acculturative stress (such as adaptation to a new language, constricted financial freedom, and adjustment to a married life) may be found in the details of the hermeneutic themes on loss and longing, role negotiation, and marginalization. Meanwhile, there is a clear absence of assimilation as the final goal among the participating WoIS in the present study. The discourse of acculturation assumes the only correct and healthy strategy of “integration” and “assimilation” in a cross-cultural experience. However, in the narratives of WoIS in the present study, although they speak to stressful cultural-crossing experiences and the reality of cultural differences as lived, no
conclusion can be drawn to the universalized assumption made by the discourse of acculturation. In other words, while the phenomenon of acculturative stress (as defined broadly) is at work experientially for WoIS participating in the present study, little in their narrative suggests that finding a way to assimilate or integrate the intersecting cultures is somehow the solution to their stressful sojourning experiences. In contrast, what is actually salient is their attempt to preserve the differential notions of various experiences of culture they had, illustrative in the hermeneutic themes that hold that tension between having time and losing time, between individuality and collectivity, and the theme on marginalization. Take, for example, two participants with very different attitudes toward the host American culture: participant C noted her desire to come to the U.S. from the get-go, and participant D who noted her private thoughts on challenging the local store clerk to speak Mandarin when serving her. While they both were able to account for the nuances of cultural differences by making meaning through their narratives on experiences of being a WoIS, neither of them spoke about an attempt to be assimilated or integrated into a new culture.

Following the acculturation discourse in framing the converging themes of the narratives of the participating WoIS, perhaps what can be gleaned is not a universalized discourse on the processes of assimilation or integration, but a complex cultural-crossing experience as lived. While this experience brings forth tension and stress resulting from cross-cultural differences as broadly defined, the meeting of the cultures only foster a nuanced and subtler sense of cultural differences, an emergence of a differential understanding of oneself, and an increase of embodied consciousness.

Juxtaposing atheoretical frames and hermeneutic themes
To turn now to an atheoretical frame, the converging themes presented in this chapter take the form of a qualitative rather than a quantitative one. Instead of trying to analyze statistical significance among selective quantitative factors, a hermeneutic analysis aims to pick up the common threads of qualitative data by way of making the implicit meanings of the texts explicit. This analysis differs from the typical atheoretical analysis in the quantitative literature on WoIS. While converging themes are outlined with the support of texts/data as qualitative evidence, the significance of each theme does not function in the same way as the “factor loading” in a typical quantitative factor analysis, for example. Instead, the importance of the qualitative themes allow room for flexibility in their loading of significance as contributing factors to the complex lives of WoIS, such that individual differences of each of the WoIS are preserved. In other words, while the themes outlined above were derived from a hermeneutic analytic that looks for converging meanings of all of the texts, the extent to which each theme contributes to the experience of each participating WoIS vary widely, allowing the possibility for an individualized gestalt that carefully conserves the uniqueness of each story of the WoIS, which is why the unique story of each participating WoIS is presented in the first part of this chapter.

At the juncture of an atheoretical frame and hermeneutic theme, the converging themes are worth revisiting because many of them are ostensibly “atheoretical” to the extent that limited previous literature has been able to address these themes meaningfully through any particular theoretical lens. For instance, within the theme of marginalization, the topic on the subtle emergence of a foreign sense of self (in terms of a self that feels foreign to the others who are perceived as “common”) spoke to how each WoIS makes meaning of her sojourning experience from a unique personal perspective. The unique personal perspective had been difficult to account for with quantitative methods because individual differences account for too large of a
margin of error, resulting in difficulty arriving at any statistically significant link (i.e. Zhang, Smith, Swisher, Fu, & Fogarty, 2011).

In terms of the theme on role negotiation, a parallel may be drawn to the notion of “negotiation” as mentioned in previous literature in the context of a feminist study (e.g. Mitrishi, 2009; Neupane, 2011), or with a focus on gender construction as a cultural transaction (e.g. Park, 2009; Sakamoto, 2006). However, the process of role negotiation with a transformative potential, while clear in the context of the above-mentioned literature, has not been underlined as an impetus of constitution. In the present study, nevertheless, the process of role negotiation and its transformative potential are constitutional in the themes derived from narratives of WoIS.

The theme on embodied consciousness stood out because none of the previous literature on WoIS has noted the theme on embodied experiences on its own terms and no direct inquiry has been made to this theme as a target of their research. Along the same line, it is perhaps not surprising that no attention was paid to female embodiment among literature on cultural-crossing psychologies. While the bodily expressions are concrete in its form of delivery (i.e. through action and direct felt-sense), its expression is certainly tacit and can only be made explicit when attention is paid intentionally to the contextual fabric through which the narratives of WoIS is founded.

What is more, the theme on embodied consciousness as derived from the narratives of WoIS is the one that speaks to both the usefulness and the lack of a hermeneutic analytic. While hermeneutics as method assists in underscoring the theme as it is, hermeneutics as an analytic tool is limited in its ability to converse with gender-based social oppression—which is perhaps a reason why an embodied consciousness as a theme among WoIS has been under the radar for so long. Judith Butler (1989) said,
If the body expresses and dramatizes existential themes, and these themes are gender-specific and fully historicized, then sexuality becomes a scene of cultural struggle, improvisation, and innovation, a domain in which the intimate and the political converge, and a dramatic opportunity for expression, analysis, and change. (p. 98-99).

On this note, an invitation is extended to articulate the role of sexuality and the gender-specific experiences as an-Other analysis on the sojourn of the WoIS. When “sexuality becomes a scene of cultural struggle,” the cultural axis of WoIS is inevitably crossed with the gender axis of WoIS. An interpellation of this intersection is deferred to the next chapter.

**Concluding Note**

In this Chapter, themes derived from a hermeneutic analysis of the participants’ narratives were illustrated. Although the themes carry with them diverse and individualized elements à la contents, the common processes of meaning making are made explicit. The derived themes include change of anchorage to the husband, loss and longing, having time/losing time, role negotiation, individuality/collectivity, embodied consciousness, and marginalization. In addition to illustrative themes derived from a hermeneutic analysis, previous literature on WoIS is juxtaposed with the themes to achieve another level of hermeneutic analytic. Inconsistencies, ruptures, and newfound interactions of elements are highlighted alongside the cultural-shock, acculturative stress, and atheoretical discourses on WoIS. As a whole, varied levels of hermeneutic analysis exemplify the movement between new-projections and fore-projections as the constituting elements of lives of WoIS, fulfilling the analytic of a hermeneutic circle.

In the next chapter, a turn will be taken to an experimental performative of inter-textuality, with the focus on cultural and gender ascriptions of the WoIS. The narratives of WoIS are
interrogated while juxtaposed with cultural and gender literature, so as to demonstrate how
culture cultures and how gender engenders.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION: TEXTUALITIES

“A hermeneutic semiology can be read as a type of deconstruction… a hermeneutic semiology could also be characterized as a ‘juxtapositional deconstructive reading.’ The practice of a deconstructive juxtaposition elaborates a place of difference as a place of understanding” (Silverman, 1994, p. 2).

In this chapter, the narratives of WoIS are taken up as texts, and juxtaposed with other texts in the theoretical literature as a performance of “juxtapositional deconstructive reading,” focusing on a textual reading of culture and gender.

Textualities of culture

Culture: between a variable and function

In the narratives of the participants in the present study, culture can be read, on the most ordinary level, as a variable that configures individual’s thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Participant C, for example, remarks that

Asian culture emphasizes repression and criticism… and here [in America], there are a lot of positive, like whatever you do they would say no problem, you’ve done a great job, you know. And then when you actually do a good job, they’ll show you how well you did. This is not the case in Taiwan, it is taken for granted when you do well, and then when you did something bad it is magnified, and then they give you a lot of negative attacks. So I feel like here, I was thinking about why I felt so miserable when I was living in Taiwan, and why I’m so happy after I came here, this is it! (Participant C)
The comparison seems to be straightforward: cultures differ fundamentally in that Asian/Taiwanese culture emphasizes repression and criticism, while American culture does not. As a result, an individual (i.e. participant C) may feel encouraged or criticized, and she in turn may reflect on her experiences of misery versus being “happy” by attributing it to cultural differences as defined conventionally (e.g. Taiwanese/Asian culture versus American culture).

A comparison of cultural differences, in this most straightforward manner, is common and intuitively available to many; it can also be found in the discourse of cross-cultural psychology (CCP), but in the seemingly scientific extension that now operationalizes culture, as a variable. As such, culture is thought in terms of measurement, hypotheses and conclusions about human behavior that can be tested and transported across contexts to verify its validity and to serve as a point of reference (Triandis & Brislin, 1984). Within the discourse of CCP among previous studies on WoIS, for example, Vogel (1986) compared subtle differences between Japanese and American cultures, noting that “Japanese tend to see [the Americans] as cold and rational, while [the Americans] would find Japanese social relationships smothering and intrusive” (p. 276). This delineation of culture is based on a straightforward comparison of culture as a variable and how it transports across context. In the example above—Japanese culture emphasizes smothering and intrusive social relationships while American culture is “cold and rational.”

By placing the narratives of the WoIS alongside that of cross-cultural psychology, and the literature on WoIS therein, the assumption of culture as an explanatory variable appears at least somewhat justified. However, what is omitted is the question of how the narratives, the literature, and the discourse make sense of culture by virtue of its expressing a relationship involving personal and contextual variables. Let us read the following example where participant A spoke about a complex social interaction at a children’s playground:
In the social context of the playground, I am always an outsider… I am most likely to interact with non-Americans… If I were to interact with a Caucasian, there had to be some commonality between us, for example, one time us two, that the two children [of ours] share birthdays around the same time, so we started chatting, or that both of our husbands work at [the university]. There has to be a point [of connection]… There was also an American who chatted with me because her husband was more, that he works in China, so they are the ones who are more atypical with diverse cultural background. (Participant A)

In this example, culture is inferred but not operationally defined in participant A’s narrative. She did not speak directly about “my Taiwanese culture” or “their American culture”, indicating that culture is not something one “has”—a container filled with different contents, or a “thing” to be measured and used as explanation for diverse ways of doing; instead, culture is a process of non-linear relational difference and similarity, political dynamics, and contextual cues. Participant A’s shared common background (i.e. that husbands work in the same university or in China), for example, is what offers an opening to a conversation in a public space – a children’s playground - structured and organized around the commonality of being a parent.

Moreover, and in another challenge to the notion of culture as variable, the intangible and immeasurable way in which culture is carried in language, on the one hand, and by which language constrains and obscures its practical expression on the other, needs to be noted. This is not limited to simply linguistic skills, but involves an ability to get at a cultural idiom that makes comprehension possible. Among the participants, both participant A and B spoke about their difficulty understanding “jokes” in English, and participant C considered it an important task to watch American television shows so as a learn about the specificity of how to use certain vocabularies. Culture, in this sense, is a function of multiple variables (e.g. language, idioms, and
the meaning of social practices such as behaviors and jokes), together making interpersonal
relationship and practices meaningful and comprehensible. Cultural practice, cultural meaning,
and cultural understanding are inter-connected dimensions of culture.

To take up language as embedded culture, and its transmission, consider an extract of
participant A’s narrative, when she says in Mandarin:

「在那個playground20的社交場合裡面，我一定是圈外人…可是playground裡面一定也會有一些外國人… 阿外國人我跟他互動的可能性最高… 然後白人要有一些共通性。」

One direct and “non-polished” translation of this portion of the narrative can read:

“In that social occasion of the playground, I must be an outsider… but in the playground
there must also be some foreigner, and the likelihood of my interacting with a foreigner is
the highest… and then Caucasians have to have some commonality.”

As readers may have noticed, this translation flows poorly and causes some confusion
because the meaning of what participant A intended is not directly evident from its translated
representation. Consequently, an earlier version of the translated representation (of this
narrative) intends to balance the flow of the readability (for an English reader) and to stay
faithful to the specificity of the meaning intended (in my translation) by participant A, which
reads:

“In the social context of the playground, I am the outsider… Most likely I would interact
with a foreigner… and if I were to interact with a Caucasian, there had to be some
commonality.”

It turns out that the well-intended translation does not satisfy an English reader entirely. At
his first read, my dissertation director commented on how this narrative does not make sense and

20 The English word “playground” was used by the participant at the interview even though the majority of the
conversation was in Mandarin. A small sample of English words in a primarily Mandarin conversation reveals
another layer of textuality that signifies a style of living in diaspora and between two worlds of linguistic systems.
recommended that I recheck the grammatical integrity of this quote. To make improvements, another version of the translation reads as following:

“In the social context of the playground, I am the outsider… Often I would interact with non-Americans in that context, and if I were to interact with a Caucasian, there had to be some commonality between us.”

There is, now already, several layers of interpretative remove from the moment of the narrative’s speaking. Participant A spoke to me in Mandarin, that speech was translated into the pictographic Mandarin text, which very few English speakers would be able to follow, hence it was translated into English, but could not be done in a direct, and linear way, and had to be interpreted by the researcher, and then the research director, for fluency and narrative flow in English. The “data”, consequently, could not be “raw”, and its presentation here is already a re-presentation.

Additionally, however, it should be noted that whereas the difficulties of re-presentation and translation may present as “mechanical” difficulties, it is never just that, but also involves issues of culture, and cultural value. For example, it is common in Mandarin to offer the context in a conversation prior to getting to the main point one intended, which is why in the direct and raw translation, participant A first gave context (i.e. “in the playground there must also be some foreigner”) and then noted her main point (i.e. that she is most likely to interact with a “foreigner”). In my ensuing translation, I conformed to (and was restrained by) the English custom of introducing the main point upfront and providing context later, resulting in an awkward translation (i.e. “Most likely I would interact with foreigner in the social context of the playground”), which may well also contain the tension between the cultural value of context as opposed to that of the individual.
Similarly, while substituting the term “foreigner” with “non-American” offers an added comprehensibility to an English reader, the translation betrays the relational intention and interview moment inasmuch as the term “foreigner” (which is the more “correct” translation of the Mandarin), in the context of a conversation between two Taiwanese women (i.e. Participant A and me), can refer to Caucasian Americans, non-white Americans, or non-Americans. A meaning completely clear to me, as an interlocutor, but not to my dissertation director, and other English speakers/readers, for whom a word (i.e. non-American) would make more sense, even as the interviewee never “really” used that word.

What gets lost in translation is the relational dynamic of the assumed shared meaning and understanding of what certain phrases or choices of words refer to—that is, a shared cultural world that participant A and I both assumed we live in. The choice of “non-American” rather than the word “foreigner”, while providing better comprehensibility for an (invisible and anonymous) English reader, inevitably betrays the original intention in the choice of word spoken by Participant A—that she and I shared a certain understanding of the term “foreigner” to refer to a group of people foreign to us (participant A and me) in the context of an American society. In fact, I daresay the term “foreigner” is likely referring more specifically to Asian non-Taiwanese non-Americans—though I made that assumption and never inquired in that instance of the interview. What is clear, regardless, is that culture is not a “thing,” like a variable, to be measured or possessed by a person or a group of people (i.e. “Taiwanese culture” versus “American culture”), nor that its transmission in report and representation can be seamless, especially across both language and different representational graphic systems. Instead, culture manifests in a shared and dynamic process, serving as a function of multiple factors (or
variables) such as geographical context, personal reference, shared idioms, (shared) language, social practices, etc.

To offer another example: the addition of “between us” in the same extract provided above was, again, an attempt to make clear the meaning intended. Nevertheless, in Mandarin, the term 「共通性」 (commonality) is clear enough in itself in the context of the particular conversation. Consequently, adding “between us” would not have provided further clarity to the sentence—as opposed to the written English translation. In the end, the final version of this extract read as following:

“In the social context of the playground, I am always an outsider… I am most likely to interact with non-Americans… If I were to interact with a Caucasian, there had to be some commonality between us.”

The specific development of the change of phrases in this final edit attempts, at first, to convey the expression 「一定」 (must be) in Mandarin within the English grammatical structure (i.e. by using the definite article “the”). Yet in so doing, what was lost was the strong force of participant A’s narration that wants to express a sense of unavoidability in being positioned as an outsider. The impossibility of balancing the quality of conciseness in written English and the intention of the original narrative in Mandarin leads to the eventual compromise of changing the “the” into “always an” in this last version of the translation. To be sure, the phrase 「一定」 is not a cultural-specific phrase because an adequate translation is often possible (i.e. commonly translated as “must be”). Nevertheless, cultural intentions and meanings do get transmitted through the specific linguistic form and expression, hence they can also get lost as a result of diverse choices made in translation. As such, the implication of the narrative is embedded in the function of culture, which is a conglomerate of various components (i.e. language, shared idioms,
shared practices, etc., as noted previously), and which clearly cannot be considered variables, in
the reductionistic, separable, and simplistic manner that mainstream natural science psychology
often does.

Segall, Lonner and Berry (1998) defined culture as “a set of independent or contextual
variables affecting various aspects of individual behavior” (p. 1102). On this definition, culture is
thought in terms of function, that is, a relationship involving one or more variables. Turning
away from the effects of culture crossing (as was the case in the culture shock literature), without
necessarily struggling with what culture “is”, the cross cultural emphasis on listing the
components of culture allowed for an examination of culture both as a variable and as a function
(of interrelated variables).

What the narratives reveal though, in its intertextual placement with those of acculturation
and acculturative stress, is of as neither a variable nor a function of different variables, but as
constitutive of the web of meanings between culture as a variable (i.e. participant C’s
understanding on Taiwanese versus American culture) and as a function (i.e. the emergence of
culture at the children’s playground narrated by participant A). This echoes Cole’s notion that
“culture is not really an independent variable” and that cultural differences locate “in the
organization of activity in everyday life” (Cole, 1996, p. 67). By juxtaposing the discourse of
CCP with narratives of WoIS collected in this study, a textuality of culture emerges in-between a
variable and a function. At once, the textuality of culture that lies in-between a variable and a
function is what makes possible and intelligible the discourse of CCP that attempts to define
culture as a measurable variable or a function of human behavior.

Culture: between thinking through and thinking beyond others
To be sure, a textual reading of participant A’s narrative above reveals a certain contour to culture that has already been made clear within the discourse of cultural psychology. Participant A came to make sense of herself as a “foreigner” and as “an Asian mother” in the context of encountering other mothers in the playground. This narration echoes the discourse of cultural psychology that underscores the malleability of culture and the notion that culture emerges by means of others and in the context of being engaged with the other (Shweder, 1991). Rather than knowing a culture by means of a set of facts reductionistically defined, participant A came to know about her culture in relation to others, and in an immediate and tangible lived experience. As such, culture is made meaningful in the incubator of participant A’s narrative, that speaks to both the cultural-crossing context in which she resides and how that context makes sense to her. Cole’s notion of cultural psychology as a psychological science that concerns not only scientifically reductionist facts, but also accounts for everyday experiences (1996) is apropos here. Similarly, Bruner’s (1990) cultural psychology that focuses on the use of narratives, reminds us that sense-making is inseparable from people’s cultural settings.

In a way, the different points made in the discourse of cultural psychology reveal a certain textuality of culture by virtue of how cultural psychology reads into the relationship between culture and psychology. While cultural psychology claims an ontological revision on the relationship between psychology and culture, it is at once performing a textualization of culture, making manifest a textuality between culture and psychology. A juxtaposition of cultural psychology and participant A’s narrative makes intelligible participant A’s (and the reader’s) understanding of a certain emergence of culture by virtue of this textuality. To put it differently, culture is made intelligible to the reader in participant A’s narratives by means of her everyday lived experiences, of her thinking through others, and of a reader’s (and participant A’s) sense-
making of her narratives. In this sense, a textuality of culture lies in-between thinking through and thinking beyond others, corresponding to a hermeneutic semiology that operates “at the intersection of the vertical interpretive, constitutive, meaning-forming experience and the horizontal dispersive, differential system-articulating signifying chain” (Silverman, 1994, p. 20). In the narratives of WoIS as text, culture is made intelligible by means of their sojourn as an in-between. Take for example participant A’s narrative above, the sense of in-between accounts for the psychological move of finding herself an “outsider” and mostly likely to interact with other non-Americans, underlining the emergence of experiencing “culture” in the process of meaning making that resides in-between thinking through and beyond others.

**Culture in diaspora: between indigenous and western psychologies**

Culture can be read in yet another way in the narratives of WoIS. Let us consider participant D’s narrative. She spoke about the difficulty during her initial sojourn as two fold: On the one hand, the expectation of her fellow Taiwanese denoted that the U.S. is a place indicative of a better life. In her words, I feel especially afflicted because many of the people who I know are, like they have the impression that, you know you got married to go to the U.S., and the stereotype is that you’re living a good life. (Participant D, emphasis added)

On the other hand, participant D’s own experiences do not correspond to the common expectation as she found her life in the U.S. “boring” and “meaningless”, contrasting to a good “quality of life” in her home-city that she loves in Taiwan. She spoke about the contrasts of the two different lives she live(d) in the following:
I love [my city] very much, with a special feeling, and so the pace of life is slow with good quality of life, like the ride to [a wholesale store] from my family home is about three minutes, and to [go to] work is five to ten minutes, everything is nearby. So it is such a big shock for me to come [to the U.S.]. (Participant D)

Multiple readings may arise from this stark comparison between participant D’s life in America and in her home city. By her own telling, on the most descriptive level, the differences arise as a result of her affection for the city where she lived in Taiwan, of the “good quality of life” when she was living there, and of the “boring” and “meaningless” life that she found as a sojourning WoIS. An interpretation of her telling of the differences, at first glance, underlines the boredom and the lack of meaning as a consequence of participant D’s shifting her anchorage from herself to her husband as a part of living as a WoIS. Simultaneously, participant D’s sense of “affliction” underscores the tension between her embodied lived experiences and the prescription of a “good life” in America by the imagination of “many people” in Taiwan.

However, one could also read the difference in participant D’s descriptions in terms of the structurality of experience – for example, from the perspective of indigenous psychology (IP), a reading of participant D’s description of everyday life may derive a Taiwanese “temporality” that makes sense within the limits of Taiwanese indigenous culture (e.g. reading her description that “the ride to [a wholesale store] from my family home is about three minutes, and to [go to] work is five to ten minutes, everything is nearby”). A Taiwanese temporality, in this formation, may indicate a “compressed” sense of time, as opposed to an “expanded” sense of time in American/Western temporality, for example. The derivation of an indigenous psychological concept that helps make sense of the everyday practices of the indigenous people is consistent with one of the goals of indigenous psychology—“to develop their own indigenous psychology
for their own people” (Allwood and Berry, 2006, p. 250). In this way, a Taiwanese temporality that implies a “good quality of life” may be conceived of as a “reaction to or rejection of” (Sinha, 1997, p. 135) a Western hegemonic temporality (as represented by “many people who I know”), paralleling the opposing binary between the views of IP and WP (Western Psychology), consistent with the initial goal of IP (as a “reaction to or rejection of” WP, see Sinha, 1997, p. 135). Nevertheless, while the construction of the “local” (i.e. Taiwanese) temporality is consistent with the objectives of IP, such a construction may inadvertently give way to the theoretical tension concerning the dilemmas regarding a potential mis-recognition of IP (e.g. Peng, 2012), to what counts as proper contents of IP (e.g. see Allwood, 2011), and to the inadequate universalizability of IP (as discussed in details in Chapter Three). In other words, interrogating the reading of participant D’s text from the perspective of IP summons the following questions: whether the indigenous Taiwanese temporality is “proper” or in fact a “mis-recognition” of a Taiwanese temporality? What counts as proper contents of IP, that of participant D’s text or that of the narratives from “many people” who she knows? And how does the indigenous Taiwanese temporality generalize to other Taiwanese people (e.g. is it generalizable to participants A, B, C, and beyond)? These questions underlie a clear dilemma—that reading participant D’s narrative as an example of constructing an indigenous Taiwanese temporality is simultaneously useful and untenable on its own. It is useful for understanding participant D’s cultural-crossing experience (i.e. that it makes sense she has a hard time resonating with her life in America), and, it is untenable to provide ongoing sustainability of IP, which, in this formation, is presumed to be necessary for understanding participant D’s narrative.

To go beyond the perspective of IP by reading into this comparison (between participant D’s life in American and in her home city) on the discursive level, what is concealed in the story
of a “good life” told by many, is a field of discourse that assumes a better life in the
“modernized” and “Western” world. What a discursive reading reveals is the concealed
elements of the colonized condition that is internalized by colonized individuals. Simply put, the
“many people who I know” in participant D’s narrative represents the forces arrested in
colonized subjects, internalizing the imagination of a “good life” in the Western world. A
critical reflection into the process of colonization is not about colonized subjects, but about a
psychically colonized space in which colonization becomes the condition of one’s everyday life.
In the text of participant D’s narrative, the “many people who I know” (i.e. her friends and
family) who consider living in America better for her (see appendix p. 256) are invoked as a
result of a colonized psychic space. This is an example of the materializing effects of the
colonial condition in the text, that is, a textuality. A reading into textualities does not attempt to
address the aforementioned dilemmas by evaluating what is more corrective or more suitable
route of interpretation, but to provide a space in which the dilemmas can arise. The colonial
condition as a textuality of participant D’s text stretches the in-between space, such that
participant D’s experiences as a sojourning WoIS may be understood as being caught in the
move from anti- to post-colonial conditions. Meanwhile, the tension between anti-colonial and
post-colonial sentiments in the development of IP (e.g. Hwang, 2011) is made visible and
intelligible. That is, a “third” understanding (i.e. an understanding from a colonial condition of
the text) that comes from neither the perspective IP nor of WP becomes crucial to an
understanding of participant D’s stark comparison between her life in America and in her home
city, together informing her sojourning life as a WoIS.

The notion of a “third” understanding points to a layer of inter-textual quality that occurs
once and again in the WoIS’ narrative, specifically, the clear emphasis that the participating
Taiwanese WoIS put on distinguishing themselves from the Chinese WoIS. Using a “third” understanding in reading into the translated narratives of the Taiwanese WoIS offers an understanding as a mirror in reverse, highlighting relevant dynamics for the Taiwan-U.S.-China triad. The question remains, how is the inter-textual contextualized by the story told vis-à-vis the relevant political implication. For example, how is it that Taiwanese WoIS gave a narrative of “oppression” even though many may argue that China (hence the “ethnic Chinese”) is considered the real “power of the world” in today’s world? To speak to the inter-textual quality of the narratives, one has to wonder how a political reality contributes to and shapes the stereotypes and dynamics between Eastern and Western image(rie)s alongside a complex historical sedimentations (see for instance, the development of Taiwanese IP in relation to the dynamic between Taiwan and China on pp. 75-79). While this is not a study of a global history on the relations among Taiwan, China, and the U.S., the effects of certain historical occurrence inevitably appear in the narratives of participants, who are unavoidably historical beings. The difficulty of living in-between cultures, between that of Taiwan and America, and between Taiwan and China, reveals itself in the textuality of the “story form” employed by the Taiwanese WoIS’ narratives (i.e. the stories told that underscored the many differences between Taiwan and China). In the example offered above, an explication reveals a textuality that makes visible the process through which WoIS’ narratives “materialize” into a certain story form. While the example illustrates the tension between the Eastern-Western dyad, similar parallel can be drawn to the Taiwan-China dyad, both are manifestations of political playground in the reality of the world as lived today.

Henceforth, another point of inter-textual reading that begins from what is concealed in the overt descriptive of D’s narrative (i.e. her recalling the details of her life in Taiwan) is that of a
life in diaspora, consisting of many realistic components of a sojourning life and highlighting a
sense of suspense that is not told in the prescribed story of the imagined Western life. As the
reality of the life of WoIS consists of many aspects (e.g. the shifted anchorage from self to one’s
husband, loss and longing, an adaptation to a new language, a confined financial and material
freedom, and a circumscribed social relation), and an implicit meaning to these practical aspects
comprise one’s getting in touch with one’s foreignness to oneself and others, embodied and
beyond (i.e. thoughts, feelings, and actions), the diasporic textuality of participant D’s narrative
“is not that which is interpreted but rather the domain in which the interpretation occurs”
(Silverman, 1994, p. 20). It is by means of the diasporic condition that the themes and meanings
of a life of WoIS become comprehensible. To the extent that the present study stays local (i.e.
close) to the immediate and native experiences of WoIS (e.g. on the basis of participants’ report
of their experiences in Taiwan and/or in America), it is indigenous in nature. In the meantime, a
diasporic condition (that of WoIS) does not speak to a circumscribed or confined indigenous
culture (i.e. limited to Taiwanese or American), but provides a bridge that links and makes
intelligible the two. In other words, a textuality of culture in the texts of the narratives of WoIS
is the diasporic condition of a sojourning life. In this reading, a textuality of culture is neither of
an indigenous nature nor of a western one; it is a diasporic condition through which the life of
WoIS, and the discourse of IP and WP all have their place, can be made intelligible, or become
frames and tools through which interpretation can occur. The diasporic condition of the WoIS is
a textuality positioning at the borderline of the texts between IP and WP.

Reading inter-textualities is “a reading of meaning structures in their plurisignificational
character [that] occurs in a [binary] milieu as a reading of the textuality (or sexualities) of the
text” (Silverman, 1994, p. 30, italics original). In the particular instance of reading the texts of
WoIS, juxtaposing with the seeming oppositions of IP and WP, it is precisely the opposing binary that gives rooms to a milieu of unconcealment\textsuperscript{21}, where a reading of textualities of the text emerges. Textualities of culture, in this reading, serves as a hinge, blurring the lines by expanding the line into a space between the colonizer/colonized, recognition/mis-recognition, and proper/inadequate. What emerge are textualities of colonial condition and diasporic provision, consistent with that of the conditions of the texts from which the narratives of WoIS materialize. The textuality at the borderline refers back not to a centered subject (i.e. WoIS from the perspective of IP or WP) but to the narrative/text as an interpretive activity itself.

**Multiple textualities of culture**

Hermeneutic semiology, or textuality, can be considered “a reading of meaning structures in their plurisignificational character” (Silverman, 1994, p. 30). A reading of multiple texts sheds light on the textualities of culture as multiplicity of in-betweens. By reading the subjective narratives of WoIS in the present study, juxtaposing with reading texts of theoretical frameworks (i.e. cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology) and ensuing literature on WoIS, textualities of culture occur in multiple in-betweens, such that the texts of the narratives, the texts of theories and literature are made intelligible. A textuality of culture occurs between a variable and its function, putting forth a space where culture can be moved from indecidable and immeasurable to definable and measurable, which makes possible and intelligible cross-cultural psychology, acculturation theory, and discourse on acculturative stress. Furthermore, textualities of culture occur with cultural psychology (as between psychology and culture) and in-between thinking through and thinking beyond others, making a

\textsuperscript{21} See more in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1962), on his understanding of truth as unconcealment (German: Unverborgenheit) or *alētheia*. 
more nuanced reading of participating WoIS’ cultural experiences in their particular cultural-crossing context possible. Inter-textualities of culture occur at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal chain of meaning, signifying that of the cultural world in which WoIS reside. Last but not least, textualites of culture occur in the colonized condition and in diaspora, making comprehensible the narratives of WoIS as between the colonizer and the colonized, and as “in suspense” and “in dispersion” from the homeland. The diasporic condition as a textuality of culture marks the tension between the discourses of IP and WP, making the multiplicity of (local or universal) psychologies of culture (i.e. IP or WP) comprehensible, that is, serving as a domain in which interpretation can occur. The multiple textualities of culture are consistent with the “plurisignificational character” of the meaning structures of hermeneutic semiology—an analytic that “elaborates a place of difference as a place of understanding” (Silverman, 1994, p. 2).

Perhaps in a similar way, a reading of the lives of WoIS as a place of difference also offers a starting point of understanding the multiple meanings of their lives, coming through from the reading of multiple textualities of culture in the texts of WoIS’ narratives.

**Textualities of Gender**

An inquiry into gender is an important aspect of this study, and well for its impact on the making of WoIS. Gendered experiences have been implicit but pervasive throughout the narratives of participating WoIS in the current study. In this second piece of analysis on textualities, a focus is turned to textualities of gender as manifested in the multiple texts juxtaposed: among them, the narratives of WoIS is the most basic playground from where textualities of gender come into view, alongside the different theoretical frames of gender and previous studies on WoIS. To track specifically an analysis on textualities of gender, what
guides the interrogations of multiple texts juxtaposed is the question of how the narratives of lives of WoIS, as texts, tells about the textuality of gender. And, how the telling of textualities of gender from the texts of the narratives relate and refer to other texts, such as previous studies on WoIS and psychological theories on gender. From the starting point of this question, textualities of gender is interrogated in four interconnected folds—by the telling of WoIS, by my interpretation of their telling, by the discursive and the textual that the telling conceals, and by the intertextual.

**Gender as told by Participating WoIS**

Let us start an analysis on textualities of gender by the telling of WoIS participating in this study. In the narratives of WoIS as texts, gender enters into these texts in various fashions. To stay true to the telling of WoIS, at the most unsophisticated level, is to offer their telling in their own words, and begin by understanding descriptively what their telling signifies.

Participant A’s telling conveys how becoming a mother and becoming a housewife (as part of being a WoIS) together fostered her realization of becoming a woman. In her words, “I think that whether or not a woman gets married does not have strong influence on her life, but whether or not a woman becomes a mother will change her life forever.” She also said, “when I first came to the US, I had a feeling that I am slowly entering into the role of a housewife.” She noted that her coming to terms with her role as a mother and a housewife “is a process, it didn’t just happen” and pointed out that she also has “changed in this process”—she changed from resisting the role of a mother and a housewife to enjoying her life as a WoIS. She added that her sense of gender role “is stronger in the U.S., because I am married, I am a wife, we are a family, and I’m a woman and he is a man. In Taiwan, I did not feel this strongly [about my gender role] among my friends” (participant A).
In the telling of participant B, a story about the gender-role is accentuated in the role of a “pastor’s wife” she played in Taiwan. In her remark, “the wife of the pastor is meant to clean up after others”, and more specifically, “the stereotype in the church is that, if you are the wife of a pastor, then you are expected to play the role of ‘gentle, composed, graceful, enduring, bearing hardship and work’ and to ‘labor along with no complaint.’” She elaborated, “Many people feel that a mother has to cook, [but] I don’t think so. Why does a mother have to cook? It’s like if God did not give her the gift of cooking, then she can’t [be a mother].” In contrast to the prescribed role of a “pastor’s wife” as a mother who has all the presupposed qualities (i.e. ability to cook, gentle, composed, graceful, etc.), participant B told a story about being a mother in a different manner, in her telling that “caring for a child is more respected in America.” In the story of her life as a WoIS, she has “unlimited house chores” and plays the role of an “educator” for her daughter while being her primary caretaker. However, she does not, in the role of a WoIS, ascribe to various qualities that the “role of a pastor’s wife” was presumed to have.

In her telling about experiencing a sense of grievance as a part of her experiences being a WoIS, Participant D attributes some of these feelings to being a woman; she noted, “Because I feel like females are more emotional” and went on to tell a story with a sense of unfairness on the choice of accompanying their spouses to study abroad, where there are significant differences between men and women. She said, what I feel strange is that, why does the women have to make the sacrifice? And I do not know if I have met anyone, like all the ones that I’ve met so far are, the man wants to come and the woman sacrifices, but if the woman is coming [to the U.S.], the man will not come! Like my friend, the girl came and the guy stayed in Taiwan. Yeah, and the guy said, ‘why do I have to go? Why would I go with you?’ I feel like it is harder to survive here as a
woman, so many of them went back [to Taiwan] after completion of the degree, and I also have some [female] friends who got a divorce after the completion [of their study], or that they broke up. But I don’t know why I see a larger portion of female who stayed here, who sacrificed for her family and her other half. But in Taiwan, we are pretty equal, Taiwan is considered to be quite gender equal. (participant D, excerpts from the interview).

In this telling, participant D underlines the equality between men and women in Taiwan. In spite of that, she makes note of the larger proportion of Taiwanese women who accompany their husband abroad for his study rather than vice versa.

Essentialized Gender?

With the question of gender in mind, my reading of the participating WoIS’s telling about their life as a WoIS reveals a striking attempt to grapple with gender from an essentialist perspective and an equally strong (if not more) effort to dispute that perspective. For instance, participant B told a story about the expectation for a pastor’s wife, that she is “meant to clean up after others” and that “you are expected to play the role of ‘gentle, composed, graceful, enduring, bearing hardship and work’ and to ‘labor along with no complaint’” (Participant B). Similarly, “a mother has to cook… It’s like if God did not give her the gift of cooking, then she can’t [be a mother]” (participant B). What is being invoked in these telling is an unquestionable set of characteristics of women (i.e. who are pastor’s wives or mothers) that is innately true by virtue of them being women. While participant B was clearly aware of the social essentialist view on women, she actively disregarded it and was eager to note her sense of difference by questioning (i.e. she said, “I don’t think so. Why does a mother have to cook?”) and by asserting possibilities for difference/deviating from the essentialist presumption.
Similarly, in participant D’s reflection on her being a WoIS, she began by remarking, “females are more emotional”, at the first glance ascribing to an essentialist view of gender. In the same breath, she observed that most of the times women would “sacrifice” for their husband by becoming a WoIS, but men do not do the same for their wives, and she questions—“why does the women have to make the sacrifice?” What her questioning opens up, once more, is the possibilities of variation from the norm.

In both participant B and participant D’s initial ascription to a social essentialist view on gender, heterosexual norm and gender-binary were assumed without question\textsuperscript{22}. Meanwhile, their questioning points to the potential downfalls of the essentialist view and its implications to their lives as WoIS. Some of the downfalls of the essentialist view on the psychology of gender are similar to that of the common critique on “cultural feminism” (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Rich, 1977). On the one hand, an essentialist view that presumes an innate gender differences is an impetus that allows for understanding gender-specific experiences and implementations of services for WoIS. For instance, among the literature on WoIS, many referenced the importance of women’s identity as a mother (Bigler, 2007), investigated women’s communal needs (e.g. Ostler, 1990), and focused on the mediating effect of electronic communication on women’s experiences of cultural shock (Bennett, 2002). While the studies and their implication are useful to think about WoIS’s experience insofar as the WoIS “fit” the cultural assumption of women (i.e. WoIS are wives and mothers), they simultaneously exclude WoIS who are more than wives and mother and hence fall outside of the set of cultural assumptions. While the supportive services designed for WoIS are helpful in providing practical assistance, these services are inaccessible to WoIS who do not align themselves fully to the prescribed cultural assumption

\textsuperscript{22} The heterosexual norm and the assumption of gender-binary can also be seen, also, in participant A’s remark that “I am married, I am a wife, we are a family, and I’m a woman and he is a man.”
(i.e. the assumption that their well-being in a foreign country requires tips or supports for cooking, shopping, language education, or child-rearing). It is fair to say that no one single WoIS would fit the prescription of woman fully, hence rendering WoIS as a group further marginalized and the “assisting” programs for WoIS evermore ineffective.

The mode of questioning, as employed by participant B and participant D, is what makes their narratives as texts more powerful as it departs from the literature and opens up the possibilities that while WoIS are women, they are more than women prescribed in a social essentialist perspective. As an omnipotent assumption in the literature on WoIS noted that WoIS ought to find ways to “move from dependency to agency” (Raymon, 2006, p. 52), which inadvertently re-inscribes these wives as innately dependents (and thus need to move out of the dependent state), it fails to question the normalizing function in prescribing an ideal “healthy woman”, which was done so very beautifully in the texts of participant B and D’s narratives, by way of questioning. It is true that WoIS at times play the role of a wife and/or a mother, but is it true that by virtue of being a wife or a mother, that one automatically encompasses a certain set of characteristics (i.e. to be good at cooking, child-reading, house-cleaning, etc.)? If a WoIS does not have the prescribed set of characteristics, does it make her less of a woman?

To complicate the matter further, the well-intended researchers in delimited academic circles may make seemingly impartial inquiries in an effort to provide services that aims to “help” WoIS. This objective to “help” is well-meaning, but fundamentally misses the point—that the intangible sense of being a “translated person” who occupy a place in-between two worlds cannot be “helped” or “innoculated” with “services provided.” The point missed entirely is the mark of the intersection between the gender and cultural axes—an intersection that denotes an emerging textuality in the narratives of WoIS. Whether or not the notion of “agency” even
makes sense in the lives lived by the Taiwanese WoIS remains an open-ended question. What the lives of the WoIS signify is a world that is fundamentally different from the world of an English reader. It is a world that this writing attempts to capture through differential linguistic and cultural practices/illustrations. As a parallel process, the writing of this dissertation encounters and performs exactly such a dilemma, that is, the dissertation attempts to put a phenomenon in a certain (Western) frame, and as a consequence, suffers from the same tension that the participants experienced, that is, any attempt of understanding or translating from one world to another is unavoidably “missing the point” of what the experiences of WoIS is “really” like. Writing, after all, is a translation of the lived. The impossible task performed in this translated writing, in this way, recreates the impossible life of living as a “translated person” in the lives of WoIS.

**Gender as constructed?**

Another angle to my reading of the texts of participants’ narratives is through the constructivist view of gender, particularly salient in participant A’s telling about how she “became” a woman. She remarked specifically how her life was “changed forever” by virtue of becoming a mother, alongside “entering into the role of a housewife”; both are significant events during her sojourn. She revealed that becoming a woman is a “process” and that it “didn’t just happen.” For her, in particular, her sense of gender role is “stronger” in the context of sojourning in the U.S. as a WoIS, contrasting to her sense of gender-identity that was more nebulous in Taiwan. This take on gender relies on an external construct, namely, gender is constituted through exterior context and via social transaction, consistent with constructionist views of “gender as residing in context rather than in the individual” (Bohan, 1993, p. 41).
In a way, the roles (i.e. a mother, a housewife, a driver, a care-taker) participant A takes up make sense in the context of her family economy that consists of a student-husband and a jobless wife. On this level of family transaction, the appearance of these roles in terms of a certain feminine ascription and essentialism hides the social transaction whereby these tasks do not reside in participant A by virtue of her being a woman, but in the social transaction between her and her husband, and the context of the sojourn.

As constructionism does not view gender with certain sets of innate qualities, each social transaction determines, from moment to moment, a new kind of gender ascription manifested in a particular relationship. By taking social context into accounts, what a constructionist view of gender contributes to the question of gender is the possibility of multiple manifestations of being a woman. In the example of participant A, her gender is fluid rather than fixed, making possible her “becoming a woman” as she moved from a life as a journalist to a life as a WoIS. Rather than as an “innate” quality, the ascription of gender for participant A is constructed, and may change by virtue of contextual shifts.

In addition to underlining the fluidity of gender, the constructive view of gender also provides rooms for changing stereotypes of gender. Rather than assuming some innate “truth” about what a woman (or mother or wife) “is”, a constructivist view questions such a “truth” by

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23 A male can take up similarly feminine tasks (e.g. child rearing and domestic chores) under the same condition as a man. Hence from a constructionist perspective, one may argue that the male is exhibiting femininity at that particular social transaction. However, an essentialist may argue that this man is being responsible or thoughtful as an essential man—re-inscribing a naturalizing assumption of the innately different traits between men and women.

24 A constructivist view of gender is complimentary to the view of gender as a performance (Butler, 1993; Walkerdine, 1989). As performance, the inevitability of encountering “a representational problematic” (Gelder, 2001, p. 6) is underscored: the questions regarding whether or not the produced knowledge in the literature about WoIS and women is true or false, authentic or inauthentic (i.e. are WoIS oppressed or not oppressed?), and the questions regarding the extent to which the prescribed understanding of WoIS reveals a kind of inversion vis-à-vis the contemporary cultural and gendered ideal, reflecting a cultural projection rather than an immediately engaged understanding of gender in the narratives of WoIS. The notion of “performance” problematizes the notion of “authentic knowledge”, making visible the hinge between a mode of questioning/deconstructing gender and a mode of essentializing gender (both seen in reading into the ascription of gender in the narratives of WoIS), giving shape to a textuality of gender.
breaking it down, so as to reevaluate it in different social transactions within various contextual horizons. As an example, participant A “is” a mother and a wife, as well as a woman in the particular context of her sojourn as a WoIS. This context is meaningful in its fostering a manifestation of her becoming a woman. Meanwhile, her husband can still help with house chores, child rearing, and even cooking, as a man, insofar as these activities make sense in the moment-by-moment social transactions. In this way, a constructionist view of gender offers a useful frame of reference in thinking about gender as plural rather than singular, rendering the “truths” of gender multiple.

Subjectivity, interiority, and materiality of Gender

By locating gender construction externally, constructionism takes up the ascription of gender in the life of WoIS with the focus on social transaction and situational factors, thus bypassing questions of subjectivity25 (e.g. Lauretis, 1984), interiority (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and materiality (e.g. Barnard, 2000) of WoIS. For instance, as much as a constructionist analysis on participant A’s notion on how she becomes a woman locates her ascription of gender in her immediate social transaction in the context of a sojourn, it seems only reasonable that participant A may also have in some ways participated in both perpetuating and counterbalancing her gendered ascriptions. If one buys into a radical constructionist view, one runs the risk of discounting participant A’s subjectivity and obliterating the interiority of her gender ascription in toto.

25 In an attempt to hold the tension between essentialism and constructionism, Lauretis (1984) addressed subjectivity by contending that it “is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one’s personal, subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the event of the world” (p. 159).
Another vulnerability of the constructivist view of gender pertains to a certain neglect of materiality that at once changes and is changed by both local and structural power-relations. In Barnard’s (2000) words,

While Foucault’s notion of productive power has clearly informed some constructionist theory, its implications for conceptualizing both the enabling and constraining possibilities of materializing interpellations of the body are often left unarticulated. (p. 673, italics original)

To put it differently, as much as an essentialist view arbitrarily assigns attributes by virtue of gender differences (e.g. in participant B’s notion that “a mother has to cook”), it is difficult to discount the material differences among sexed bodies, a difference by means of the facticity (Heidegger, 1962) of the body. The embodied consciousness as a hermeneutic theme derived from the participants’ narratives is an example that points to the facticity of the body.

Quite simply, a female body is different from that of a male. The materiality of bodies is sexed, albeit on more of a continuum than on the extreme ends of the two separate categories. What is pivotal in discussing the materiality of sexed bodies is not to re-inscribe the essentialist attributes but to traverse it by accentuating the asymmetrical relations between the material bodies and the discursive bodies. In the end, material bodies are malleable as they respond fluidly to discursive practices, while at the same time, the materiality of the body is still tangible and palpable. In the example of participant A, her ability to bear children is a fact of her sexed body, though whether or not she possesses the prescribed characteristics of a mother is not innate to the

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26 See Kessler (1998), for example, on the ambiguity of biological sex that destabilizes the myth of binary sex. The existence of intersex reflects a continuum rather than a dualistic assignment of sex. The ambiguity of sex also implicates the fluidity and the multiplicity of gender manifestations.

27 Discursive bodies underscores the effects that both the essentialist and the constructivist view on gender have on the materiality of the “performance” of bodies. Both the discourse on essential sexed bodies and the discourse on externally located gendered bodies are discursive approximations of the materiality of sexes, which is why traces of both theoretical views on gender were found in the texts of participating WoIS’s narratives.
materiality of her female body, but depends on the process of becoming that is both adaptive and malleable. Following this analysis, textualities of gender reveal the locus of in-between, residing at the hinge between material bodies and discursive bodies, between the power and the restraints of the formation of gendered body, and between the essentialist and radical constructionist view of gender.

**Textual and Discursive Reading about Gender**

In the previous section, my reading about gender in the telling of the WoIS’s story is juxtaposed with theories on gender and with previous literature on WoIS, underscoring the discursive formation of the ascription of gender among WoIS and gesturing toward the (inter)-textual. To take the discursive and the inter-textual further, textualities of gender also signify by the discursive and textual that the story conceals.

In participant D’s telling about the differences between men and women’s degree of willingness to “sacrifice” for their spouses by joining their counterparts to start a sojourn abroad, what is clear in her telling is that women are more willing to make sacrifices while men seem less willing to do so. What it is to be a woman, in the expectation of sacrifice, is in relation—and well in a relation of subservience. WoIS as women and their husbands as men are produced as subjects juxtaposed, and as subjects subjugated by a dyadic power-relation.28

In the analytic of power-relations, Foucault (1982) emphasizes how micro practices both subjects and is subjugated by larger structure of power/knowledge. In other words, a mutually in- and trans- forming dynamic is always at work—while micro practices are constrained by

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28 Similar dynamics can be found in Nixon’s (1997) discussion on the practices of masculinity, noting that “middle-class men’s masculinity was not only different from middle-class femininity but was also defined in a position of dominance over it” (Nixon, 1997, p. 300). It is by underscoring the relation between middle-class men and middle-class women that men and women are produced as subjects juxtaposed. As much as middle-class women were defined in relation to men, middle-class men were also subjugated by the power-relation in a defined social transaction.
larger structures of power knowledge (i.e. larger macro practices), they also have effects on the larger macro practices. To use the example of participant D, Foucault may argue that she is at once produced as a feminine subject through the discursive practices of her narratives, and subjugated as a woman by the constitutive structure of being a WoIS. The text of participant D’s narrative elucidated above illustrates how her ascription of gender informs gendered practices as a WoIS (i.e. an example of how her micro practices inform the macro practices of a WoIS), how she was produced as a woman subject, and how she comes to know herself as a woman, within the larger structure of power/knowledge. In this analysis, what are concealed by the textual of her narrative are the subtle power-relations that are invisible, in addition to the process of how she (and her husband) becomes subjects and is subjugated.

When participant D arrived at her sense of unfairness from her initial declaration that “females are more emotional”, in a way, she has already engaged in the production of a gendered subject (i.e. emotionality lies in the woman subject) and is being subjugated by such practices (i.e. that participant D is feeling emotional by virtue of this subjugation). To underscore the many layers of how power-relations produce participant D as a gendered subject is to take a serious look at how she ascribes to a woman subject, and to highlight the ways in which gendered subjugation has the potential to take a more fluid form with multiplicity of manifestations, unlikely to be pinned down in a straightforward fashion. The analysis of power-relations between subjection and subjugation makes manifest a textuality of gender that makes gender(ing) possible. This textuality of gender is also local in nature, that is, it stays quite close to the exchange and practices of one’s everyday life, evidenced by participant D’s recounting of gendered experiences with ease. Packer’s notion that “social practices constitute real objects and subjects” (Packer, 2011, p. 11, italics original) is fully illustrated in the intricate relationship
between the local nature of the practices of participant D’s everyday life and the embedded power-relations manifested through these practices. Textualities of gender are to be found in the texts that speak to, about, at, and with the lives of WoIS as gendered subjects subjugated, and in the different representations of their lives in the literature. Simultaneously, textualities of gender are what make the lives of WoIS and differential representations of their narratives comprehensible and sensible.

Let us consider the notion of spirituality as another example of the indecidability of the textuality of gender. Readers may have noticed that two participants (i.e. participants A and B) made extensive references to spirituality (specifically Christianity) regarding how it shapes their sojourning experiences, particularly related to their experiences of becoming a wife and/or a mother. On the one hand, the influence of spirituality did not “make the cut” based on the criteria of “three” out of four participants’ explicit mention; on the other hand, spirituality held a substantive presence, such that it demands notice, and even as it does not meet the methodological numerical threshold, so to speak. However, it is perhaps less spirituality or religion in itself that provides the analytic and interpretative link than the function it serves. Indeed, as an organizing force for the lives of participants A and B (i.e. participant B noted “this is the life that God gives me now”), it appears that spirituality provides precisely an organizing and overarching framework within which their roles can be contained and made meaningful. Arguably, however, the function of organizing containment may be equally obtained through one’s faithful practices with yoga, meditation, a delimited exercising routine, or a community of shared-interest. Yet, as much as an organizing structure provides containment and a meaningful ability to narrate one’s roles and struggles, this structure may also limit and constrain. For instance, an unquestioned ascription to certain faithful practices (spirituality and otherwise) may
foreclose or silence any ambivalence about prescribed gender-roles in the arrested (i.e. peaceful) subscription to the roles of mother and/or wife. Spirituality, consequently, while substantive in the narratives of participants A and B, may be of lesser concern in itself, but hermeneutically and textually important for the manner in which it points to the phenomenality of an organizing structure for a WoIS, another layer of textuality within which and alongside which gender emerges.

Gender Ascription as Grammar of Subjectivity

Another reading on textualities of gender signifies by concealing. While the texts of the narratives of WoIS may be read alongside different theoretical views on gender (e.g. essentialist or constructionist), what has clearly come to form in the gendered ascription of WoIS is a discursive thematic that converges in perceiving her functioning as a mother, a wife, and/or a supportive character, as seen in the narratives of all four participants. Additionally, a rather accurate caption, and appellation, is of WoIS as “invisible sojourners” (e.g. De Verthelyi, 1995). Reading textualities of gender now seeks to inquire beyond the assertion or finding that they “are” invisible, but also how and why WoIS are rendered invisible.

One way of finding out what a story conceals is by examining genealogy. For instance, in her article *The Rise of Domestic Woman*, Nancy Armstrong (1991) went through the history of books on conduct, listing practical ways to be a “proper woman” from the seventeenth century onward. Her article illustrated how domestic women were produced alongside the emergence of the middle class, as a separate category, in order to maintain the balance of domestic economy and to keep the discourse of the middle class alive through various historical revolutions. By tracing the history of normative and prescriptive “proper” conduct genealogically, Armstrong
summarized that, “the modern female body comprised a grammar of subjectivity\(^{29}\) capable of regulating desire, pleasure, the ordinary care of the body, the conduct of courtship, the division of labor, and the dynamic of family relationship” (Armstrong, 1991, p. 923). A genealogical review, in this example, underlines larger socio-cultural structures that carry particular kinds of “grammar(s) of subjectivity” inscribed in the gendered body, pointing to regulatory powers emanating from social institutions. The regulatory power of the social institutions is what the discourse of the texts conceals.

To return to the discourse of WoIS as supportive characters and as invisible sojourners, what is being concealed in the discursive is, similarly, the involvement of social institutions that benefit from the invisibility of WoIS. The position of WoIS is a place that ensures the smooth operation of multiple institutional functioning. The student husbands of WoIS are the ones who ought to be productive in their academic pursuit, and they require the most assistance to ensure academic performance and productivity. Therefore, the best way to keep married international students in check is to make sure that their wives cannot work so that they will take care of domestic chores for the student husbands—an economy that supports free and invisible labor! Along the same line, there may well be institutional fear of domestic interruptions that cause ruptures for the students’ academic pursuit, pointing to other structural and social implications in the making of WoIS to live their sojourning lives invisibly. It is by the same fear of domestic interruptions in recent years that more studies began to inquire into the lives of WoIS, only to prescribe ways to be a “proper” WoIS (i.e. Baldwin, 1970; Raymon, 2006). Of significance, the

\[^{29}\text{The notion of “grammar of subjectivity” denotes the characteristic system of inflection (i.e. form) and syntax (i.e. how various elements are put together) of subjectivity. This characteristic system is taken up as shared grammatical features that subjective predicates have, and a close examination of these features reveal what subjectivity consists in and how it is encoded in the linguistic system. It is worth noting any linguistic system is always already embedded in a certain cultural context (hence always carrying certain delimitation in terms of ways of expression), and that some (i.e. Ray, 2001) has considered culture as a grammar of subjectivity and identity.}\]
institutional desire (i.e. promoting the academic performance of the student) and fear (i.e. an unspoken fear of the decline of the student-husband’s academic performance as a result of family discord) are both invisible traces that result in an inscription, operating through the discursive formation of WoIS, at times in the name of “proper” conduct, like in participant B’s notion that “a mother has to cook” or in participant D’s observation that “women have to make the sacrifice”, both marking the trace of marginalization emerging through the WoIS’ narratives.

What an examination of discursive formation offers, in understanding gender ascriptions of WoIS, is a cultural reflection on how institutions in the contemporary society think about family dynamic and higher education in relation to women’s roles and desires. Institutions and social structures are regulatory and restraining agents that keep WoIS in place in order to maintain best productivity and achievements of international students as well as to minimize social ruptures stemming from disruptions of international family units. In this way, one might re-write Armstrong’s note about the modern female body by replacing it with WoIS: the body of WoIS comprised a grammar of subjectivity capable of regulating desire, pleasure, the ordinary care of the body, the conduct of courtship, the division of labor, and the dynamic of family relationship. Curiously, this re-written note is not at all off target in the texts of WoIS’s narratives concerning their ascription of gender, underscoring the fact that it is through the regulatory power of discourse that certain cultural ideal and institutions are kept intact. Meanwhile, it is by the same discourse that WoIS are constituted. A reading into textualities of gender un-conceals the condition through which this discourse and its regulatory power are made intelligible and possible. Placed side-by-side with the texts of the WoIS’s narratives, inter-textualities of gender manifest in-between the textual reading of Armstrong’s reconstruction on
“the modern female body” and that of the discourse of the “invisible sojourners.” A textuality of gender signifies the “grammar of subjectivity” that is inscribed in the body of WoIS.

**Textualities of Gender: In-between Essentialist and Constructionist Views**

By way of putting into context and referring back to the texts of participant WoIS’ narratives, the problematic of questions of subjectivity, interiority, and materiality in understanding gender ascription of WoIS resurface. On the most fundamental level, an understanding of the WoIS cannot ignore the fact that they are biologically female (i.e. all participating WoIS’ narratives note how their “embodied consciousness” shapes their experiences of being a WoIS). Meanwhile, WoIS are not essentially women as prescribed in the social essentialist view on gender because they do participate, reshape and re-inscribe what they do as women during their sojourn as WoIS (i.e. by way of their questioning why women have to have a certain set of characteristics, and by way of the WoIS’s experiential and historical diversity). By all means, WoIS are women in the sense that being women allows them to begin a social engagement that calls forth a different location of departure—different from not being a woman. For example, it is at least partially with some sense of an agentic subject that coheres with a sense of interiority that Participant A took up domestic chores and child-rearing practices during her sojourns, and it is with the same sense of subjectivity that she took up a career prior to her marriage, that she negotiated a turn-taking child-rearing plan with her husband during his study, and that she started driving a car after arriving at the U.S. In all of her practices, Participant A cannot escape from her being a woman, differing from being a non-woman and from being a man. As a consequence, it is by virtue of her being a woman that she takes up a multiplicity of activities as a WoIS. In addition, her being a woman with a material sexed body is at once “enabling and constraining possibilities” of the modes and strategies of adaptation in
her every day practices, such as the time when she recalled feeling intimately connected to her body as a result of irregular menstrual cycles, and from there, realizing that she cannot take for granted the future of her becoming a mother.

In the narratives of participating WoIS, gender ascription is not illustrated in an either/or relation, rather, they offer a textuality of gender that holds the tension between essentialism and constructionism. Textualities of gender are designed to engender multiple possibilities of gender ascription. In the case of WoIS, reading into the layers of meanings about their gender ascriptions give rise to an understanding of gender fluidity that is simultaneously materialized (as real) and constructed, simultaneously conforming (i.e. to the discursive norm for example) and rebelling (i.e. against the prescribed standard of what WoIS “should” be). Within such design, various relationships among WoIS’s subjectivity, materiality, interiority and her gendered performance are realized through her role, with negotiations, as a mother, a wife, a woman, and beyond (what the discursive of the roles signified). Textualities of gender reveal discursive practices on division of gender not only as a “necessary fiction” (Nixon, 1997, p. 301), but also as lived and malleable experiences with a mark of gender. The place where the differential understanding and interpretation occur, is the place of textualities of gender, that is, a place in-between an essentialist and a constructionist view of gender, in-between a discursive truth and fiction, and in-between subjecting and subjugation.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUDING NOTES:
REFLEXIVITY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTUALITIES

Conclusion

In the present research on wives of international students (WoIS), two objectives were delimited to offer understanding, interpretation, and inter-textual readings of the stories of lives of WoIS. The first objective aims to make more visible the lives of WoIS by retelling their stories in individualized account and by a hermeneutic interpretive that gives shape to the delineating elements of how lives are like for WoIS. Several themes emerged from the hermeneutic analysis: First, WoIS experience a shift of anchorage from herself to her husband as she finds that the structure of her days are oriented around that of their husband’s. This change of anchorage influences WoIS’s sense of who she is, her daily routine, her choice of focus during her sojourn, and her overall experiences. The second emerging theme is loss and longing, again covering many aspects of WoIS’ lives, including loss of social relations, loss of connections with original family, loss of financial freedom, and loss of a general sense of meaning and purpose in their new lives. A sense of longing naturally transpires following the pervasive sense of loss during the sojourn of WoIS. While at times the sense of longing fosters a recreation of what has been lost (i.e. attempts to create new social relations or to establish new meanings in life), other times the taste of longing remains palpable and could not be substituted. The dual dynamic of having time/losing time is another theme that emerged, revealing a paradoxical tension—On the one hand, WoIS appreciates having time to spend with children and family, to learn something about household chores that they would not otherwise have taken up, etc., and on the other, they
are losing valuable time in terms of building stronger social relations, pursuing personal dreams and/or education, improving the provisions of her career, etc. The theme of role negotiation comes through the process rather than the contents of the WoIS’ narrative. The significance of this theme lies in its offering many possibilities of differential roles that WoIS could take up or get prescribed with, and the many ways (i.e. attitude, reactions, etc.) WoIS relate to her roles and find personal meanings in this negotiation process. Another interesting theme is a strange paradox between WoIS’ appreciating simultaneously the collectivity of Taiwanese family and community and the American value of individuality and agency, as it pertains to them, individually. Embedded in this theme, the process of an internalization of the social comes into shape—because contextual change occurs inevitably in their sojourn, each WoIS seems to internalize a set of contradictory social values relating to both individuality and collectivity. On the theme of embodied consciousness, the interconnection between mind and body is underlined. At the same time, the extent of implicit-ness of the mind-body interrelation in the narratives of WoIS is made apparent. Last but not least, the theme on marginalization signifies many layers of the lives of WoIS, pertaining to WoIS’s adaptation to a new language, their adjustment to a married life, their sense of loss and longing, and the experiences of being othered vis-à-vis lived cultural differences.

The second objective of this study is to engage with the interview and textual data in a qualitative and interpretative analytic. To fulfill this objective, an inter-textual reading that juxtaposed the narratives of participating WoIS and the literatures on theories of culture and gender was performed, interrogating textualities of culture and gender. In pulling together the inter-textual reading, the earlier chapters of the present study comeback into view and serve as multiple frames of reference relating to previous research (i.e. literature review), theoretical
constructions (i.e. multiple forms of cultural-crossing psychologies), and methodological makeup. Inter-textual reading, on the one hand, subjects the data to a theoretical dialogue with existing literature in the areas of psychological, cultural and gender theories, and on the other to an analytic textual reading that may offer new meanings or findings specific to the narratives of participating WoIS. The finding in the present study—textualities of culture—resists the question of “what culture is” and addresses the issue of “how culture cultures” by outlining the multiple “in-between(s)” that a textual reading of the narratives juxtaposing with other texts (i.e. literature, theories, etc.) unconceals: culture emerges between a variable and its function, between thinking through and thinking beyond others, between the colonizer and the colonized (i.e. in the colonized condition), and between home and host (i.e. in diaspora). In similar fashion, textualities of gender reveals the “becoming” of gender at the hinge between material bodies and discursive bodies, between the power and the restraints of the formation of gendered body, between a discursive truth and a necessary fiction, and most fundamentally, between the essentialist and radical constructionist views of gender. While the pragmatics of the lives of WoIS consist of many dimensions (e.g. the shifted anchorage from self to one's husband, loss and longing, role negotiation, dual dynamic of having time/losing time, etc.), and an implicit meaning to these dimensions necessitates a consequence of WoIS’ getting in touch with her ascriptions to culture and gender that are foreign to herself, embodied and beyond (i.e. thoughts, feelings, and actions), the textualites of culture and gender surface not as “that which is interpreted but rather the domain in which the interpretation occurs” (Silverman, 1994, p. 20). In this way, textualities paint a more complicated and comprehensive pictures of WoIS’ cultural and gender ascriptions. Simultaneously, textualities make the narratives of WoIS comprehensible and sensible. The contribution of this juxtapositional reading, in addition to making intelligible
and fostering appreciation of the lives of WoIS from their viewpoint, is to offer a space where culture and gender can be thought differently, such that subjectivity and materiality are included as well as adaptability and malleability. In other words, reading textualities offers a space where indeterminants are appreciated, where many forms of difference are comprehensible and interpretations can occur without fixed prescription and prediction.
Epilogue: Reflexivity and Autobiographical Textualities

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.
—Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken” (1915)

The first time I met a wife of an international student was in early 2006, when the winter was not quite over yet, and spring had not quite arrived in North America. I was facing two diverging roads with my ensuing graduation from a highly competitive psychology undergraduate program in Taiwan—the program was competitive by virtue of its focus on psychology as a natural science. Having done well enough in both empirical research and academic performance in that program, I was to either continue on the path of scientific psychology, or to explore an alternative. I had no idea what an alternative to scientific psychology should look like, but I had taken an abundance of courses atypical to the core of scientific psychology during my undergraduate years, such as social psychology with an emphasis on historicity, sociology that touches on radical feminist and post-modern theories, indigenous psychology, and qualitative research methodology. Some of these courses were offered at the graduate level, and I took them as an advanced undergraduate student. To this day, to the best of my recollection, I cannot trace the proper memory to what exactly I have learned in those mind-baffling courses. Yet a part of me is quite certain that this is the context in which I took the road less travelled by. And there, I encountered a wife of international student in my life for the first time.

Having been exposed to and inscribed with ideas of first-wave feminism, I was knee deep in a newfound determination to switch my academic course to study the human science approach to psychology. I was passionate and ready to explore the world of hermeneutic, phenomenology,
and existential psychology. At the transition between winter and spring in 2006, I was visiting schools and programs in North America to see if they would be a good fit for my ongoing path. I was welcomed by a local international student, whose wife and children were accompanying his study. I had a wonderful time during my visit, as the programs I visited had everything that I wanted. In the meantime, while I was observing the beautiful life that this family had, I was unable to reconcile within my thoughts the feminist theories I knew then (that promotes a particular form of gender equality), and the seemingly meaningful and fulfilling life that this woman was having as a wife of an international student. I could not make sense of a person who willingly gave up her life just to be a study-partner of her spouse. And just when I thought that I was the one who took the road less traveled by, I wondered if she also did so in a manner beyond my comprehension?

In a way, this dissertation is a text that carries traces of autobiographical textualities.

**Autobiographical textuality**

elaborates the autobiographical features (or meanings) of a text. It characterizes the respects in which a particular text develops autobiographical concerns. These concerns remain inherent in the text although they are not necessarily its central themes, issues, or foci of discussion. (Silverman, 1991, p. 89)

In this concluding chapter, I invoke the first encounter I had with a WoIS to elucidate an epistemological formation of how this dissertation functions, how it operates as a text, how it incorporates meaning, and the respect in which it enacts autobiographical considerations. By invoking this encounter, this chapter writes with a reflexivity that take into consideration Gadamer’s emphasis on application to self, Ricoeur’s attention to personal commitment, and Packer’s thesis on the intersubjective nature of language and communication. Indeed, personal
involvement “is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives” (Oakley, 1981, p. 58). As my personal involvement is the condition under which I come to know and admit WoIS into my life, so do they me. Reflexivity is a textuality of my reading of the texts (i.e. the interviews, the literature, and the inscriptions of the literature) and the effects of the reading and the interviews have on me. By way of concluding notes, I share some of this reading and their effects.

After 2006, I met many more WoIS during my own journey in studying human science psychology in America. Many of the WoIS I met had come and gone, yet I have stayed, meeting more of them. I have long wanted to do a project (i.e. a piece of writing) that ties together all the theories that I have acquired, but that project also had to be personally meaningful, and empirically founded. I was not looking to do a project that dresses up in fancy theories yet looks right through the lives lived, for I still remembered my initial passion when I found my ways to hermeneutics and phenomenology in the burgeoning years when I first turned to human science psychology. Perhaps it is not by sole luck that I decided to do an empirical study on WoIS in the early years of my doctoral training. I experimented with phenomenology, autoethnography, case study, genealogical analysis, and gender theories, all of which may have found threading traces through different parts of this dissertation/text. Come last but not least, was the influence of deconstructive theories. In addition to reading Merleau-Ponty as a phenomenologist, Foucault as a genealogist, and Ricoeur and Gadamer as philosophers of the linguistic, I began to see traces of deconstruction in their writing. Also, along with the forces of post-colonial theories and third wave feminism, I started to learn that there are many creative ways to read a text, and to read a person’s life. I thought to myself, how cool would it be if I could do a project that locates at the
place in-between hermeneutic and deconstruction?! There it was, I ran into textuality (without knowing its name) in the midst of my recounting a fragment of my autobiography.

Silverman writes,

An autobiography is one’s own life as written. Autobiographizing is writing one’s own life. An autobiographical text is a particular written version, fragment, or account of one’s own life. Autobiographical textuality is the feature of a text (autobiographical or otherwise) which characterizes the writing of a version, fragment, or account of one’s own life. (Silverman, 1991, p, 103)

This dissertation is by no means an autobiography, but with the utmost earnestness a text with autobiographical textualities that characterize the writing of a version, fragment, and account of my years of doctoral training and the years of my life living as an international student. In these years training, I was exposed to many more theories of cultural-crossing psychologies, to theories of both hermeneutics and deconstruction, to both qualitative and quantitative literature on research methodology, and to more waves of feminist theories. This text/dissertation is possible only by means of an autobiographical textuality of the text—an autobiographical textuality that characterizes the writing of a version of my intellectual life, of a fragment of my intellectual product, and an account for my life during the years of an Other academic pursuit, while sojourning as an Other (culturally and otherwise). An autobiographical textuality is what hides the traces of excitement and critical thinking I found in myself when reading texts on WoIS using the frames of cultural psychology and indigenous psychology; it also makes invisible the sense of dullness, single-mindedness, and disturbance when I read texts within the frame of cross-cultural psychology. As if sublimated, an autobiographical textuality puts all the feelings in the trace of my writing, and makes space for the text to appear, without
prejudice, that is, without the force of totalizing or of making it singular/uniﬁed. Simultaneously, the autobiographical textuality of the text is still prejudicial, in that it contains that of my life through my reading of many texts, though it only emerged as a footprint—a version, a fragment, and an account.

My first transformation in relation to my approaching this project occurred when I did a pilot case study on a WoIS in 2009. I was “blown away” during and after my interviews with the WoIS I spoke with—she was a mother of two with a highly paid job in Taiwan prior to joining her husband to the U.S. so that he could pursue his dream of getting a Ph.D. She would never have to become “domesticated” (as a mother and a wife) had she kept her well-paying job at an internationally known company. I was surprised by her steadfast commitment to a life she chose without detriment, and the conversation we had fundamentally challenged many of my beliefs about the meaning of gender equality and cultural differences. Perhaps most important of all, I was confronted with the rudimentary element of humanity, resilience, and hence the malleability of any ideology, theory, or discourse. The sense of being humbled yet again reminded me of my first encounter of a WoIS in 2006.

At other points, I was able to identify with the WoIS I spoke to, particularly on the incomprehensibility of the discourse of cultural shock that I read so much of in the literature throughout the years of my study in the ﬁeld of psychology. I found that cultural shock discourse offers a brilliant conceptual vocabulary, but the experience of always living in two completely disparate worlds as an Other in one’s immediate surrounding can never properly be captured by what the textbooks coined as “cultural shock.” The discourse is so one-dimensional that it cannot help but miss the complexity and the nuances of the experiences of a hybrid person, a person in translation, and/or a person who lives in two worlds at the same time.
Similarly, acculturation discourse never sat well with me either. Years ago, an American friend of mine told me that he was planning on taking the first “two weeks” for “adjustment” and “acculturation” when he moved to South America for the first time for a job. I remember thinking to myself, “two weeks, are you kidding? I have been in the U.S. for two years now and I am still not ‘accultured.’” Though I never shared this thought with the friend, he later told me that he, too, never really “made it” in terms of becoming an “acculturated” person “integrated” into the local culture he resided in. Despite being highly effective at his job, he is always and inescapably the “gringo” from the get-go—for him, it was over-determined. I felt validated, by him, and similarly by the many ensuing WoIS I met. What became clear to me in relation to my own transformation as a psychologist-to-be, as a researcher, and as a person, is the insufficiency of any theory, and particularly the impossibility of “resolving” the cultural differences by making them “the same”, by offering “programs” and support to “assuage” the experiences of difference, or by creating a “common language.” As a result of this transformative realization, I learned to trust myself more as a full person, and to trust myself more with my thoughts and feelings, my ways of being and my uses of languages—all of those later had significant effects on my approach to research and clinical work, as well as my approach to various vicissitudes that come with life.

Between the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, I conducted the official interviews with all of my participants to prepare for this project. It was a year of my academic life when everything was seemingly put on suspense. I had finished all of my course work, terminated with all of my patients, and stopped teaching—I was supposed to be writing and to prepare myself for a year of sojourn for a clinical psychology internship. It was quite a joyful year in respect to the manageable workload and the immense freedom of time, yet it was also a difficult
year in respect to the tangible yet invisible sense of uncertainty—the feelings of not knowing where life will turn from there on. My interviews with the participating WoIS took place in that year. In my reading and re-reading of the transcripts of the interviews, I found myself yet again being inspired and guided by this group of women, who too, was living a life in suspense. Nevertheless, they met me with the most generous and gentle manner. They joined in my curiosity about their lives that had been deemed invisible and truly indescribable in words, and they pointed me to the multiplicity of directions that a life in suspense can potentially lead.

Participant A was a friend of a friend. She was a mother, a devout Christian, a sociologist, and had been a journalist. When I met with her for the interview, she treated me with her homemade sweets, fruits, and warm welcome. I remember listening intently to her description of her own transformation, from a career woman and a social activist, to a domicile mother. I heard her sharing her initial struggle, and imagined my own struggle. I remember asking myself if I too, would be able to take up my life so readily with the cards that were dealt to me, and with the choices that I was about to make? I remember leaving that conversation with a sense of awe, and a strong admiration for her. In re-reading the text/transcript of our interview, I read with pleasant surprises in the texts that interrupt the discourse on gender-based oppression not by the way of dispute, but by the way of a viewpoint that stood in-between. Similarly, the absence and the silence around the topics of cultural shock and acculturative stress in the text of our interview spoke volumes to a new thinking about psychology in cultural-crossing contexts.

Today, participant A has “upgraded” from mother of one to that of two, her husband is getting ready to graduate with a postdoctoral position awaiting. Participant A’s family is planning on residing in the city where the interview took place for a couple more years.
Participant B was Participant A’s friend. The first time we met was for the purpose of the interview. She had been e-mailing and calling me to find out more about the research, and she quickly decided that a meeting at her home would be appropriate. We met on a weekday morning after her husband had gone to school. B was busy taking care of her daughter and house chores when I arrived. She invited me to stay for lunch even before we started the interview. She spoke fiercely with blunt opinions. She spoke about the pain of racism and the appreciation of kindness encountered. She talked about her experience of gender-based oppression in a patriarchal system without using those words. She knew the effects of silencing without staying silent. While she enjoys solitude, she does not consider her life boring. I remember the joined moment of frustration at the cultural and gender-based injustice. I also remember the challenging moments when I was humbled by the assumptions that were made about the life of a WoIS. She made announcements that seemingly bought into the paradigm of cross-cultural psychology, while also giving me additional nuanced examples of why her life lived is not just about those prescribed meanings of culture, and which profoundly questioned the paradigm. Although participant B has come out to gather with some of our common friends a couple of times after our interview, I have not been receiving any updates from her for many months. I do not know her whereabouts as I write this concluding note.

Participant C was another friend of a friend, and she was also acquainted with participant A. Participant C and I met on her day-off for the research interview. She had come to me because of her eagerness to help, and her eagerness to share her story that was going to be “very different” from other WoIS. Participant C has a unique personal background in that she did not have much access to financial support from her original family for most of her life. In this context, she shared with me her relationship with her husband, her predicament of taking up a
job during her sojourn, and her hopes about the future. She was also the one participant who was the most comfortable with speaking in English and the most motivated to learn about American culture. I felt quite empathic to participant C’s situation, and I was encouraged by her resilience. I recall my reciprocal eagerness to offer help, and a strange identification with her ceaseless courage to explore and to be a part of a new culture. Participant C reminded me of a host of women in migration, who are so fearless in entering into a world unknown in the hope for something different, and the struggles and the beauty those fearless moments must have borne. With all the shared “elements” similar to that of a “typical” WoIS, participant C also led a life that transgressed the “limit” of theoretical and institutional boundaries. And I found no theories that can properly account for such a life lived. Today, participant C has gotten a new job with less workload, and she is trying to fulfill her dream of pursuing further education—she is in the process of applying for graduate schools in America.

Participant D was a friend of participant C. She was initially unsure about being interviewed because she was unsure about what there is to be said about her life. It turned out that she spoke more than all of the other participants, and her insights about the sojourn were not only accurate, but also reflexive and thoughtful. What I found most memorable of my interview with participant D was her passion and effort to find ways to give back and contribute to her homeland, Taiwan. I have come to know about those similar impulses I have in me, and her mentioning of those dreams was just enough to activate my inclusion of certain literature as a distanced contribution I attempted to make. If there were to be a true division between Indigenous and Western psychology, elements of participant D’s interview is probably the one that corresponds most with the theories of indigenous psychology—the values she holds, the intimate details and the practices of her life in Taiwan, all of those were transmitted in her
speech, to the transcribed texts, and to my reading of and writing about the texts. Though the text did not end there, there were still moments of disruptions that disclose a world that is more representative of the hegemonic Western psychology, many of those disguised under the notion of “cultural difference” in Participant D’s words. After much struggle to find meanings in her sojourn in the U.S., as of today, participant D is back in Taiwan to do what she knows the most—teaching—as her contribution to Taiwan, and as her personal dream. She is planning on visiting America during the summer when schools are on break, that is, in-between semesters.

There were so many inter-textual connections between the narratives of the WoIS and the previous literature on WoIS and on cultural and gender theories. In carrying out the interviews, Packer (2011) noted that

the researcher’s knowledge of language plays a crucial role in the conduct and analysis of an interview… Communicative and intersubjective relations should be treated as the bases on which subjects, and subjectivities, are formed. (Packer, 2011, p. 120)

Indeed, it is difficult to tease out how much of the inter-textual dialogue transpires as a consequence of my knowledge of the multiple texts, of my knowledge of the language, and of communicative and intersubjective relations. Theories could have easily occluded the participants’ lives lived, and yet my participants and I have all begged to differ. It was perhaps at the locus of in-between that the texts/speech of the lives of WoIS makes an utterance, in ways that were unintelligible to us all, with or without theories. And I remember how much appreciation I felt for this gift that the participating WoIS offered, in-between a full willingness to disclose and an ambivalence to put their sojourn into language—a “pregnant” speech.

In the years of my graduate training, I am living a life as a sojourning international student, having a seemingly end-goal of graduation but without a plan beyond that allegedly end-
point. Hence in these years of lives, I was also exposed to the multiple elements of living as a sojourner that many WoIS endured, like that of a change of anchorage, loss and longing, the paradox between individuality and collectivity, and marginalization. I, too, went through channels of negotiation, had direct and immediate access to embodied consciousness of a female body, and often reflected on my personal context as a diverging origin.

The act of writing this dissertation fostered another transformation that I did not anticipate when I started on this journey. It had not occurred to me, but has gradually become clear in the process of writing (and life), that many forms of in-between really signifies a relationship that is mutually transforming. The false dichotomy between many dualistic concepts (e.g. East versus West, self versus other, individualism versus collectivism, IP versus WP, essentialism versus constructionism, etc.) has been made clear in many theoretical discussions. However, the fundamental connectedness of the two (or multiple) worlds in which one lives, while ultimately disparate, is still always already in relation to each other (one another), and always mutually forming and in-forming each other.

In this second transformation, I learned to not hold on to theory, but to hold on to the effects of the theories on me, alongside how the effects inform my ways of relating to and/or transformed with others. In a strange but not surprising way, this adds tremendously to my ability to listen for the implicit and the unspoken elements in clinical encounters and helps me become more in touch and at once less concerned about everything between my worst fear and my utmost pleasure. In my attempts to make the WoIS fuller and “whole” by wrestling with the prescriptive existing discourses that wrote about them, I was simultaneously admitted to my own full- and whole-ness, in a way liberating of many discourses that had been holding me in check. This liberation is restraining, too, in its force to shape my relations with others in previously un-
thought ways. Because preconceived patterns are broken, people got confused and disoriented with certain non-conforming ways of being I perform. And that shift, is where a relationship \textit{in-between} two people/concepts/understandings is brought into light, shaken awake, and made possible of an opportunity for something different to emerge. The relationship between Eastern and Western schools of thoughts, the relationship between IP and WP, and the relationship between self and other is akin to this. It is not that one is X and the other is non-X, it is not a matter of who is right or wrong, better or worse, but it is a challenge of whether or not one (and the other) can fundamentally admit the other into their corresponding yet completely disparate worlds, such that a transformation of both cracks open with many possibilities that could not have appeared otherwise—I come to learn experientially about a joint relational process that is at once the same and different. I am transformed in this process of writing, by the encounters I had with the WoIS, and the traces of transformation are tailored in the textuality of this text.

Silverman said, “Autobiographizing is the writing of one’s own life. The writing enacts the life as a text” (Silverman, 1991, p. 113). I have enacted my life in the writing of this text, interlacing with other texts (i.e. WoIS’s narratives and cited literature), so as to demonstrate an autobiographical textuality as an “exorbitant” (Silverman, 1994, p. 82) to the text. Text spills over, goes beyond itself, and that “there is always a remainder according to which the text affirms an identity for itself” (Silverman, 1994, p. 82). To that end, the practice of autobiographical textuality is the practice of reaching beyond the limits of an autobiography to the side of the exorbitant, while at the same time, affirming an identity of the life that the text is writing about. The words that were left unsaid, the details of the lives that were not accounted for, and the theories and literature that were beyond the scope of this project to be reviewed, all of which is both excessive and contained within the traces, marks, and sediments of the text, in
the autobiographical textualities of the text. To be sure, autobiographical textualities of this
text/dissertation are “both a condition… and the practice of the text” (Silverman, 1994, p. 86),
and this is how this piece of writing comes to its concluding notes.

It is now 2014, again on the cusp of winter and spring. I have come near to the end of my
doctoral training in clinical psychology with a broadly human science focus, writing the last
chapters of a dissertation on WoIS, and completing my clinical internship with a focus on Asian
mental health. Looking back, the life of my doctoral journey has written itself a hermeneutic
circle—an end to a beginning, and a beginning to an end. I am in transition again. I cannot help
but think about the notion of time as in-between, as “neither the staring point nor the place of
conclusion,” that “time is in between the self and the life that the self narrates… This time is
what will be called the time of autobiography as it structures and delimits the autobiographical
textuality” (Silverman, 1991, p. 113). By way of questioning/interrogation, I wonder, did I just
resort to time, as a part of the concluding notes, to delimit a contour between my self and the life
that I narrated via this text, by way of an “autobiographical temporality” (Silverman, 1991, p.
124)? Sure enough, an autobiographical temporality is a feature of autobiographical textuality.

Autobiographical temporality gathers together the dispersed aspects of a life and gives
them a shape. The shaping and recounting of a life establishes it as this life and not that
one. The narrated life is structured so as to render a particular character determinate in
accordance with its unique qualities. The writing of one’s own life involves a re-marking
of its most significant features. The remarking of that which develops or lives as a life is
the autobiographical textuality understood temporally in terms of the autobiographical
text. While the historical time of autobiography puts something into the text,
autobiographical textuality in its temporal dimension is what the text puts into history.

(Silverman, 1991, p. 124)

Having given a shape (in time) to a life I have lived in the years of graduate schooling, two diverging roads are presented in front of me, once more. I am to choose many forms of in-between, in between an academic versus a clinical career, in between a life of a family versus a life of a career woman, in between staying in a foreign land that has been a home for many years and returning to a homeland that has been foreign to me for these years, and perhaps most remarkably, in between the me that I have narrated and the me that is Other than that utterance. At this juncture, I conclude by marking the excesses and the surpluses of the autobiographical textualities of this text/dissertation.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Announcements posted on public discussion board

Hi all:

My name is Mengchun Chiang, a doctoral student at the Psychology Department at Duquesne University. I am conducting research to understand the experiences of wives of international students, and I would like to invite those of you that are wives of international students to participate in this study. You are eligible to participate in this study if (1) you are currently a wife of an international student in the United States (that is, if you hold a F2 or H2 VISA for your stay in the US) and (2) that you have been living as a wife of international students for more than five months and no more than five years.

Participation will be invited to an interview that I will be conducting with you to understand your experiences as wives of international students more fully. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. The original data will be locked with passwords in a secured computer, and they will be deleted after the research is completed. All identifiable personal information that could identify you will be eliminated in my final report of the study and all subsequent presentations and papers based on this data.

If you would like to participate in this study or want to know more about details of participation, please send me an email (chiangm@duq.edu) or give me a call at 412 567 3914.

Sincerely,

Mengchun Chiang
Appendix B. Sample questions for the interview

Keeping in mind that the aim of the present study is ostensibly around the two themes of culture and gender, particularly with regard to the acculturation and adjustment processes and the constitution of subjectivities of wives of international students. To the extent that the participants get there on their own with my initial open-ended question, and depending on the natural flow of the conversation, I may also address some but not all the following questions to assist the unfolding of the interview so as to shed light on the two intended themes. These questions are samples that provide a structural guide during the interview.

1. Tell me about your life as a wife of an international student.
2. Describe your typical day.
3. Describe your thoughts and feelings about your typical day.
4. Describe what being the wife of an international student means to you.
5. Describe a belief about yourself that has changed and a belief about yourself that has not changed before and after your journey to the US.
6. As an international student’s wife in the US, do you feel that people respond to you first as a woman, or as an Asian woman?
7. How is it that your sense of being a woman in the U.S. differs from in Taiwan?
8. In what way do you think of yourself as a woman in the US? Give me some examples.
9. How does being a woman pertain to being a parent in the U.S. as compared to being in Taiwan? Give me some examples.
10. How does your and your husband’s sense of yourself as a mother/woman any different in the U.S. as it is in Taiwan?
11. Can you speak about the differences of the quality of marriage and intimacy between your life in the U.S. and in Taiwan? Give me some examples.

12. How is it that you see yourself differently ethnically and culturally in the U.S. as compared to in Taiwan? Give me some examples.
Appendix C. Narratives of the participants

As all the interviews were conducted in Mandarin-Chinese, the data presented here has gone through a form of translation/interpretation. This section is presented so that readers can get a sense of how the participants spoke about their experiences, as close as possible in their words. Though a layer of translation/interpretation is inevitable, some organization that put the narratives of the WoIS into individualized broad categories and edited out the pauses or certain details has already occurred in this re-presentation.

Narratives of Participant A

Journey to the U.S.

Participant A’s journey to the U.S. is intertwined with her decision about getting married. Participant A has been dating her husband for seven and a half years prior to the husband getting accepted to a prestigious Ph.D. program in the US. Participant A reported that they did not get married for many years because of discord between the two families as a complicating factor. After participant A’s husband accepted the offer to the PhD program, participant A and her husband decided to get married and they spent three months planning for the wedding. They got married in July 2009, and participant A’s husband flew to the U.S. right after the wedding. Participant A was working as a freelance writer at the time, so she stayed in Taiwan to complete her projects prior to joining her husband in the U.S. in four months. Participant A reported that she enjoyed the last four months in Taiwan quite well as it felt like the last time she has as a single woman. She noted, “The most difficult part was the process of flying to the U.S. all by myself, because I feel that it was a journey of a process of losing my single life.”

After participant A arrived in the U.S., she felt that having a concrete personal goal for the early part of her journey is helpful. She said, “every stage of life is in need of a goal, and that will provide some sense of stability. So the first year after I arrived in the U.S., I felt that at least I can try to better my English.” Participant A described her first year in the U.S. in the following way: “There was more of a sense of uncertainty in the first year, so me and my husband also fought more about why he decided to come to the U.S., and that consists of the most emotional content of our altercations, and then I would say that I wanted to go back to Taiwan, more like a reprimand to him, but that is a part of the process of the first year.” In addition, participant A noted that she “had an attitude like a traveler or a visitor during the first half year when I was here [in the U.S.]... what I was able to identify is that I did not yet know my role, so my identification was that my husband wants me here, a descriptive one, but that my goal was to better my English, and that I do not know what my next step will be, but I was clear about wanting to improve my English.”

A recalled that she enjoyed walking and biking during the first year and a half of her time in the U.S. because they did not have a car. She remembered this time in comparison to her busy life in Taipei, and noted that it allowed her to have better physical health. She eventually decided to apply for graduate schools in the U.S. and she started to sit in on university classes, which kept her life quite busy. Participant A wanted to be a part of the local community as quickly as she could, and noted that “the role of a student seems to be the only way for a foreigner to enter into the local American life, and this seems to be the only way that I can think of to advance my linguistic ability.”

After a year and a half, participant A felt that she started to have a sense of stability in life: she started to volunteer at a local library teaching Chinese, started to participate in activities and
serve in a church, and she started to feel more connected to the community. In the meantime, she was pregnant and gave birth to her first daughter, which inspired her to reflect on her struggles identifying herself as a woman, a mother, and a sojourner in the U.S. She eventually came to terms with the struggles and adopted the new role as a full-time mother and a housewife of an international student (see more on the section of participant A’s reflection on her gender and cultural roles). In her third year in the U.S. (the year when this interview took place), participant A reported that her goal is to continue learning about how to keep her household clean and organized (because this was challenging when participant A was younger), and to practice making birthday cakes. Reflecting on her learning to maintain a tidy and ordered home, participant A noted, “it seems to me that my current role in this temporal and geographical context gives me a chance to take my time learning something that I have always wanted to achieve, without pressure, without a time frame. That is, I can take an entire year to learn this thing [cleaning the house] slowly, and step-by-step making sure that I do what I do in the best way I can. This is a small thing, but in my mind it is huge.” In addition to adopting the role of a mother and a housewife, participant A carried on her goal of advancing her English by integrating it into her daily routine, after becoming a mother and having been in the U.S. for almost three years, she said, “I go to the playground to practice English.”

Reflections on being/becoming a F2
In reflecting on her role as a WoIS, participant A expressed a personal struggle in the context of her cultural background, personal history, and learned academic discourse. When thinking about becoming a WoIS initially, she recalled, “I felt that going abroad means that there will be no next step of my career.” Her gut was not entirely wrong in its felt-sense but missed the target in terms of its content after she arrived at the U.S. and became a mother. She said, “What seems slightly more frustrating is the fact that I barely have my own time now [as a mother] to follow American or Taiwanese news… mostly because I also need time for myself to sleep… Slowly I learned that even though the news are important [to me in the past], it is not so important that I will lose my value completely if I did not follow up on the most updated news.” She continued, “If I showed what I do all day now to the me that was in Taiwan, I would probably have done everything I can to not marry this guy, to not go abroad, to not become an F2… But this is a process, it didn’t just happen, and that I have changed in this process, so now I actually quite enjoy my life… The first time I heard about the role of F2 was during my junior year in college when I was taking an organizational sociology class. In that particular context, we were critical of the role of F2 from a sociological perspective, that F2 represents an oppressive role, and that it means women were not treated equally…. So I feel that this had strong influence on much of my initial emotional reaction toward being an F2 when I first arrived here. Because I have internalized the feeling that, if a woman becomes a F2, that means that you do not have a life of your own.”

In reflecting on the adjustment after she arrived at the US, participant A reported, “A big adjustment I experienced after coming to the U.S. is my relationship with [my husband], it might not be related to coming to the US, but coming to the U.S. made the conflict more visible, the conflict of intimacy… It seems like being a wife is the most important thing to do to foster the growth of our intimacy.” Participant A pointed out the crucial issue of timing that “many of U.S. got married right before coming to the U.S. with our husband” because it is the only legal way for WoIS to join their partner to their sojourn. Although participant A was able to recall some of her difficulty adjusting to her role as a WoIS, she has also found her journey to be personally meaningful in relation to her spirituality. She said, “My husband said that most people think that
I came here to help him out because he came to obtain a PhD, but in reality, it was him that helped me come here to serve God and spread the gospel… we both knew very clearly that God wants U.S. to be in [this city]… and we came here and decided to join the Chinese church… with my temperament, I would definitely prefer an American church, why would I go to a Chinese church? I would like to be connected locally by attending an American church instead of a Chinese church. For this reason we feel very certain that God wanted U.S. to serve the Chinese church, to serve these Chinese students… and for my husband, he is also clear about the fact that what he is studying is meaningless and valueless in itself…. They are empty and simply his responsibility so he has to do it well, but after all, if his life can influence anyone, then it will be truly meaningful.”

A also reflected on her value and regret during her journey in the U.S. pertaining to personal history and cultural background, and she relate this reflection to her prior professional and academic engagement: “The most valuable thing for U.S. coming to the U.S. is my chance to be a servant of God in the US, and a regret I have has to do with family, that it is something I have to let go. I miss my family and friends the most, and I do not miss the limitation and boxes when living in Taiwan, a living style that concerns only ‘we’…. I used to do research and engaged in social activism when I was completing my Masters, but my ideal was not grounded… For example, I care deeply about environmental issues, and I would have interviews with environmental activists when I was a journalist, but I never participated with my own feet. I do not know why, but after I became a housewife, I found the answer to the uncomfortable feelings I had [when I was a journalist]. I can completely realize that a housewife is like a laborer, and being a laborer makes me understand that I was completely disconnected from all the theories from Marx onward. But becoming a mother and a housewife also makes me a laborer, and then I am reconnected from that sense of disconnection, so my body and my soul become united again… I found the feelings that I have been searching for in this role that I resisted the most when I was looking at it, and I feel very deeply about this.”

Narratives on the cultural axis
When participant A reflected on her gender and cultural experiences, much of her description naturally occupied a space of intersection between cultural and gendered axes. On the cultural axis, participant A compared cultural differences between Taiwan and the US. For example, participant A reflected on her experience of different kinds of work-life balance between Taiwan and the US. In her words, “When I worked [in Taiwan], without thinking about it I tend to often focus only on work, which then may sacrifice my time with my family and loved ones.” And she observed that people pay more attention to family value versus work dedication in the US. Participant A thought of the U.S. as a “foreign land” that values “self-creation,” “new learning” and “social skills,” and she talked about her sojourn here as a means to equip her with those qualities. In contrast, Taiwan was thought about with “traditional value” and that family is important in the sense that elderly’s opinion carries more weight than youngster’s desire for independence and privacy. Participant A used the example of the expectation during the Chinese New Year’s visit with families to illustrate this point. She said, “For example, [my husband] grandmother will definitely insist that I join his family for Chinese New Year, but for me, it makes sense to take turns [between my and his family] every year.”

Another comment participant A made on the cultural axis concerns pragmatic experiences in the process of acculturation. She gave the following example: “What I do not feel like participating is the activities held by the department of [my husband]… Basically it is hard to
have a conversation with anyone because I don’t know how to chat in the U.S. because I’m not integrated in the culture, and my English is not good enough. I’m okay with the basic stuff, but like if they talk about jokes, it is very hard for me to understand.”

The last notable comment on the cultural axis the came through participant A’s interview is her realization of the experience of otherness despite having the best intention to join with the locals. She reported, “During my first year here, I would join the discussion group with mostly Caucasian participants, and I would also be very aware of my being a foreigner, and that I am a foreigner who comes to the U.S. with my husband… Another example is when I go to the playground with my children, I would have very clear realization that I am an Asian mother… the difference is that I am a foreigner, so I am not equal to local Americans. “In the social context of the playground, I am always an outsider… I am most likely to interact with non-Americans, I interact with them or they me, because sometimes I would initiate a conversation or they would, the highest [likelihood], and then it would be a non-Caucasian American, and then it would be white people. If I were to interact with a Caucasian, there had to be some commonality between us, for example, one time us two, that the two children [of ours] share birthdays around the same time, so we started chatting, or that both of our husbands work at [the university]. There has to be a point [of connection]… There was also an American who chatted with me because her husband was more, that he works in China, so they are the ones who are more atypical with diverse cultural background”

Narratives on the gender axis
On the gender axis, participant A reported an experience of gender-role identification that coincides with her motherhood (i.e. identification as a mother), which came about as a result of participant A’s getting married so as to join her husband’s pursuit of higher education in the U.S. In this process, participant A also reflected on the becoming or learning to become a housewife in relation to her gender-role. Spiritual and embodied dimensions of gender-role were clearly present in her description. Most notably is participant A’s reflection on a transformation of her view of herself as a woman, and her view of gender-role in relation to her sojourning experiences.

Participant A started by talking about her role as a mother. Participant A noted that she thought very little about herself a woman when she lived in Taiwan, and that continued even after she first moved to the US. She reported one memory of thinking about herself in gendered terms while she was in Taiwan, and it is related to her mothering role. She said, “I used to live next to a [subway] station, and one day when I was walking to take the subway, I was walking on the street, and I suddenly had a very deep feelings, which came from the fact that my uterus has been ill for one to two years, that [the feeling] is that it would be God’s blessing if I can eventually become a mother because this has never been my choice.”

When thinking about her gender role, participant A first reflected on its relation to the role of a mother. She said, “I think that whether or not a woman gets married does not have strong influence on her life, but whether or not a woman becomes a mother will change her life forever.” She reported initial confusion when she was pregnant with her first daughter: “I felt quite disconnected when I first got pregnant… Instead of preparing to become a mother by learning about how to feed and raise a baby, I spent a lot of time learning English during that time, which indicates that my decisions were based more on my needs, rather than on the fact that my baby will be born soon.” Two to four months after participant A’s daughter was born, she began to realize that she has entered into the “mother role.” Participant A reported that she
started to be “able to enjoy” the experience of being a mother, and she finally understand “within herself” why other women often report a positive experience of being a mother. She noted that becoming a mother is like becoming an educator. In her words, “I feel that in terms of my relationship with my daughter, I play the educator’s role.”

In regards to participant A’s reflection on her personal feelings and life changes as a result of being a mother, she said, “My emotional need for being a mother relies mostly on the women I met in the English classes, all of them have children and they do not belong to a church [they also are not acquaintances that engage in small talk in the children’s playground]. There was a woman from Lithuania, one from Korea, and two from China… these are the ones I would call them up and ask if they would like to hang out… In any case, once you become a mother you will start only make friends with other parents with young children, this is a structural dilemma… Simply put, mothers with children do not usually go out and have a meal together, we usually plan on hanging out during a time that our children are awake. Only women with no children will plan on hanging out around dinner time.”

In addition to the role of a mother, participant A indicated that another example relevant to the “woman’s experience” in the gender axis is learning to cook in the context of being a housewife. She reflected on her initial struggle with the role of a housewife, “Another thing has to do with the role of a housewife… because my mother was a housewife and she did not enjoy it when I was growing up… anyways, so when I first came to the US, I had a feeling that I am slowing entering into the role of a housewife.” For example, participant A said that did not used to cook in Taiwan, and her husband does not pressure her to cook for the family. However, while there was little pressure, participant A learned to enjoy the process of cooking. She noted that she took the experience of shopping at a grocery store as a chance to learn about different English words of vegetables and cooking materials. She came to learn that cooking is not just about “the tastiness on that palate, but also about an emotional and spiritual deliciousness… I suddenly realized the beauty of cooking as an art, and that’s how it enters into my life.”

Participant A also reflected on her learning as a housewife in terms of “cleaning the house.” She noted that she used to be disorganized and had tremendous difficulty keeping her own apartment tidy and neat, but she has a spiritual motivation to learn about household organization because she believes that is how she serve God and others. Perhaps the most interesting comment participant A made on the gender axis has to do with her reflection on how her role of a mother and a housewife slowly engenders a transformation of her understanding of herself as a woman. She reported a process of getting more settled into her current role as a mother and a housewife in the context of a F2 VISA holder, which carried a specific academic connotation. She reflected, “If I showed what I do all day now to the me that was in Taiwan, I would probably have done everything I can to not marry this guy, to not go abroad, to not become an F2… [refer to p. 231 for the rest of this narrative that ends with ‘Because I have internalized the feeling that, if a woman becomes a F2, that means that you do not have a life of your own’].” Participant A kept on talking about her experience in the U.S. meeting other women who have had the experiences of being an F2. In particular, she referred to a wife of a professor of a local renounced university. Participant A recalled that the professor’s wife told her that “having a hundred degrees is not as valuable and as important as raising a child with good education.” Participant A also learned from the professor’s wife that becoming a volunteer could be another way for participant A to learn and improve her English ability, allowing her to realize that “[the role of F2] is not as limited and as biased as what I thought it was.”
A gave eloquent reflection on her transformation into becoming more in sync with her gender-role identification. She said, “Three years ago when I was in Taiwan… I already had a hard time accepting my role as a woman… In comparison to who I am now, I feel like I have fully accepted myself as a woman, it is very clear, I feel comfortable and free. And in terms of the political or intimate relationship between women and men, I am no longer bothered by it, and I do not think that there are anything to be managed [in terms of the women versus men relationship].” Participant A reported, “gender politics used to bother me in Taiwan.” The example she gave, however, highlighted a dilemma of women’s struggle with embodied liberation and limitations. She said, “For example, my body started to have problems during my third year as a journalist for a newspaper. I would have period that does not stop bleeding with great amount… then I would have anemia… and it lasted for a year and a half… I have tried Chinese medicine to alleviate the symptoms briefly but it was never cured… and Western medicine would stop the bleeding but that felt quite scary to me so I wouldn’t take the medication. And right before I took the GRE, [my husband] had prayed for me… and then it stopped slowly just like a regular period… And after that my menstruation became more regular.”

In general, participant A considered herself a later-comer to her gender-role-identity that was fostered and cultivated after she began her sojourn in the US. In her words, “[My sense of gender role] is stronger in the U.S., because I am married, I am a wife, we are a family, and I’m a woman and he is a man. In Taiwan, I did not feel this strongly [about my gender role] among my friends.”

Narratives on the intersection between gender and cultural axes

On the intersection of cultural and gendered dimensions, participant A’s reflection indicates that sometimes an assigned gender role provides a space for uncomfortable cross-cultural encounters. For example, “This time when [my husband] went for a conference, we would have a meal together, but because I am now a mother, it is clear… that is I am a wife, and I was there to care for the children, so [my role] is very concrete and clear… At another time we went out together when we haven’t had our children, it was a little bit awkward… [husband’s friend] thought that she needed to take care of me… I had this feeling that I visited [a laboratory] because I was accompanying my husband, so my role was a bit ambiguous… because I was there for a trip without any contribution, and [his friend] had to host me, so I felt a bit out of place and uncomfortable”

Another participant A’s reflection on the intersection between cultural and gender axis denotes that cultural sojourn provides a context in which participant A was able to come to terms with her gender-role identity (i.e. the transformation of gender-role identity aforementioned). She said, “There will be more pressure in Taiwan for being a housewife because of the increased stigmatization for not working… In Taiwan, if you’re able to work and [you are] not working, people would ask why are you not working and helping the family finance? And in the US, I could simply say that I don’t have a work VISA…… If I was chatting with someone that I do not want to talk in-depth with, I would just say that I can’t work legally because of my VISA… this is a matter of structure and regulation—that I really cannot work, and I refuse to work under the table, as compared to Taiwan, there is financial pressure because everyone thinks that it is expansive to raise a child, so a family has to have two sources of income, and that’s already taken for granted.” Participant A went on to discuss the gender-role among U.S., China, and Taiwan. She said, “Women from mainland China especially needs to have a job, it is stranger
for them to be a housewife than for us [Taiwanese]… because the employment rate of women in China is higher than Taiwan… women in China needed to work after the Cultural Revolution because the division of gender was broken, and everyone had to work… In China, gender inequality is less prevalent than in Taiwan, so that the employment rate and jobs for Chinese women were higher… Also because of their “one-child” rule, most couples only have one child and both sides of the grandparents would compete to help care for the grandchild, so women do not have to care for their own child and they all work… I have a friend from mainland China, she very much enjoys her time here taking care of her child and being a mother [in America], but when she thinks about going back to China, when she thinks about the fact that she will no longer be able to take care of her child the way she does here, because her parents and parents-in-law will both want to care for the child, and that the stigma of a not-working-full-time mother is still strong, she could not take that kind of pressure, she will not take it… I think Taiwan is in no comparison to Mainland [China in terms of the employment rate of women], as to the U.S., I’m not sure, because there are also a high percentage of women working here, perhaps the Americans think that it is your personal choice and would be more able to leave you to your own decision. After all, I am a foreigner, and they of course feel like you are a foreigner following your husband, so you are going to care for your children. Whether or not they are actually friendly or supportive is up for debate.”

Another interesting intersection of gender and cultural axes reflected in participant A’s description is the intersection between, gender and spiritual axis. Participant A spoke about her struggle with being a woman in Taiwan in the context of her spirituality: “When I was in Taiwan, because the church encourages women to be a mother and to care for children, which I am not entirely, I’m not very critical of this, but I also do not completely identify with [the church’s position]. And I also did not feel, I did not respect the role of a mother as wholeheartedly as I do now.” On the same topic, she talked about the subcultures of spiritual group that differs from the general Taiwanese culture. She said, “Currently in Taiwan, Christian population has the highest percentage of full-time mothers … Christians are more likely to have children and Christian women are more bold to quit their job to take care of their children.”
Narratives of Participant B
Journey to the U.S.
Regarding participant B’s journey to the U.S., participant B reported that she and her husband moved to the U.S. together two months after her daughter was born. She noted that she “could not imagine not coming with my husband” despite others have inquired about their traveling later after the daughter grows a bit older.

When reflected on her sojourning experiences as a WoIS, participant B started by talking about her life living in a seminary during her first two years in the U.S. In that context, she noted how her personality style played a part in her experience. She said, “Because I was living in a seminary when I first arrived in the U.S., and that community shares the same spiritual beliefs, which is why I had a positive experience. Like when I first arrived, we received a lot of help, and especially because others can tell that you are an international student when they saw you. We lived in a suburb and we had to drive quite a while to get to the grocery stores that are larger and cheaper, and so when others saw us there, because of our Asian appearance, they would always ask if we come from the seminary or if we are a seminarian. There was this wife of a teacher, Caucasian, and she asked if we needed scarf for the winter or something else, and she would give it to us as gifts. So it was a positive experience. Basically, they are pretty friendly. And this may also be related to my personality, I feel like I am relatively more independent, and that even though I do not stay at home all day long, neither do I think that a life that is bounded at home is a boring life. Sometimes I would have conversations with other wives of international students, and they would feel that living in a barring place like this one and having their husbands focusing only on studying is quite boring. I feel that my life is similar to theirs, though I do not feel as bored as they did. Especially when my child was younger when we lived there [at the seminary], she took a nap in the morning and one in the afternoon, I basically had very little time to be out and about. And I feel like I can work on my stuff when she was sleeping, and that I can go out when I needed to. I did not really think or feel that I was locked in the home. For me, staying at home is a choice but not like [I was] being forced to or locked up, so I feel like if [the child] is like this [young], it is okay with me not going out, and if the weather is good, I can take her out. So in this role [as a WoIS], I do not feel particularly burdened.”

During her sojourn in the U.S., participant B reported enjoying the benefit of having a “family life” as a WoIS. In particular, she compared her life in the U.S. with her experience when working at a church in Taiwan. She said, “As compared to my previous experiences, my husband had to participate in activities at the church in the evening, and here [in America], he is a student, he studies, and we lived in a dorm, so he could come home for lunch and dinner… Although studying takes up a bunch of his time, but at least he has time to stay at home.” Participant B noted that it is not about the total time she had with her husband because when they both worked at the church in Taiwan, “we basically spent 24 hours a day together” but it is about having a “family life” that she would not have had with her life style working at the church in Taiwan. She said, “I was seeing many of my colleagues [at the church in Taiwan], their children had to be brought by their mother to visit their dad at the office because the dad could not go home for dinner, so the kids would come and have dinner with the dad, and their mom would bring them back to get ready for sleeping time. But I do not like living like that, and thank goodness that after moving here [to the U.S.], my husband is a student and he can afford a better quality of family life.”

Another aspect of the sojourning experiences participant B commented on has to do with a better child-rearing environment. She said, “I feel like the current environment of my child-
care is better [than Taiwan]. It is more child-friendly here [in America], and my husband only has the pressure of studying, and there are no other pressures. In other words, compared to the time when we were working, life is much simpler. In the past, there were a lot of interpersonal matters that we had to deal with because we were pastors, and we were in contact with all kinds of Christians, and that we had to communicate with our peers and colleagues, so I feel like it was not as simple as now.” On this point, participant B reported that her current life can be sum up with the word “joyful.”

The everyday life
B described her own life in the following way: “For me, besides taking care of my kid, housework, that’s plenty, and I would hope that I spend my spare time reading. I like to read, so I want to read more, so I do not feel bored because I have not enough time to read… and I would also go to the gym by myself, which most other [WoIS] are unlikely to do.”

In terms of her typical day, B said, “A typical day is that the kid wakes up in the morning, usually my husband helps me prepare breakfast, and then we have breakfast together. After that, we do our morning routine like brushing teeth and getting dressed, and then [my daughter] would said that she has pooped, so we would take care of that, and sometimes my husband would, he rides a bicycle to school or sometimes I drive him to school. And then I come home, like if I did not wash dishes, I would do that. Usually in the morning I spend some time playing with [my child], now that she is older, she will read, not bedtime reading, but actual reading. And then we would sing together, like ‘it’s our learning time’, and after we have a class together, we would sing a goodbye song, and then she would get a sticker, like this. Then she would have lunch, which is simpler, like food that I made extra for her father’s lunch, if not, I would make something easy. And sometimes I would bring her to the library during the daytime for the story time program, and then when the weather is warmer, like recently we started a membership for the zoo, and so I will bring her there. Most of her activities are in the daytime. After lunch she would take a nap. After nap it would be close to 4pm, which doesn’t leave much of anything to do, when it was warmer we could go outside, but like now the sun is down, so not much. We try our best to go outside in the morning… [My husband has classes at night some days of the week, and when he is home during the evening,] he would stay in the study by himself studying. He would tell [my daughter], ‘daddy is working’, so she would also say that daddy is working, let’s not bother him. When she heard that her daddy comes out to [go to the bathroom], she would run to daddy, and then she would say ‘daddy works,’ like that. And then after dinner in the evening, we usually have more family time, like me and [my daughter]. She would read before going to bed, like she would read during lunch time. Sometimes I would say it was too late [to read] in the afternoon, and she would ask to read at least one book, and then we would borrow books from the library. And then in the evening we would read more books, and then shower and getting ready to sleep. I really feel like I have unlimited housework, like I’m always washing dishes or doing laundry, and I feel like why is it so easy to eat out? No need to prepare the ingredients, no need to cook, and no need to wash dishes in the end.”
because most Koreans are Christian… But Korean wives are not usually interested in interacting with me because they have a big network of community, so they do not usually need additional connections, although I did make some Korean friends. I did not feel that I had a community of my own [when I was living there]. In spite of the fact that we did have the so-called ‘students from China’ but we were not that close. We did have some activities together like dumpling making or having hotpot during the Chinese New Year, but the ones that came from China were more internally grouped. I feel like this might be related to their history of family church, because the communist oppressed the church, so they could not go to church in public… In any case, it is hard to generalize, but basically people who go to family church go to family church, and that could slowly develop into a personality style, such that they are less likely to welcome others.”

On this topic, participant B talked about herself being friendly to everyone and understanding of the constitution of different groups of WoIS in the seminary, though she did not feel like she belonged to any of the groups. She made notes of how this is connected with the way in which other WoIS relate to each other and her personal preference of social interaction. She said, “I think one of the big reasons is that the wives seem to depend immensely on one another, and I do not feel that [kind of dependency] is necessary. For example, they seem to be quite inquisitive of what one another is doing [at all times], and I feel like why would you care about what I am doing? I do appreciate having conversations with others, but I am not the kind of person who would pick up the phone to just chat when I realize that I am bored, like I would not pick up the phone and ask someone out to have tea together… It feels to me that many of them desire to live symbiotically, but I do not want to be symbiotic with others, so it’s both good and bad. Sometimes I feel like an outsider myself, and sometimes I think that being an outsider for matters like this is not such a big deal.” Along the same line, participant B reflected on the feeling of being an outsider and the sense of loss when she spoke about her spending more time reading and doing things that are less “social.” In her words, “what I mean is that because I spend most of my time on [reading and looking for information that I am interested in], and that I do not feel that, interpersonally, [I am] similar to other [WoIS], I sometimes feel a little bit like an outsider, and sometimes a bit lost, but not most of the times.” She elaborated, “like I feel like I’m pretty close to [participant A], but sometimes I feel that, like she would invite me to join her to someone else’s home, and I would feel that I’m so tired, let me check my schedule. But her life is just like mine, but she can go and teach someone how to make a cake or go visit someone’s home, or bring someone to visit someone else, and so I feel like, wow, I am really different from you. That is, from time to time I would have this fear, that I wonder if I’m an alien [to others] you know… so in this way she gets to meet more mothers, and I don’t know many… And I feel like these are all nice people, like you usually do not have any conflict with others, or not that your personality is not so weird that no one can get along with you. So basically I feel positively toward others, but it also seems like I do not usually actively seek out [interactions with others].”

Participant B also spoke about the process of her working through her ambivalence toward being a WoIS, she said, “In the past I would be unhappy, I felt that I am a person with thoughts and plans for my life, I am not someone who is forced into… when I heard this sentence I am repelled by it, like I thought that you think that I was useless, like I was only concerned with [child care] and that if I did not care for [my daughter] I would be bored, like I have no talent or virtue? So I have more dislike, [toward] me as a mother. Because everyone can be a mother, everyone can be a housewife, like you see, Mengchun (this writer) studies, not
everyone studies for a doctorate in psychology, so I, like everyone, can be a mother, but whether or not everyone is a good one is a different story. But like everyone is a [mother], so I felt ‘it doesn’t make any difference, like I feel like I am not doing anything different from everyone else. It’s like when I heard people saying things like this, I feel like, if I do it, I dislike it. And I didn’t have a child then, and then I feel, it’s not like I suddenly become better, I, at least I am like, becoming more and more… I feel like life like this is still quite good. I feel like I can also do good [with my life], like you see my arms are becoming stronger. I do not feel, primarily because of my faith, and I don’t feel that what I’m doing is not, like I do not have a concrete sense of identity, I do not feel this way.” Participant B elaborated on some of the factors that fostered some of her changes in terms of seeing herself as a WoIS. She said, “I feel like my change is related to my faith, not because of the context, so I no longer feel that…‘what I’m doing’ means nothing or too mundane, like you can find it on the street. I don’t feel this way anymore… and I think that this is related to the society [also].” On this note, participant B gave an example on how cultural difference enabled her to resolve conflicted feelings she had about being a WoIS that was derived from others’ opinions. Please refer to the section on cultural axis for more details. After the comments and thoughts she noted above, participant B concluded that “my faith helps me feel, less, concerned by others’ opinions and perspectives.”

Self-identity via spiritual pursuit
B found her self-identity to be related to her religion. She said, “although others also have the same faith, but they may feel that they were forced to come [to the U.S.] for their husband’s study, but I feel more like, yeah sometimes I may feel like I do not have time to rest, especially when I am busier. But most of the time, I would think that this is the life that God gives me, that God gives me different kinds life at different times of my life stages, so this is the life that God gives me now. This is because even if I was in Taiwan, I might still take care of her [my child] on my own.”

Participant B also talked about her sense of identity in the context of her faith and her hope for the future. She said, “I feel primarily that now I sense the different directions that God has led me in my life, the leading is like this, I feel good, that I concentrate on doing the work that I do [as a WoIS]. And I hope that someday in the future, I am not sure whether it will come true or not, because I hope to continue my study, and yes, I want to study the history of the church, and to study, so I can be a student again. And when [my daughter] is older, I will be freer, and we also want another child, so I am not sure how long this is going to take.”

Reflection on being a WoIS
Regarding her thoughts on the meaning of being a WoIS, participant B thought about the meaning for her daughter to have a mother who raises and educates her. She said, “I think that one does not just care for her child, but it has to include raising and educating her, like you interact with her, because when you interact with her, you not only feed her, [so that] she can play there and not give you any trouble, that’s not what it is. I feel like she has many needs, and from her childhood onward, she can experience the love her parents have for her, like the construction of her [way of] relating to others, I feel that these things come from the parents. So parents become a model, like how the parents interact, the family life, I do not have a lot of detailed research on this, but I feel like these things have an amorphous impact on her. And so I think that this is very invaluable. I think that others might not see it, and they feel that I am just like any other housewife and any other mother, but me and my God and my family, we know the
value of this, which is that we may actually see fruits in the future, like my child’s personality, her character, and like we train her to be able to focus, we give her time to play on her own, and we teach her a lot of things, tell her many things, and discipline and educate her, things like this, I think will have lasting effects.”

In addition to mothering, participant B revealed that another meaningful aspect of her life is her spending time learning about things that she cares about. She said, “also sometimes I would get on the internet, to check on things that I wanted to check on, not web surfing, but to examine something that I am interested in, or like, figuring out what that term means, or like what’s the view of Chinese medicine on diarrhea? And how is that different from Western medicine? So it is more like collecting information, not serious info or academic per se… like my husband has herniated disc, and then bone spur, so I looked into what these things are and how to help? There are many different experts and views because a lot of doctors also spend time posting things like this, so you can read about it, like some doctors would write articles on this, so I spend time doing things like this.”

In sum, participant B noted that being a WoIS for her is “like [I am] having a break. I feel like, for me, this is a simple life that I care for my child and my family, and that the break is not a physical one, but a psychological [one as well].”

While it feels like taking a psychological break, participant B mentioned her family’s long-term plan. She said, “and this has to be considered alongside my husband’s plan for his life, like when we return [to Taiwan] in the future, he studied a practical subject, about preaching, and now he is studying communication and can still preach, so he might want to teach in a seminary when we return, and he also wants to spend more time in the church… but I realize that I don’t want to go back to a church anymore. I’m still okay with being the pianist or a small group leader in the church or something like that, like [Participant A], but not a full-time [position]. Because I know that as long as my husband is a pastor, I will have to be the wife of a preacher.” For this reason, participant B expressed in passing a desire that began prior to coming to the U.S. with her husband, which is, to pursue a doctoral degree.

Narratives on the cultural axis
On the difference within the cultural axis, participant B talked about child-care practices and expectations. She said that Taiwanese often send their children to child-care when kids are young in American, and that “in Taiwan it is more prevalent, because people can simply ask the grandparents to care for their children… So if my [ Taiwanese] acquaintances asked me who is helping take care for my child, I would feel like what kind of question is this? Who helped? I do it myself! Why wouldn’t you engage in child-care yourself? I say, why would you need that? Look at the American mothers, with three children they hold one and push one [on a stroller] with each hand.” As to her experiences in the U.S., participant B talked about the differences of mothers’ sense of responsibilities regarding managing their children’s behaviors. She noted, “like some of the people [in America], not all Caucasian, but some people, like when their children violate others, [the parents] did not mind, but I do not think that this is discrimination, sometimes white people are selfish, like they can violate others but others cannot violate them. Their children can mess with others’ children, but if you mess with their children, they would sue you or get mad. I feel like they are easily offended, like getting mad easily, like ‘I’m offended,’ but I feel like they’re offending others all the time. When I was in the seminary there were fewer occasions like this, but some shadows of it. I feel that sometimes Caucasian are more, like less interested in interacting with others, like because we speak slower sometimes, and they speak
very fast, and they’re very afraid of quiet moments [in a conversation]. They have to say something when it’s quiet for three seconds, and their jokes are not funny. And their social connections are more unlikely to continue when their living environment changes.”

Participant B continued to talk about her experience of realizing the meaning of friendship in different cultural contexts. She noted, “After I have lived here for almost two years, I suddenly realized, one day I was shocked! They said that my shock was too delayed… That I feel like, I have always felt that I get along pretty well with my white friends, but one day I suddenly realized that we are not friends. I suddenly started to wonder whether we are actually friends, and what’s the actual degree of our relationship? I feel that this does not often trouble me with my Asian friends, that I can more or less guess and be aware [of the different degrees of friendship]. I feel that the superficiality of my Asian friends is one that we are better at being courteous, but Caucasians do not usually speak with courtesy, they would speak ‘friendly’ or ‘super friendly’ as their way of expressing courtesy… like they would [speak in high pitch], ‘it’s gorgeous! How are you?’ and the like, and then they would say ‘anytime’ to anything, like come to visit our home and so on.” On this point, participant B gave an example of a friend who had offered to help her husband, but did not respond after they sent an e-mail request to the friend. And the friend did not acknowledge the lack of response afterwards. She noted, “after that event, I feel like I do not understand Americans at all. We had a friend who lived here for a while, and he said that Americans are like, more superficial, and they are less responsible. Even though Chinese sometimes may also procrastinate, and when they see you they would say, ‘oh we are sorry, I was busy for something today, Meng, etc.’ And even if they sometimes do not answer your phone, they would still give you a lot of reasons… But Americans are more like, they act like nothing has happened! I’m not saying that the Chinese way is better, but the point is that, Americans are better at continuing to live their life, and they may continue to interact with you.” Participant B went on to give another example of a friendly neighbor of hers who hesitated to say hello to her when they bumped into each other at a public fair—another social context. She spoke directly about her feelings after recalling this event. She said, “Yeah, after that I suddenly feel like, are we friends or not? It’s like I often feel like me and my American friends are more like, I’m not sure, like we have fairly good relationship, and we can talk with each other a lot about our personal lives, and that Americans are good at chatting… and then we Chinese are more like, slower to warm up, that we become friends slowly, you know. They [Americans] are more like, they can have a conversation with you about their thoughts, opinions, and personal life, and they sometimes, should I say that they preserve privacy? Perhaps a bit, but other times, the information they’re willing to share, even if it is private, they would still tell you, but it doesn’t mean [we are friends] or that we have a close relationship. It just means that I am willing to tell you [this particular piece of information].”

B also gave two extensive examples of being discriminated racially on two occasions, once at a coffee shop and another time at a supermarket. She was not surprised but angry, and she said that she asserted her grounds and asked the particular employee to take responsibility for their action.

With a different tone, another example that shed light on the experience of cultural difference is participant B’s description of difference of social contexts that enabled her to transform from feeling bad to being less effected by other’s opinion of her for being a WoIS. She uses child-rearing in the social context as an example, “Like in Taiwan, everyone would be nosy and they like to comment, like when I brought my daughter back, they said, ‘don’t let her eat this, instead she should practice having a bowl of rice even if she drop two third of the
contents on the floor, she just needs to practice.’ But I think it was not time yet, ‘can’t you see she couldn’t even use her hands, why force her?’ but they would tell me and give me a lot of advice, like teach me how to care for her, but I feel like people here [in America] do not often give you their opinion. Like when I interact with Americans, they would give you their opinions in a polite way, like this is just ‘my experience’ for your consideration… In Taiwan, it’s like everyone is an expert, like even when you walk on the street, I let her wear short sleeve one day not long after she was born because it was hot, there was an older women who I do not know at all, who commented, ‘why let her wear short-sleeve, she is only one-month-old!’ and I was angry, like ‘who do you care?’ but I feel like this is related to our character style. It’s like I feel freer and more open in America because nobody does this, nobody bosses you around because Americans do not let others boss them around.” Participant B addressed this aspect of cultural difference as the main challenge for her returning to Taiwan. She said, “I’m not sure, I feel so tired when I think about [going back to Taiwan]. I feel like [I ought to] take one day at a time… Generally speaking, the Western cultural is more respectful of individual choices or individual will in all aspects, respecting the individual, so I feel that I am someone who does not enjoy being managed by others, so I can get tired more easily when I’m in Taiwan. And coming here [the U.S.] is nice because no one is bothering me. So to go back, the same thing might happen, but I guess I will have to readjust.”

Narratives on the gender axis

Participant B did not comment specifically on the factor of gender differences in relation to her experiences as a WoIS. However, she gave some thoughts on gender-specific roles such as being a mother or being a wife. She noted, “I was not aware of anything when I was in that environment [of the church], but I had some physical conditions, that I got ill frequently, and felt uncomfortable, had difficulty sleeping, but I did not think that I was under a lot of pressure until I left there, I realized that there was a big difference! So basically I feel relaxed and happy now that I am here [in America]. And that sometimes I feel like being a mother appears to not have too much, not accomplishment but like, not a special or an official job title or contribution, this is how I feel sometimes. But I think, I told myself that this is only for a period of time. Yep, most of the time I feel very blessed, and less frequently I would tell myself, ‘you have to endure.’ Yes, because I feel like time will not return after this time period. Your child, like I have seen someone else… take someone else as an example, that I have an acquaintance who quickly sent her child to day-care, the child was barely three years old, because she said, I need to rest… I asked her why and she said that I feel very tired caring for [my child]. So that made me thinks sometimes, and wondered if I also would like to take a break?”

Participant B also had very concrete thoughts on the expectations other seem to have on a mother and/or a wife. She gave two examples, “the wife of the pastor is meant to clean up after others, who said that? Of course it is nice that you have responsibility to do these things, this is not void of value, but you can’t make everyone do it. Many people feel that a mother has to cook, [but] I don’t think so. Why does a mother have to cook? It’s like if God did not give her the gift of cooking, then she can’t [be a mother]. Like my mother-in-law is good at cooking, so she often complains about my sister-in-law’s (wife of husband’s brother) inability to cook. [The mother-in-law] would question, ‘how does my brother-in-law (husband’s brother) live a life?’ And my husband would feel like, ‘ma, brother is fine.’ Because sometimes the [mother-in-law] would feel like [I am] better at cooking, comparatively speaking, so my sister-in-law would feel
pressured. The point is, I do not think that being a mother means that you have to know how to cook.”

Participant B also talked about the practice of gossiping that seems to be true for wives in general, regardless of the social context. She said, “the husband of [one of the Korean WoIS] told my husband that, ‘sigh! My wife always goes to the wife’s bible study, but I don’t think they study bible.’ Basically he said that every time his wife returns home, she would tell him someone’s husband twisted his ankle, and another one’s husband had a very difficult time with a course, and another one’s husband bought something the other day. And then he told his wife that he did not want to know those things. For me, I also realize suddenly that, sometimes they shared matters like this not because they just wanted to gossip, but it is just their life circles, like this is the entirety of their lives. Take my mother-in-law as an example, after she finished all of her house chores, she would sit down and call up someone for a chat, not that she was intentionally engaging in the act of gossiping, but what else do you talk about when you chat on the phone? When you talk you talk, you know. So for me, I feel like maybe what I expect [for myself] is different from my [current] life, I feel like time is valuable, and I want to use it more productively.”

Narratives on the intersection between gender and cultural axes
In terms of participant B’s thoughts on the intersection between cultural and gender axis, she spoke about her gender role in the church when she was in Taiwan as compared to that in America. She said, “the stereotype in the church is that, if you are the wife of a pastor, then you are expected to play the role of ‘gentle, composed, graceful, enduring, bearing hardship and work’ [溫柔端莊賢淑刻苦耐勞] and to ‘labor along with no complaint,’ [刻苦耐勞] but for me, this is like a source of invisible pressure… Simply put, I am more capable and experienced, so when others disagreed with me, they would connect it to my role as a pastor wife and said that a wife should be more supportive [and what not]… and another point is role confusion, because I studied Divinity, so they would ask for my contribution because of my education… In some ways, because my husband is a pastor and I am his wife, so I have both the supportive role to play and the eligibility to be a pastor. I think my biggest challenge back then was the sense that I could not do anything right in any specific role, and that was very frustrating. But the most bothersome point is the sense of confusion, that other people have conflicting expectations of you. Because people all have two sides, when they wanted you to interfere less, they would said, oh you are a wife of the pastor… Anyways, now that I have left that environment and am living here [in the US], so I feel that without that [interpersonal pressure], I feel much lighter and happier.”

Different cultural frames also provided participant B with different views on mothering à la gender axis. She said, “caring for a child is more respected in America. In a certain sense, like in Taiwan and trying to get onto a subway, [taking a child] is perceived as slowing everyone else down or the like, like when we flew, a mother would take a child with her and be treated politely, and in America others would offer to help, and like when [my daughter] goes to church in the U.S., when she was younger, I would take her and sit in the last row, [the church] would allow kids to sit there and not running around and making a lot of noises… and sometimes she would cry and I would have to take her outside and return, but they basically allow this, they do not require complete quietness. Like when she cried, Americans would turn their head and smile, and then in the end they would say, ‘oh it was you that was making a lot of noises, right!’ [in a positive tone] But like in the Chinese community, I feel like people of Chinese decent treat
children differently, like sometimes when kids cry or make noises, the face when they turn around [to look at you] would appear differently. Americans are like, ‘oh you’re crying, what’s the matter?’ And Taiwanese are like, ‘oh so and so did what.’ Not in the sense of blaming or dislike, because they also know children are like this, but it’s just like more in [a critical] way.”

Participant B gave an example of bystanders comforting a frustrated mother who took three children on the flight from Detroit to Japan because the kids could not stop crying, in comparison to people of Asian decent who are more likely to feel annoyed because the kids are loud.
Participant C

From the get-go of the interview, participant participant C emphasized that she feels very different from most of other WoIS because “there is a strong portion that I also wanted to come [to the U.S.]. Because many F2 may not really want to, I mean that they may not even think about coming to the U.S. if not for their husband. But for me, I also wanted to be here, this is the part that’s different.” Later on, she gave some additional thoughts on how she feels very different from others WoIS. She said, “Yeah, that’s why I said that I’m different from other people, I would like to know if you know of any F2 who has to work from sunrise to sunset, or that if there were anyone, or less, like almost no one would tell you that. My guess is that for the ones that are working, they do not have to work, but I have no choice but to go to work.”

Journey to the U.S.

In terms of her journey to the U.S., participant C talked about getting married as a means for her to come to the U.S. She said, “We got married because I was going to come here… Because the truth is that I did not really want to get married, and I do not want it now either, that I am not used to living a married life. But back then we felt that getting married is a way of making this process more, that this is an easier way for me to come here to live with [my husband].” Participant C noted that she and her husband has been dating for more than a year at the time, and that she was quite worn out by her job, which propelled her decision of getting married. She said, “One day I felt especially tired or something like that, and our relationship had been a long distance one, so one day I thought, I do not want to work anymore, I want to just go over and visit you. I did not want to get married then, but getting married seems to be a way that made it easier for me to do this [visit and stay together], so we got married.”

C’s husband has been a student in the U.S. for almost two years when they decided to get married. As a result, participant C recalled going through the process of marriage preparation rather hastily. She said, “[my husband] came back to Taiwan in the middle of May, and we planned on [going to America] in the middle of July, so during the time that he was in Taiwan, his family asked for everything, so we had to finish everything in two months, like wedding receptions, wedding dresses, packing, moving, and wrapping up and passing down my job responsibility.” In retrospect, participant C indicated that there was not enough time for her to stop and think about what she was doing. She noted, “back then I was, like I told you that after he went back to Taiwan not for too long, like about two months, and suddenly announced that everything has to be done, the two months was too short and there were too many things to do, so, and work was so busy that I had to get ready for my colleague to take over, and to prepare to pack and move, etc., so I did not have time to settle down and think about it. It was all in a rush, but if you gave me additional two weeks to a month to think about it, I might not even get married.” Participant C spoke extensively about various points of conflicts due to the inconsistency of the consensus between her and her husband. She described that most these conflicts involved the demands and requirements from her husband’s family.

In reflecting on the hasty decision of getting married instead of visiting frequently as a means of continuing to date, participant C said that “I could not afford this, like stop working for a few months, and then going back to Taiwan, I would lose my job.” On the same topic, she spoke about the discussion she had with her husband in preparation for joining him to the sojourn in the U.S. She said, “We have discussed all of these topics because who knows what will happen once I go there [to the U.S.]? You want to find a part-time job, everyone wants to find a job, but the question is, can you find it? Where will you go to look for it? No one knows. What I
said was, if I could not find a job in a year or two, will you be able to support my living expense? I said that these things have to be thought through, because I said if not, I might have to stay in Taiwan and to keep my job. So he said to me himself, that if only for a year or two, the [finances] should not be a problem. That’s what he said.” In reality, however, participant C talked about a different life soon after she moved to the U.S. to join her newly-married husband, “But you know I arrived here in the end of July, and I started to work on September tenth. I started to work within two months of my arrival. But you know what? During these two months, he asked me three times, ‘when are you going to start working? When are you going to start working? When are you going to start working?’ And then I felt like crying, because I thought that we have prepared for the worst, which is that I may not find a job…. And that we will have to survive with his stipend, and to live a basic life. So the thought was that during the first two to three years I might not be able to go back to Taiwan, and that I was mentally prepared for this… the thing is you know when I actually got here, I did not think, how do I say this, that because I wanted to come here so badly, I did not think that my connection with my family was in fact so tight. I was crying and crying at the airport, and when I arrived, I was crying and crying everyday. But I guess that [my husband] did not know because I often cried alone when I was in the shower…… and my personality is such that I am less afraid, like I am less afraid wherever I go and whatever I do, that I have the personality of walking straight through everything, like to just try things out, because what else would you know if you don’t try? So I feel like for me to go abroad is the right thing to do, but at the same time, I miss my home terribly… So during the first month, I had some difficulty adjusting… I think primarily I was very nostalgic, and then it was hard to adjust to the weather, it is too dry, because Taiwan is quite humid. It is really really dry, to the extent that my face feels like the sand paper, it was red and itchy, and none of the cleanser was suitable, really terrible. So like this, like I was feeling nostalgic, so when he asked when I was going to start working, when I was going to start working? I really feel like crying. So after he asked me the second time, I told him that the way he asked me puts a lot of pressure on me, and then he said that that was not what he meant, he was just asking. And I feel like he should not have even asked… and then he asked me the third time! Can you imagine? For an F2 to come here, and then your F1 keeps asking you if you would go out to work? His job is to study, but it’s not like I was really bored at home, I even went online to get some information, like I knew [participant A] back then, and she told me about the English learning resources, and I found online a group IWAP (International Women’s Association in Pittsburgh) on my own and I joined it. I went all by myself without his company, and now I am their Chinese-speaking coordinator, although I do not go [to meeting] as frequently now because I have to work, but I was not just doing nothing completely! I really did not just do nothing! And you know that during the time I was not working, although I did not like to do house chores, I was making noodles at home by myself, and learning new things. I was not just sitting at home bored, but he still continued to question me [about finding a job.]”

Areas of adjustment
An area of adjustment participant C talked about is the married life. In her words, “yeah this is a new adjustment for me, because I have always lived alone and the distance suddenly became so close, that it is really close, and I am someone who needs a lot of personal space, so I told him that even though it is more expansive, we still need to live in a one bedroom apartment no matter
what. For two people, at least there will be a living room and a bedroom separately, not just in one small space, that would go crazy!  

Participant C also discussed her financial management in the context of family finances. After she started working as a waitress, she noted, “I did not even think about opening a bank account of my own, like what’s the use of having my own account? I thought that [my husband] has an account, so the money can be saved there… yeah you know, you just don’t think about things like this when you first arrived, like there are a lot of things you did not think about… so it was like, every week after I counted the money, I would say, ‘take this to the bank.’ … and then one time after a while, like I calculated my income and felt that I was making good money, I thought about whether or not I would have a chance to go back to visit Taiwan, so I asked how much money we have left and if we can buy plane tickets. And he said, ‘no, there were all spent for household needs.’ And then, he later said something that was maddening, like it was my problem you know? … Anyways, you know that life here is all about eating, so I told him that we are getting older, so it’s important to pay attention to what we eat. And since our income is sustainable and that two of us don’t really eat that much, so we can use better ingredient, and he okayed it. So when we were talking about how he spent all the money for household needs, he then added, ‘all you want is to eat with better quality!’ He was blaming me you know! I was so mad, but I did not know how to respond, because I could not believe that anyone would say anything like that.”

On the topic of family finance, participant C talked about the disparity between her and her husband in terms of the money being brought in for their family. She said, “With some calculation, I discovered that I was making more money than he did, so I mentioned that to him, and he said, ‘really?’ I did not understand why he had to compete on this matter, I was just mentioning my positive income, and now he had to compete with me. He said that it is not true because he had to spend $200 for my insurance. I really wanted to smack the table and told him that I can pay for my own insurance! Also because if you look closely at the details, like all the money that [he spent after] I asked him to save up in the bank, I was actually paying for my own insurance! So I feel like this guy is quite [unbelievable]!”

Personal Experiences of Living as a F2

In discussing her initial social life after arriving in the U.S., participant C reported, “I first went to the library to take English classes, like a conversation class, and met some friends. During my first year, I had some good girl friends, one from Japan, one from Lithuania, one Romania, and one Ukrainian, and then there was one from a country that I can never remember its name, it is between Romania and Ukraine, but she went to study in Portugal and her husband is Portuguese, so she is also considered a Portuguese, there were five of U.S. getting along well.” Participant C continued to explain that although the conversation group was not specifically designed for WoIS, it just happened that the group “has to consist mostly of people like [us].” She said, “[the other WoIS] actually get together quite often, but because I have to work I was unable… but I feel lucky that I made these friends first, or I may not have any friend. Yeah because you have to work, and when your friends invite you to a gathering, you often cannot make it. So it was nice that, afterwards they would still give me a call and say hello, or to chat on the Internet. We did make arrangement to meet [at a time when I was not working] for a couple of times.”

Participant C talked about other WoIS’ concerns about going to work, she noted, “yes, they

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30 prior to participant C moving in with her husband, her husband was sharing a room with a male roommate splitting a one bedroom apartment.
would always say that they also want to go out and work, but they worry about violating the law and working illegally, and also, their husbands did not ask them to work.”

Although participant C does not see herself having language barrier socially, she gave observations of others who do. She said, “I have a good friend who is originally from Spain, and she came to the U.S. two years before us, but she was only able to come out in the last half of the year during her time here, like she was telling her husband that she wanted to go home everyday since she arrived in the U.S., and then in the end she got to know us and got along with us, and she was telling her husband that she does not want to go home anymore… and so I asked her why she did not come out earlier, and she said that she was afraid because she could not speak English, but my thinking is that you have to learn precisely because you do not know [how to speak English].”

In terms of her typical day at the time of interview, participant C recalled, “on the day with work, I would wake up, get something to eat, get ready, feed the cat and go to work, and then come home after ten or eleven in the evening, and then if I can, I would still vacuum the floor, because of the cat’s sand, and there are a lot of dirt in the air, and like in the summer when the windows were open, we live right next to the main road, so there are a lot of dirt, so I would probably vacuum, and I have bought the automatic floor steamer, it’s very useful. It’s the one that’s black with a green… yeah I’ve done some homework on the Internet, I was going to buy an iRobot, for vacuuming, but iRobot is too expensive, and because we have a cat, so the more suitable ones are like four to five hundred dollars, and this one is only $180, it will dry and wet clean both, so I would vacuum and turn on this steamer, and then I take a break, shower, communicate with my family back home via the Internet, and then go to sleep. This is for the day I have to work… And on the day that I don’t work, I would do laundry, tidy up, and if I have energy, I still need to go out grocery shopping, take the bus, bring a gigantic shopping bag, wait for the bus, carry the giant bag, and wait for the bus to come back.” Participant C talked about other things that she enjoys doing including “cake making” and “watch TV.” She said that the cakes in America are often “too sweet and coarse.” In regards to TV, she noted that “watching TV is very important to me, one for practicing listening, when I first came here, I told [my husband] that even though cable is expansive, I need the TV, because I feel that it helps me tremendously.” On this topic, participant C talked extensively about how TV helped her learn English in daily conversations, and the specificity of how to use certain words. She considered herself as having less initial difficulty speaking English as compared to other WoIS.

In terms of thinking about the meaning of her position as a WoIS, participant C said, “Regarding being an F2, I did a lot of homework before I came to the U.S., like the life of F2 in the U.S. or something like that, I looked into that to see if I will be able to adjust and bear it, and what I may have to face, and much of what I saw was that, they were afraid of going out and make friends, let alone going to work, so most of them have children as a way of keeping themselves busy, and of course there are the better ones, who can go out traveling with their husband on a day-to-day basis, but most of them stay at home and do not work, and so I am actually curious about where they get the kind of financial support? But it’s true if you look on the Internet, many F2 have travelled to many places in America… This for me is impossible. If I had a chance to go traveling, then that’s from the money I earned and saved, like I visited Boston in August, and I happen to have friends there, and I was supposed to stay for five days, but instead I stayed for ten, without having to pay for lounging, yeah because Boston is pricy. Also I
feel lucky that I have a job, because having a job makes me feel… because of my own family, I have always felt insecure about money, so sometimes it is better for me psychologically. If you ask my husband to support me [financially], I can never ask for that, I can’t, I can’t! I will never ask others for money, most of the times others ask me for it… yeah so having a job is good. But the down side of this is the fact that this is a choice out of no choice. [Work] in an ideal situation is one that you can choose whether you want it or not, not that you have to have it without a choice. It is not because I do not like it, but sometimes people are tired, and you may prefer… like for me, more and more I think about going back to school to get a degree, but the problem is, if you want to go back to school, you have to have time to study first. The issue is, having to work three to four days weekly, and my shift is pretty awful, like work for a day and rest for a day, like that, how are you going to be able to study? And then on the day off, I’m quite busy, I have to do laundry, clean the house, tidy things up, and sometimes the house chores can take up a whole day! It’s true, that you can be very busy when you are home on your day off, and you’d feel like you never get a break….. There are both good and bad sides for the same thing. Now what is more uncomfortable for me is, yes I can think positively or negatively, but the root of the problem is the fact that it is a choice of no choice, I cannot say that if I was really tired and that I want to take a break. I cannot.” In terms of her understanding of having to work while sojourning as a WoIS, she said that she “feels tired physically” and that the benefit is that she had “lost some weight.”

Participant C did not talk elaborately, but hinted at her hope for the future in the following way, “the thought about going back to school has grown stronger and stronger.”

Narratives on the cultural axis
On the axis of cultural differences, participant C reflected on the changes she experienced after she started her sojourn. In her words, “I feel like this might not be directly related to my being an F2, but it is because of my status that I am able to stay around, so that for me, like when I go to English classes, I learn about the differences between the two countries. Like for Taiwanese and ethnic-Chinese in general, Asian culture emphasizes repression and criticism… and here, there are a lot of positive, like whatever you do they would say no problem, you’ve done a great job, you know. And then when you actually do a good job, they’ll show you how well you did. This is not the case in Taiwan, it is taken for granted when you do well, and then when you did something bad it is magnified, and then they give you a lot of negative attacks. So I feel like here, I was thinking about why I felt so miserable when I was living in Taiwan, and why I’m so happy after I came here, this is it! It’s like, even when I was working in Taiwan, even with the service profession, like in Taiwan in some ways the service professions are looked down on. But here, nobody thinks anything wrong of you serving plates, it is just a job that you do to earn a living.” She went on and gave an elaborative example of how she was serving a big party for the first time soon after she started her job, that she was afraid of making mistakes, and that she was quite apologetic because she spilled some soup. However, the customers were very forgiving, humorous, and gave her additional tips despite her timidity and mistake. She said that when the customer “sees that you’re working very hard, they’ll give you good tips, and they even will encourage you by saying, ‘good job, no problem!’” She gave another example of her customers being very understanding and patient on a busy day, and how those experiences “moved” her to do a better job. She said, “they will see the positive side of what you did, and they will not magnify the negative parts, they would say, no problem, everyone makes mistakes. And even here, even though my bosses are Taiwanese, but perhaps because they have lived here for a long
time, you know even when you break the plates, like ‘oh goodness, this is bad,’ and they would
tell you that it is normal to break plates sometimes… The point is that they’re less likely to say
[negatively] about what you have done, like saying things are like this, but for the positive part,
they would keep telling you that you’re doing a good job. And I feel like this is the reason why
Americans are more self-confident, like they were treated this way since they were young, I feel
like this is more enjoyable. And I feel like I have improved my trust in myself.”

Participant C added, “I discover that here [the U.S.] is very different from Taiwan, like in
Asia, it seems wrong if you graduate from high school and did not go to college, like [going to]
college is your responsibility. There’s this blogger who wrote, in Taiwan, if you did not go to
college after high school, it’s like you did not go to elementary school. But in America, you do
not have to go to college after high school. Nobody would feel like, ‘oh you did not go to
college,’ as if you did not graduate from primary school. Also, many people study cross
discipline [in America], but Taiwanese do not appreciate that, and they feel insecure about it, but
people here [in America] do not think that studying is a means to make good money… And
everyone is really focused on what they are truly interested in studying, and I feel that this is a
nice idea. Because I’m not the kind of person who study the same subject all the way through
with ease, and also, I feel like I’m a bit slower in this respect. I mean that many Taiwanese
would always have a plan ready, like what to study and what to do at what age, and so on, but
I’m not like this… So in Taiwan I’m more likely to get criticized, like why don’t you know what
you want to do already? But the problem is, even in Taiwan, if you ask someone on the street
randomly, many people also do not know what they want to do, but they were forced to do one
and the only thing. So I feel like being here, for me, it’s like this in a way, so less people would
criticize me. It’s like, ok, now you’ve found something that you’re interested in, so you go and
study, no matter how old you are. I feel like this is a good point for me, and like even if I was
divorced, I will not want to return to Taiwan, that is, with my current condition I do not want to
going back to Taiwan, because the general environment in Taiwan is not good, like the salary is so
low. Like even though the business of [my current job] is not the best lately, with some
calculation, my earning is still better than my job [in Taiwan]. Yeah, and that, I don’t know, if
you have a record of divorce in Taiwan, it’s like a criminal record. It’s like, even though most of
the time I do not care about what others think, but if people around you keep saying something,
you would still feel annoyed, and you would still be influenced by them, like when I was in
Taiwan, before I got married, everyone would be saying, even my younger sister, like why aren’t
you married yet? And then I felt like, it’s none of your business whether or not I’m married.
Like my sister, she got married quite early, really early because she had a child, 21 to 22 years
old, she was a mother when she was 22, so young, and her kids are big now, seven or eight years
old, so like I went with my sister to visit her husband’s family, and then they said, oh now that
the younger sister is married, is the older sister feeling like… and even for the visitors of his
family, they said, ‘oh this is [so and so’s older] sister who came to visit from Taipei,’ and they
would ask if I was married, I said no, and then they said, so now that the younger sister is
married, how about the older sister? And I was thinking, it does not concern me that my sister
was married. But they’re all like this, everyone’s like this, and my aunt would ask about that too,
of course my friends are less inquisitive, but others would ask quite frequently.”

To sum up her experience of cultural differences, participant C said, “[the America] is
very free, and no one would, I mean that the criticism of people, they’re less, like in Asia I feel
like the kind of judgment people have against others, like criticism of others, it’s very deep, it’s
too, that most of time it’s quite hurtful. For example, like yeah you work in a restaurant, and
many Taiwanese would feel like why are you doing ‘that kind of job,’ but here it’s different, this is your job. And for example, frankly speaking, if one day [my husband] and I broke up or got a divorce, it’ll be hard for you to find another partner in Taiwan, everyone would feel like you have a record of marriage, hey, it’s a marriage history, not like a criminal history, but it would be like you had a criminal record. Don’t you think?”

Living between the two cultural worlds, participant C noted that she misses the eateries in Taiwan the most, and she miss the interpersonal expectations the least. In her words, “If I went back to Taiwan, I would have no choice but to, like [my husband] would say, ‘go visit my parents’ and things like that, and this is something that I hate to… and like when we were planning for the wedding [his parents] were very, yeah, they said something that made me very angry, so I feel pretty upset, our relationship is just very upsetting, so this is what I miss the least. Other things like food, friends, and family, I really miss dearly. Oh and I do not miss winter in Taipei, the clothes will not be dry after a week, and became smelly, and there was no dryer, so it would not dry, and then it is cold without heat, so back then, when I was visiting in the winter, I was living with a friend in [M-city], and that city is particularly rainy, it was miserable! That I feel like, when taking a shower, it was cold enough, and having to take off the clothes, to wait for the water to warm up, and so I was like, only back for a few days, and thinking, oh I miss the heat in America so much. This is for real, I really does not like Taiwanese winter in Taipei.”

Participant C also talked about the shift of her cultural identity after she came to the U.S. She said, “I’m not quite sure how to talk about this, but I care quite deeply about, like when someone else asked me where I came from, I would say Taiwan, and I would also confirm with them regarding whether or not they know where Taiwan is. Because 99% of the people would thought that it is Thailand. Let me tell you, all Taiwanese [in America] have had this experience! And then, if someone said, like I’ve met someone who told me, ‘oh Taiwan is just part of China,’ I would tell them that it’s not true. But you know at least this person has some idea, rather than saying Thailand, at least they have some sense… Thailand is so far-fetched. There were two WoIS who told me, and then they thought of me as from Thailand again, and I was telling them no, that’s not true, and then she asked me if I was Taiwanese and she asked me if Taiwan and Thailand are neighbors, and then I was like, huh, if you’re comparing that with the distance between Taiwan and America, it is a bit closer, but not like ‘actually neighborly.’ And then there was a guy who said, isn’t it a part of China? I said no, and told him firmly why it isn’t. First we do not have the same passport, we cannot enter China with our passport, neither can Chinese people enter Taiwan with theirs, and second, I forgot what I said, but there were three points I gave him, oh like taxes, we Taiwanese pay taxes to Taiwanese but not Chinese government in Beijing, and Chinese do not pay taxes to us, and there’s one more, anyways apparently, we are not the same country. And he was like, oh [in agreement.] Basically, I would tell people that I’m Taiwanese, and I will never say that I’m Chinese.”

On the same topic, participant C talked about her experiences of interacting with customers who are Chinese students. She said, “Customers would ask me, are you Chinese? Or like Chinese student, when they see your Asian face, they would… they would first ask if you can, that if you’re Chinese and can speak Chinese. They have to speak in Chinese, and then I would think, ‘but what are you going to do when you go to an American restaurant?’ Yeah, so it was very apparent that they were Chinese students, Taiwanese usually would not ask you so, but if the Chinese students asked, I would insist that I am Taiwanese not Chinese. There were one

31 In Taiwan, it is a common practice to dry clothes naturally, and the use of dryer is less of a common practices.
time when I was taking an elevator, too, in my building after I came home from work, they came in from the first floor, took a look at me, and said, ‘Are you Chinese?’ and I said, ‘I’m Taiwanese,’ and they were like, ‘oh, Taiwanese.’ So I was thinking to myself, ‘yeah I know you’re Chinese,’ and ignored them… For me, this is my self-identity, I do not care about what others think…. [This identity] is equally strong in Taiwan, but you need not emphasize this to others, but since I came here, it’s like you have to tell others more firmly, regarding the differences between Taiwan and China. So maybe we can say that this is reinforced somehow.”

In addition to the bicultural experiences comparing Taiwan versus America or Taiwan versus China, participant C also made comments on multicultural differences on the topic of different forms of spoken English. She said, “There was a group of Indian customers, and they were trying to order something, but after asking them [to repeat their order] four times, I still could not understand… this is about pronunciation, and sometimes the middle-eastern customers are similar in this way, and so I feel like maybe, like there must be a way to practice, like getting practices [to speak English properly].”

Narratives on the gender axis
Much of participant C’s experiences on the gender axis were discussed through the intersection between cultural and gender axes. The only note she made in reference to strictly gender-related topic is about how her customers treated her differently on the basis of her marital status. She said, “Marital status makes a difference. There was some customer, especially when they were interested in you, they would guess at your age, age is also important, they would ask you where you came from, why you are here, and then when you told them that you came with your husband, they would be like, oops.”

Narratives on the intersection between gender and cultural axes
On the intersection between gender and cultural axis, participant C talked about the differences of gender-role between cultures. She said, “American guys are generally more thoughtful than Taiwanese guys, this might be related to the cultural differences between the countries, [my husband] was only educated later on, that I had to educate him critically so that he is now more, like, you know the doors here are quite heavy, and regardless of who you see, especially when a male sees that you are a female he would often prop it open for you. [My husband] was not like that, he would go through the door and ignore whoever is behind him, but you know I was right behind him, at least he could give it a push. There were several times that I was behind him, and he was doing that, and I almost got hit by the [closing] door, you know. He is kind of like this, he does not have ‘other people’ in his dictionary, and I feel like in his cognitive concepts, he does not know what it means to have other people, he does not have anything like this [in his mind]… And in terms of females, females here [in America] are like, when they feel like there is something that they can do on their own, they would not say that they’ll leave that job for a man to finish. This is not the case in Taiwan, I see that a lot of Taiwanese women would say that she does not know how to do something that she clearly can do on her own. Like changing a light bulb, how hard can that be? But one does have to climb up and do something, or like how hard could it be to unclog the toilet? But these are the things the women often ask for help from men [in Taiwan], but not here [in the U.S.]. There are less women that I know in American who would come over with excessive needs and say, ‘oh that my light bulb isn’t working, will you please help me,’ and things like this.”

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Participant D
Subjective experiences of being a WoIS

Regarding her experience of being a WoIS, D said, “A strong sense of grievance! Because Taiwanese women are usually quite… you know [my husband] and I share the same educational background, we went to the same university, and my salary in Taiwan was so much higher than his. He was working at [a research institution] with a salary of about 40,000 NTD, and mine was $65,000 NTD. Salaries for teachers are usually pretty good, and there was the bonus for Masters’ level teachers, and you know, my days were really good. I got off of work around 4pm, with really good social status, and it’s a five to ten minutes commute to school. And so I especially, I feel especially afflicted because many of the people who I know are, like they have the impression that, you know you got married to go to the U.S., and the stereotype is that you’re living a good life. But I’m the kind of person, you know I’m from [a city in Southern Taiwan], and I love [my city] very much, with a special feeling, and so the pace of life is slow with good quality of life, like the ride to Costco from my family home is about three minutes, and to [go to] work is five to ten minutes, everything is nearby. So it is such a big shock for me to come here. It’s like I change from a person with real contribution, this is why I wanted to be a teacher, I really really wanted to do something for Taiwan, so I wanted to change the life of children and their thoughts, but after I got here, it turns out that there’s nothing that I can do. Even if I work, it’s meaningless! Because I do not go to work for the money. So when I got here, I was teaching, like I was teaching elementary Chinese a while back, like a tutor for foreign children, but you would feel like you were only teaching them a tool, like a linguistic tool, but it’s not really about influencing one’s value. You know the education in Taiwan, especially Chinese education, like the content of reading materials, it always involves the value of life, the question of right and wrong, and whether or not you are making a contribution to the society, and so on. So you are accompanying, that you feel like you are a company of [the children’s] life, and this is an important position, but coming here [to America], you turned into, you’re just like his, you’re simply just a teacher, like you teach, and that’s all. So it’s not that I care about the money, but it’s a feeling like working here does not give me the strong sense of fulfillment. And of course on the other hand, there’s nothing to do, so it feels like, worthless and lack of contribution. Without a child, contribution is zero, only with cooking, but it was not that tasty!

So the first year when I was here, [my stay] was quite sporadic you know because, that I was visiting during the winter and summer breaks. And the reason is because when I first arrived the shock was too strong, and so I told him that I would need to go back to think more clearly about this, to think about where is the most suitable place for me to live a life, things like this.”

D described her initial sense of shock a bit more, “after I arrived, maybe because we were not living together in Taiwan after getting married, but here [in America], so sometimes I would, I was not very understanding initially, like I would blame him and said that it is your fault, like, you made me unhappy after getting married because we are here, and he asked me what was making me unhappy, we can try and figure things out, but there was nothing to figure out, because it is as a result of U.S. living in America, so I said that I would be happy if you let me go home.”

It is on this topic that D considered the biggest change for her since she started her sojourn in the U.S., she said, “I feel that the biggest change I went through is that, I was planning on being the Minister of Education of Taiwan… I mean like climbing the ladder slowly, like you know from a school principle and climb layer by layer, with the final dream of the Minister of Education. Because I still believe deeply that the first and foremost important matter to change
Taiwan is to provide good education to students and children, yeah, I feel that you cannot apply any policy to change the adults, because their thoughts are pretty fixed, so I feel like if we can actually do a good job with education system starting from kindergarten, then [the children] will naturally do well without much management. So this was originally my real dream, but it is gone after I came [to America]. This for me is not simply a kink, it’s actually quite miserable. And a friend of mine even told me that you gave up Taiwan for a man. Although I may never become the Minister of Education, but at least it is a dream that I had… so as it looks now it seems like I have given up, unless if I go back to start being a teacher again, or it’s going to be hard to continue on [with my dream.] Of course you can say that here, like my husband told me that you can advocate for Taiwan here, and that you can still do things that are meaningful. But I still feel so small and so weak, so I do not identify with him entirely, regarding the things I can do here.”

In terms of her social experiences, D talked about getting along with many of her husband’s colleagues and friends. She said, “we get along pretty well. What I find interesting is that, most of the people who come here are from various countries, so it is funny when we get together, because many of [my husband’s] friends are from either Spain or mainland, and the Spanish actually did not speak English well enough, so when we get together, everyone would use, a group of people would U.S. broken English in a conversation, so it’s actually pretty fun. And we would introduce our own country, we would exchange our passport and so on, and to understand, like they would discuss their history with us, or they would introduce their food and so on, so I feel like this is a nice area [of my life], [my husband’s] friends are all pretty nice.”

Regarding her sense of change after she started her sojourn in the U.S., participant D said, “The only change that I’ve experienced is that I am becoming more open-minded.” She elaborated this point based on some differences of cultural value (please refer to section on cultural axis for more details, see p. 260). On the other hand, D talked about the experiences that she feels unchanged, including “that my English is still poor,” and she elaborated, “you know that I studied Chinese literature, like ancient Chinese and such, so my English is super underdeveloped. And in terms of life style, I also do not feel a difference nowadays, but this might not be a good idea… like my habits of eating and drinking. For example, I often see them jogging, and I am aspired internally, that I really would love to jog and would want to enjoy exercising, but I have not been successful [in this area].”

Regarding her thoughts about her own future, D said, “I feel like the best thing that could happen is for U.S. to also go back to school, even just for a Masters degree, like if we can also study, we can change and to be more like them [our husbands] with the same reason of coming to America. And that if we can actually study, then we can actually find a job, the life would be, of course family life is an important factor, but after all work can take eight hours, so I feel like whether or not we have a job is quite important for U.S. foreign wife, we are really not foreign wife, but wives of international, or else you would feel like you don’t know what you’re doing with your life.”

Can you understanding what it’s like to be a WoIS?

In terms of her view on WoIS, D said, “It’s just that, international students are so poor, so wives of international students are both poor and bored… [Our living expenses] are less than my salary in Taiwan, and I used to live at home, so it was really cheap [to live in Taiwan]. And so, I would still feel not enough, I know that the amount [of students’ stipend] is a normal amount, like what the university offers, but students are poor, it’s in no comparison to having a full-time
job. So in terms of living, I don’t know how, naturally I do not dare to spend thriftlessly, that there is a big difference in terms of my spending attitude. Additionally, he is poor but he has something to do, but I am poor and have nothing to do, so I feel like sometimes, you can feel quite obviously when going shopping, that the store clerk probably also has a sense of my position, I guess, like you know we would show up at two to three o’clock in the afternoon, it’s gotta be the wives. And also we look sort of like, kind of poor… because naturally, here you would, without anyone saying anything, you would become more economical. So like when you’re buying things you would pick, compare and think a lot. And, I’m not sure if others also are like this, but I am pretty clear about calculating so as not to exceed the budget, because we did not take money from our families…. And so in Taiwan, you can buy whatever you want, and I did not usually check the price-tag, but here, it’s not just about looking at the price, but I also would compare, like every pound, how much does this cost, and how about the other one? And I would then calculate, with everything I am buying today. Like if I go grocery shopping I would make a list in advanced, because I can’t buy anything extra, if I did and they went bad, it would be a pity. So I have to think about what dish I am making today, and what ingredient I would need to make that dish, and write it down, after writing it down I still have to compare, like which one is on sale today, if not, I would also try to remember like, what is on sale at [one grocery store] and not at the other one, so I would separate those. But in reality, it’s like, of course, regardless of whether or not you have money it is a good idea to save up and not to squander, but it still feels so toilsome! Sometimes you’ll feel like the person next to you can eat whatever they want and drink whatever they want, but I would have to cook it myself if I want to have a steak. Yeah, but we do not have the money to go to the restaurant because you have to pay tips at the restaurant, and that’s too expansive. So we can only, like getting the bread ourselves because if you had a steak at a restaurant, there should be bread, salad, soup and the steak, so we would buy bread and cut it up ourselves, pretending with ourselves, seriously, it’s not bad, it’s just like, a faint feeling of having become fourth-grade citizens after coming to America.” D continued to reflect on her life, she said, “I feel like this is like a retired life, because many of the wives from different countries often get together, like from Malaysia, Indonesia, China and so on, and we get together, and everyone feels like, our life is pretty funny, it’s like a group of retired old ladies getting together, doing some flower potting, reading, and the like, and everyone has pretty much the same problem, which is to sacrifice ourselves in order to fulfill others.” In general, D found her sojourn in the U.S. a matter of “sacrifice.” In her words, “I feel like this is really just, I feel like it’s a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice for your husband and children, because now my friends around me all feel like it is better to have children here, they still feel like having children here would entail a better life.” In sum, D noted that being a WoIS means “it is better for everyone else but me.”

D also commented on the life as a WoIS in general based on her own experiences and observation of others. She said, “One of the big problems we have is that we do not know many people, because [the husbands] have coworkers, and then their elder or junior colleagues, so they can meet many people once they are enrolled in school. And for us, we are forced to meet wives over and over again, so we do not have many new friends, and it’s mostly females. I feel like it should be, both males and females, if we only meet female [friends], life is quite restricted, like it’s all about grocery shopping, cooking, baking bread, and so on. These are just necessities of life, but they cannot help expand one’s vision, so I still hope that my life circle would be more like, real life, because for us to come here in this way, there is no life quality, and it feels like, an animal that is put at home, like raising a dog. [For people who are WoIS], there are no
interactions, and it is hard to get acquainted with others or going out, and she often has very limited views about the external world. And if it happened so that her husband is not nice then she would be miserable. If he cannot take you out, or did not introduce you to his coworkers, it’s even worse. It’ll really be like a dog. Because we know of a wife of a co-worker, she is like this, like when there are social gatherings, [the husband] will not let [the wife] join. They’re from the mainland [China], and because I often do not see her at the gatherings, I said, ‘where’s your wife?’ he said, ‘she’s home.’ I asked, ‘why is she staying at home, why not let her come?’ and he said, ‘why does she need to come for our guys’ gathering? Yeah, and [my husband] would feel that, he does not have the concept of the division between men and women, and he does not think that women have to stay at home. And that [particular person] is pretty traditional, and he feels like, why would she join the men’s gathering? And I feel like this might, and sometimes this is a point that upsets us, that the husbands are, sometimes maybe because of exams, like they have studied for TOFEL before coming, so their English is slightly better than ours, and I met many people who got into fights because of this. Like for the wives, for example, if they cannot try and understand where we are coming from and stand in our shoes, because we can get nervous going grocery shopping or running errands, and it is not because we are unwilling, but it’s more about giving us some time to learn. Like when we go and get a cell phone activated, I would be a bit more sensitive, I feel like if you do not think for me or that you do not speak for me, I would feel like you are doing this because my English is not good enough. Yeah, they should know that [the wives] English is not as good as [the husbands], my husband is alright, he would also encourage me to speak for myself, but he would still observe. I’ve met many people from the mainland, and he would tell his wife that you should go to the bank on your own, go get a credit card and run an errand on your own, and then his wife can only cry…. I feel like for the people who came here [for their husbands], the role of the husband is very important. Because if he does not think for you, or that your life is not good in quality, it’s easy, like, [feeling like] wanting to go home. That’s a strange feeling, it’s like after I came, we are like pets, because we only have our partner in our eyes, and we do not have anything else to distract us. So sometimes I feel like the husband may also feel, you’re annoying, how could you watch me everyday, and you do not go out and play, or go find a job, or can you please give me some personal space, or something like that. But in our roles, we would feel that you and I are living together, or what else am I going to do? Because we were not like this when we were in Taiwan. We had our own life when we were in Taiwan. So my husband had said that he felt that one of the biggest things he noticed after I came here, is that I have been watching him a bit more closely. But I was not really managing him, I was just paying a lot of attention to him, that’s all. You know in Taiwan, you would go out and play, go out shopping, and have your own friend, but after coming here, what else can I do? If I cook, all I can say is to ask him if he’d like to have some? But they can easily feel that, will you please not keep, like he would often tell me rather haphazardly, ‘don’t bother me, do whatever you want, decide for yourself,’ and then we would feel like, I feel pretty sad when you say things like this because what else could I do? Because I can only ask if you want to eat when I cook, or who else am I going to ask? And I can only ask him to go out together, there is no one else. So it is slightly better now. I feel like the first six months was miserable, like the first few months when you still had no friends is miserable, and it is also that I have to ask for someone else’s help for everything. Like wherever you go, whether or not you’d have friends who can help out, to give you a ride, or something, and then you feel like you keep asking others for help. But in Taiwan, you are someone who can
be depended on, and you can help others, you can take others out for a ride, and so the change of your role is a huge one.”

Regarding her observation of other couples, D commented, “I do discover that many people got divorced after they came here, maybe two out of five that I know of are divorced, this is what I have heard so far. Yeah, and that they got into serious verbal fights, and some of the worse cases, it’s like they see some better looking guy or someone with more money, it happens so fast! The ones that I know of and guaranteed to break-up are the ones that are still dating. So this is a real big challenge, and the aspects that requires compromise is different from the ones in Taiwan.”

A typical week
When asked about her typical day, D stated that it made better sense to talk about her typical week, which is summarize as the following: On Mondays, D has an English class with a tutor from a local agency that provides free English lessons for foreigners in the morning, then she joins her husband for free lunch at the university, then she spent time in a nearby office building to study or watch some American TV shows with free snacks in the afternoon. After that, she might go home to cook and get ready for dinner, or if her husband were busier, they would have dinner around the university. On Tuesdays, D would go to work because she now works as a waitress—a part-time job that was introduced to her by participant C. After working in the morning, she reported that she does “nothing, like living a life of doing nothing” or she may do laundry, which she feels like “the only thing I can do.” On Wednesdays, she works all day from 11am to 10pm. On Thursdays, she would “sleep until waking up naturally,” which is usually 1-2pm, and then she may go to her husband’s university to study or watch a movie, which to her is “another boring day” and then she would go home and cook or go grocery shopping with friends. On Fridays, she has the tutoring class in the morning (she attends the class twice weekly), and then she goes to a Christian small group gathering. On Saturdays, it is a “regular day for going out playing.” And on Sundays, she works half of the day with the other half being “very boring.” In sum, D said what she does most with her time is to “sleep and cook.” Although D was working part-time under the table at a restaurant, D found her job to be “completely for the purpose of passing time” and “completely meaningless.” She added, “I don’t even care how much I make everyday, it’s just about passing that time, or else I may spend too much time thinking aimlessly, I might want to go home, or think about why I am here, and so on. So I can only make myself busier in this way. And also having a job can increase the number of people that I can get to know.”

Journey to the U.S.
D talked about her one and a half year long-distance relationship with her husband during the time she returned to Taiwan after her first six months of stay. She noted, “It was not bad, because we video-chatted daily, like we Skyped everyday, and then we would get together during winter and summer breaks, because you know that he’s still there, because you know if he’s not, yeah, because I was quite busy with my job, and we actually Skyped everyday whenever we had a chance, because I put the iPad he bought me on the desk of my office, and wifi is free at my school, so it is always turned on, and so sometimes even when I was grading students’ essays, I could still see him. It’s like you’re still participating in each other’s life. Like during my lunch time he is about to go to bed, like midnight, so sometimes I would chat with him while I had my lunch, and he would take a look at what I was having that day, like the lunch
provided by school, and then he would say that he is about to go to sleep, and then the kids would come in, asked who he is and talked a bit, so it feels like you still know what the other is doing, so it was really not that difficult to accept, though it does not work for a life-time. So back then it was like this for a few semesters. But I really feel that it was quite trying to come here [to America] right after we got married. And my dad said that it was a miracle that we did not get a divorce back then. I really wanted [to get a divorce] then, I said that it was because of our marriage that I felt so burdened, I said that if I was not married then I could stay in Taiwan, that’s what I was thinking, if I wasn’t married, I could stay in Taiwan.”

D’s narratives also have traces of conflicted views about her time apart from her husband. She described that she and her husband can watch a movie together through a shared internet server, and so all the sounds and interpersonal conversations are “synchronized”—that there was no time differences or delay when they spent time together. In her words, “Because of technology, long distance is really not a big problem.” At the same time, she acknowledged that seeing each other in person does make a difference. She said, “For now, it is true that being able to see each other when coming home does make a difference, like he used to have a roommate, and now he does not. Yeah, like before, because I was not there, and there was no roommate, he would feel quite lonely when he got home.” D noted that the long distance relationship “is not a good long-term plan.”

In terms of her final decision to quit her job and to move to the U.S. to join her husband, D said, “I realized that we will not be able to have children if I only visit during the winter and summer breaks. Because I was 29 years old, and my parents were a bit worry, like, if we always only meet up during winter and summer break, additionally, he finished his Masters degree this year and surprisingly is going to apply for doctoral program… No, I completely did not [expect that he was going to be here for so long.] Initially I thought it was going to be a year or two, and now the doctoral degree, who knows how many years this is going to be? And so I heard that, with the doctoral program, we anticipate maybe another three to five years, and he also has to work, like he wanted to stay here to work after his doctorate. Yeah, he likes America a lot, and so after he has this plan, if I stayed in Taiwan, it will be really difficult to have children… I came to this decision with an empty mind [放空决定]. Because I made a comparison table, you know that in magazines they would have two columns with ‘wins’ on things like height, weight and those categories, and so I made that table, and of course staying in Taiwan wins! The problem is, because of him, other things do not weigh in the same way he does, like how good it is to stay in my own hometown, but it is no longer meaningful! So I still had to, I can only forget about this, and to find ways to be here, like finding a job or getting education, that is, to find ways to have a better life here for myself… Back [when I first came to America] I did not know that I was going to return to Taiwan after a half year, and I thought that I was going to stay after I arrived, so maybe every couple is different.”

One of the major factor that D considered when she made the comparison table was her strong and deep connection with her family. She reflected on her important tie with her family and her hometown, and said, “as compared to other wives, my situation was a bit worse because I was too attached to my original family and [my hometown], because I see that many people were very happy when they came here, even though with mixed sweetness and bitterness, but it was not as serious… I collapsed when I first arrived, because I could not figure out what could attract me here [in the U.S.]”
Narratives on the cultural axis
On the cultural axis, D began by talking about experiences of being treated like a “fourth-grade citizen.” She said, “for example, if I speak a bit slower, they would say, ‘never mind’ and I would say that I’m not finished yet, give me a chance to let me finish. Like the clerk in a store, like if I wanted to exchange something, they may ask me why I would like to return or exchange, and I wanted to explain to them, but they might think that I was slow or that they did not understand, and would say never mind never mind… and so it’s very upsetting, it’s like give me a chance and won’t let me finish. And also, like for example, not just buying things, but purchasing things is the most obvious, because you don’t have much money, so sometimes when you enter into a store, you would feel clearly that they do not want to greet me, like the stores on [a street full of luxury stores], because [the street] is very pricy, and those people, if a wealthy lady walked into the store, they would keep asking how you are doing and what you’re looking to buy, but if I wanted to find a clerk because I have some questions for them, they would not bother to pay attention to me. And so, I’m not sure if this is because, I discover that I have a lot of friends from China, mainland, and when they go shopping maybe, they speak quite loud with high pitch, like their sound and volume is different from us, so I discover that when I go out with people from Mainland, the clerk would frown. Because my friends would mess up the clothes, while Taiwanese would fold them back to its place, not [people from] the mainland. They would mess around, try on and toss it wherever. And sometimes they would, wear [the clothes] for a couple of days and return it. And so I discover that they might feel that all of us are, like all the [ethnic] Chinese are the same and such. But this is not the kind of things that I do, sometimes I even, like after buying and cutting off the price tag, regardless of my satisfaction, I do not dare to return it, so I feel the sense of grievance, because I am not that kind of person, but they might feel like we are fourth-grade citizens, and they look at us with very different eyes.”

D also talked about her experiences of race in America. “In terms of race, I feel like, because they think that we are ethnically Chinese, sometimes I even feel like they, the Americans or these kinds of foreigners have a sense of respect, fear, and dislike toward us. It’s a bit like discrimination, of course it could be that because we are foreigners that they do not like us, but it is like discriminating against other ethnicities, like feeling as if we are not outstanding, that we are skinny and tinny, like, not very competitive. But because we are strong in numbers of people, because I feel like they cannot tell that Taiwan and China are two different countries, so they often feel like we are ethnically Chinese, and the Chinese power is very strong. So a friend of mine has said to me that, oh there are so many of you Chinese, will there be a day that the president is of a Chinese decent? Yeah, so they feel like there are so many of us, and sometimes in fact, that do not dare to treat us badly, because if you piss off one person of Chinese decent, it will… yeah, I think it is more obvious around here [the particular university campus], but not around [the other campus.] Because most of the stores here [around this campus] rely on Chinese for their business. Almost a third of the members in my [husband’s] laboratory is Chinese.” Following this topic, D naturally began to address her opinion and experiences of the differences between Taiwan and China. She stated, “One of the shortcomings is that Taiwan still holds a local social status here [in America] if one takes a closer and more discerning look, that the mainland still has stronger forces. In addition, we are not recognized by them as a country, so we often have strong conflicts on this topic. But because we get along pretty well with one another, with all the altercation, not like anything bad occurred. So like I would say, I don’t care, I am a different county, and they would say, whatever, it’s up to you. Like I would say, I don’t care, I told them if you dare, because we have about 130 or 140
countries we can enter without VISA, and I say you see you only have five countries that are so unheard of. Yeah, but the thing is, I feel like we can still be oppressed and that Taiwan is slightly on the weaker side.” D noted that her feelings on this topic “can only be felt after one has left Taiwan, because in Taiwan, all the things that happen in one’s daily life, with all the strange news, and that everyone only focuses on the increase rate of groceries, like a few pennies of increase, things like this. I feel like the topic of [public] discussion is very different. Like the discussion here is more, [my husband] even had the idea of how he is going to broadcast the positive aspects of Taiwan, and our home is entirely covered by postings of the [Taiwanese] national flag. His dream is quite grand. He said that he wants to invent things and to be proud for Taiwan… What I feel is that the point of focus is very different. In Taiwan everyone would compare and ask about the rate of your salary, what famous company one works at, and to compare around buying houses or cars. Friends in Taiwan often enjoy discussing this topic. But [my husband] thinks that this is not important, because it does not make a difference if you rent a house. The important thing is to have value in your life.”

Another area of cultural difference D noted has to do with individuals’ value of oneself. She said, “I feel like the thoughts [of oneself] vary widely. In America, everyone feels that I’m good, I’m competent, I can try it out, I should try it out. But in Taiwan, your boss, like [my husband] wanted to submit [an article] to the best journal, the boss looked at him and said, are you joking?... So I feel like Taiwanese has, I don’t know why [I’m having] a feeling like this, like a sense that we are not that competent, like feeling that I am not that great. I don’t know if this is because our status has been oppressed, but, I can feel that we are not that confident.”

Regarding social life a la cultural axis, D indicated that she spent quite a lot of time with her husband’s friends around their research laboratory. She said, “Because I often go there [to the lab] and sit around, and their teachers, I feel like American teachers are all so interesting, I sometimes feel intuitively I should have called them professor or teacher, right? because it’s like this in Taiwan. Even with your director, you do not dare to call them by name, you should still be very respectful. But when I called his teacher ‘professor’ once, he was so shocked. He said, ‘what, are you calling me?’ I was thinking, ‘or who else?’ He said that I can just call him by name, this is such an overkill! So it is more, I feel kind of weird. And sometimes I would sit on the chair of their office, like the chair of his coworker’s because the coworker was out, and then I would be playing video games, and his teacher would walk in, and I would be thinking, what am I going to do now, I would get worried because they were working, and then the teacher would say, ‘sit sit sit’, and then the teacher remained standing, so I feel nervous and said, I’m turning this off to leave soon. And he said, ‘sit down and keep on playing.’ [my husband’s] teacher is so nice because he feels like I’m trying, because I came here for my husband, so usually they do not pay a Masters’ student so much, that’s what they told me, because others usually only get paid $800-1000, and another reason is because of his additional capabilities, and that he is bringing family members, it appears that the pay is different between one with and without family members. So I feel like [my husband’s boss] is real nice, and he would ask me, like he really cares about my life, sometimes he would send an e-mail to say, oh you may want to participate in this or that activities… In any case, I feel that this is very different from the teachers in Taiwan. Teachers in Taiwan usually do not care about what your other half is doing, and it is really a top-down relationship. [My husband’s] teacher feels truly like a friend.”

On the front of personal changes a la cultural axis, D said, “I actually feel like after I came here, I feel a bit more open mind than when I was in Taiwan. You know that Taiwan is a small island, and you get too focused on the details of the things, like the things you focused on
and fuss about, the things that you pursue after is too small. After I came here I really feel that there are all kinds of people in the world, and everyone has different thoughts, like I used to be, take a silly example, like in Taiwan when I see someone wearing in a silly or idiotic style, I would feel like how dare you walking on the street with this kind of outfit, and then here you know, Americans usually dress pretty ugly, and I feel like, in fact their heart and their brain is how they actually dress up, and they could careless about the outfit. So I feel like after coming here, maybe because I am seeing more, so like before even though we travel frequently, but traveling is different, so I feel a big difference! And there’s a slightly more negative example, like in Taiwan I would feel like getting a divorce would be a miserable event, like you may be scolded! But after coming here I feel like, getting a divorce is not such a big deal, because there are so many people who are getting a divorce. Like my tutor, he has a family with four sets of grandparents, because both his parents were remarried after divorce…”

D also noted the differences between cultural value that manifests through educational system. She said, “I feel like in Taiwan, they overemphasize the superficiality of politeness, or like superficial morality, but what I hope for [the children there] is an internal, actual tolerance and gentle calmness, but not, because I feel like they often compare [with each other] privately, regarding their grades, they would cry for one additional or less point, but I feel like this is not that important. The grades are not important, I feel like, whether or not you are learning, whether or not you are having fun in life and in learning, and whether or not you enjoy seeing me, this is more important. But it is hard to convince them.” D went on to talk about how the education system is intertwined with parents’ expectation, which then was transposed to children’s expectations of themselves, which is in the context of the predominance of traditional cultural value. She said, “many more traditional teachers would say that you must do something in this way, and that there is only one right answer, nothing else, and then when the children try to communicate, [the teacher] would say that you are being argumentative, and got more mad! Yes, this is still the current trend. But I feel like, why not? Why can’t [the child] have this thought? Like we have a child who said that her biggest dream of life is to be a housewife, and her parents feel like that [idea] is useless, but why not? She might be a very awesome housewife. Yeah, so I feel like it is easier in America, like teachers are more readily receptive of the variety of thoughts children have, and many different possibilities.”

In terms of her sense of value in America, D noted, “I feel like people will be more honest and upright. On the one hand, [the Americans] are more likely to care about others, and of course every country has bad people, and there’s a possibility for you to meet bad people, but I feel like, as least if you take a whole day into account, you can still feel, once I was holding two cups and trying to open a door, and a bystander opened it for me. It was just a bystander! And it’s not a male but a female, she was on the sidewalk and ran over to open the door for me prior to go back to where she was. This dumbfounded me! I thought that she was also entering into this store, but she was not. I can actually do it like with a hook and open the door with my foot, so I felt like I could in fact do it on my own, but they were still very nice and good-hearted. And also they would say hello to your everyday. Sometimes I would walk on the street and someone would talk to you on the street…. In Taiwan it’s like, who cares about you? Especially in Taipei, everyone walks with his or her heads down, and keep moving forward and forward, and nobody cares about you if you ask for direction. So there are many nice [people]. Because I feel that Americans are more cooperative, and carefree of the smaller details, and put out less fuss.” In terms of the areas of limited value in America, D said, “I feel like wasting life and time, because they’re too slow! For example, the things that one can finish in a day in [my home city], it will
take a week to finish here.” She gave extensive examples of how she could complete five different errands within an hour due to the closeness of all kinds of business geographically.

D’s narrative leaves clear marks of nostalgia—depictions of interrelation between home and personal goals. She talked about her desire to return to Taiwan with various pulling factors. She noted, “I really was just wanting to go back [to Taiwan], but I know that this is an unreasonable request, because there is no chance that [my husband] would want to go back, and my parents also, they actually hope that I will not return because they do not think that Taiwan is good… they really wanted me to, like go back once or twice every year, and to spend time with the, but they feel like for children and grandkids, it is better to stay in America. Because like problems with education and livelihood in Taiwan, and so they feel like if we return from America, like in terms of hardware, not spiritual but in terms of materialistic aspect, they think America is a bit better. This is because everyone has a different perspective, like parents would feel like you have a good life here, with good care, like my father feels like my students will not be with me my whole life, for my father, from a daughter’s perspective, like his perspective on a daughter, of course he hope that my life is better if it is a bit more relaxed without pressure. But from my perspective, I feel like it’s about an important personal goal and a sense of accomplishment, so rationally speaking, I would know that I should better stay here and make no trouble, and that I can still do a lot of things, like, I’d like to get a degree in nursing, because I feel like if I cannot have any influence as a teacher here, I do not think that it does, because it’s just a Chinese teacher, not a teacher for elementary or middle school education, and that Americans do not have the [same kind of deference] for teacher, like when I was in Taiwan, our role is like a mother, but it’s unlikely to be so here, so I feel like I might as well become a nurse and I can help more people.” The pull of returning to Taiwan also include D’s concern for her and her family’s future, she said, “[my husband] feels like he can do something here also, but I said, he can, because he can potentially make something here, but for me, what? For me to teach Mandarin here is simply a tool, I do not feel like I can advocate for anything. Yeah, you can keep telling others how good Taiwan is, but it’s useless, because they really do not care much. So I feel like my contribution to Taiwan is literally nothing here, unless if I go back in the future, but the future may be worse, like if you have children here, the kids may think of themselves as Americans. I feel like there’s going to be a difference, like if they live in America, maybe he will not want to go back to Taiwan and do something there when the child grows up. But I was born in Taiwan and I want to go back. No matter how long I stay in the U.S. I still want to go back. So now I am still thinking very hard about what I can do, but it’s quite difficult, maybe one day.”

In terms of what D misses the most about Taiwan, D said, “mainly family and friends, these are the main reasons for me to buy tickets to fly back. But in terms of the reasons of liking Taiwan, it’s probably the food, like I really like the duck broth [鴨肉羹], I have a kind of unspeakable, and strange idea of liking the duck broth and eel pasta [鱔魚意麵] and similar kinds of eateries, and because I cannot make those by myself, and we don’t get to eat stuff like that here, so, if you like beef noodle soup [牛肉麵], it’s easy, right, but if you like the duck broth, nah, so it’s the food!” D also reported that there’s “nothing” that she does not miss in Taiwan, because in the city where she lived, “the weather is good, everything is good, no traffic jam, parking is easy to find, and no earthquake, no typhoon, we really do not have any natural or artificial damages, there are no flood, so there’s nothing that I don’t like.”
Narratives on the gender axis

On the gender axis, D talked about an experience of being treated with preference due to gender difference. The incident involved her trying to get the store clerk to put on her phone a screen-saver sticker. D’s husband’s first attempt to ask for the service was denied by a clerk. In contrast, D attempted again by herself and was being treated nicely with friendly recommendation and helpful assistance. D said that she felt as if “I have met an angel” who was willing to help. She said that, “after all the non-pleasurable treatments prior to this, I feel very happy about it this time. Because I feel like Americans might take advantage of us because our language isn’t fluent enough, so I feel especially happy when I meet someone who is nice. I often would curse them behind their back when they were being impolite, I would curse at them and said, ‘or else you can speak in Mandarin, why not try speaking in Mandarin?’”

D’s narrative also included struggles à la gender vis-à-vis cultural axis. She said, “Because I feel like females are more emotional. It’s like, for someone who originally does not need others’ help as much, who is pretty self-sufficient originally, like I used to be able to go to the movies or go out to eat on my own in Taiwan, I do not dare to do that here. Like now, for example like for me to come and have lunch on this street on my own, I do not even want to do so. The feeling is pretty negative, because after you come here, it’s a feeling, I feel that my personality has changed, so that my husband would also feel like you are different from who you were. You used to be outgoing, independent, and dare to have a conversation with others, and now you changed into one, that I have to tell him everything, ‘oh you go and do this,’ or that ‘you go and pick this up for me.’ I do this quite often. Yeah, I really do not want to ask him in the heart of my hearts. And at times like this, if the husband is not understanding, or if he made an additional comment, like why do I have to do this all the time and that you’re not doing it yourself, I would get really mad. But you’re not like this in Taiwan. If he made that comment in Taiwan, I would say, ‘whatever, I’ll go on my own.’ And now I feel powerless, and that if he does not help me and do such thing I feel a sense of grievance…. So sometimes I feel like, am I really going to live here for the rest of my life? And we actually have thought that, I can be a teacher in Taiwan, and we can travel for all the summer and winter breaks, we have thought about this… what I feel strange is that, why does the women have to make the sacrifice? And I do not know if I have met anyone, like all the ones that I’ve met so far are, the man wants to come and the woman sacrifices, but if the woman is coming [to the U.S.], the man will not come! Like my friend, the girl came and the guy stayed in Taiwan. Yeah, and the guy said, ‘why do I have to go? Why would I go with you?’ I feel like it is harder to survive here as a woman, so many of them went back [to Taiwan] after completion of the degree, and I also have some friends who got a divorce after the completion [of their study], or that they broke up. But I don’t know why I see a larger portion of female who stay here, who sacrifice for her family and her other half. But in Taiwan, we are pretty equal, Taiwan is considered to be quite gender equal. Like for my parents too, they were pretty mad when hearing about this, and said why would I raised you and support your education for so long, and now that you are going to accompany someone else for their education? Like a person who reads along for someone else? My dad said that if I want to be a housewife after I got married, that’s ok, stay in Taiwan, ok, but [he does] not know why [I would] come here [to the U.S.] to be a housewife. He was quite angry.”